Learning Democracy through Community Management: The Case of Toronto Community Housing Corporation

by

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Abstract

This cross-disciplinary study builds on and extends existing theoretical and normative arguments regarding participatory democracy and adult informal learning by identifying the ways in which participation at community-based governance structures provides learning opportunities and builds individuals’ civic capacity. It also determines the functional characteristics of such schemes by introducing and analyzing the case of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation’s Tenant Participation System (TPS), a state-sponsored program to integrate principles of participatory democracy into the norms of public service delivery. Through a qualitative lens, this study extends what is known about civic engagement in the context of social housing communities and the effects of engagement on those tenants who have been involved.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 35 staff and tenant representatives; there were also over a hundred hours of observation of tenant assemblies. By examining tenants’ motivation, their informal learning and the interactions within the defined structure of participation, this research broadens our understanding of the prospects and challenges experienced within the Tenant Participation System of the second largest social housing community in North America.

As has been noted in the literature, people are motivated to participate for a variety of reasons, the most common being that they see a real need or potential for change in their community. However, in contrast to past research, tenants also got engaged out of a desire to learn – to learn more about their community and local political procedures. Three conditions were noted as both sufficient and necessary to make participation happen. One was the desire to influence authority over decisions affecting tenants’ housing conditions; second was the
idea that participation has important benefits for the participants; third was a sense of qualification, a feeling that those who participate are more qualified than other tenants thus they chose to participate.

Informal learning through the Tenant Participation System emerged into several themes. Learning related to increased self-confidence and overcoming fear of authority helped to radically transform the traditional tenant-management relationship into a collaborative endeavour in which tenants get the opportunity to be part of the change they would like to see. In addition, the skills learned through the participatory process resulted in an increased managerial efficiency – a self-looping process whereby the participatory project improves through time and through the very act of participation. Learning, however, occurred not only through observation and participation but also through tenants’ struggles with authorities. The Tenant Participation System was found to be a space in which informal learning occurs through cooperation, competition and struggle.

Finally the results of this study reveal two major challenges. First, the lack of discussion amongst the tenants and the management on the purpose of participation has resulted in confusing forms of practices that complicate the process and eventually hinder the growth of a participatory culture within the organization. Second, conceiving community participation through holding competitive elections and forming yet another layer of representation converts the supposedly collaborative and horizontal approach to community governance into the hierarchical paradigm of property management.
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Chapter 1: Research Overview

1.1. Introduction

In this thesis I explore the learning dimension of Tenant Participation System at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. As an adult educator and a community development practitioner, I am concerned about how people participate in and learn through collective endeavours, which aim to enhance their livelihoods.

Throughout my life, in and out of academia, my quest has been to learn about strategies to nurture the more democratic social order. My doctoral program is no exception in this quest. Through this experience, I sought to illuminate my understanding of social change. Social change as derived and evolved from within the passionate hearts and critical minds of people, not imposed on them through the pre-determined laws of modernization, be it the dominant neo-liberalization project or the order of revolt.

This is a cross-disciplinary study through which I aim to build on and extend existing theoretical and normative arguments regarding participatory democracy and informal learning by examining the educative effects of participation at community-based governance structures. My interest in the topic grew out of my days working as a rural development program officer in Iran.

I began my career as an engineer in rural Iran hoping to tackle structural barriers to social democracy in Iran. My goal was to involve in direct adversarial action against the rigid and powerful political establishment in the country. Working alongside farmers and street children was my full time volunteer and professional engagement. At the Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment, where I had my initial connection with the literature of community development and a handful of learned experts on participatory action
research, I learned how to evaluate my understanding of the concepts of democracy, development and social justice; through my engagement with several area-based development projects I came to realize the importance of process-based grassroots activism; I read Freire and others who taught me to make the road by walking; I came to understand democracy as a learning process through a profound personal reflection in the context of a collective. Later on, I sought to understand the essence of transformative learning that helps people, those from the periphery, to grow into agents for their own social betterment.

Working alongside farmers, fishermen and mountainous dwellers I learned that life is a whole; thus, its problems should be addressed in their wholeness. I learned to recognize the interconnected nature of life and reject any early division of livelihoods to spheres of polity, society and economy. We should see society as politics and politics as social; we should embrace economy as a social realm and society as embedded in the political grounds of economy. We should assume no branch in isolation and realize that it is through the same roots and one whole trunk that each branch is able to live. This metaphor manifests a fuller and stronger democracy and implies expanding the boundaries of our democracies to encompass economy and politics, society and environment all together and at the same time. This study aims to shed light on an innovative local governance initiative attempting to embrace this metaphor.

I left rural Iran and joined Western academia to reflect on how people, individually and collectively, learn to become “masters of their own destiny”; and to pursue an ambitious dream to learn to become a facilitator for this journey of learning. This explains my choice of directing the focus of my doctoral studies on Adult Education and Community Development, and more precisely, my choice to take on a study to understand the social processes whereby
people learn to become participatory citizens while pursuing their own interests or those of their communities.

Engaging in this research has helped me to organize my ideas through the experience of “critical rationality” in a Western university. It has also been a profound celebration of the salient turn in engineering of my life; leaving the life of an engineer to the one of an educator, defocusing from the science and techniques of development to engaging in the art of emancipatory and educative development; lastly, it has expanded my vision, systematically engendered my talent, and directed my aspirations to social change in the peripheral communities of the North as well.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This research is about a state-sponsored initiative to bring an often neglected community into the domain of decision-making for public service provision. One of the emerging characteristics of contemporary societies is diminishing popular belief, trust and engagement in even so called democratically elected institutions and bureaucracies (Fung & Wright, 2003; Gaventa, 2004 & 2006; Putnam, 1988; Smith, 2005). Low voter turnouts and low levels of trust in public institutions signal fading civic engagement, a form of democratic deficit in our contemporary liberal democracies. As Lukensmeyer and Brigham (2002) note in their proposal for creating town hall meetings for the 21st century, the health of a democracy depends on citizens' rightful voice and citizens’ ability to “affect the public policies that deeply influence their lives”; and they argue that "our [democracy] does not currently allow citizens their rightful voice in decision-making" (p. 351).
Democracy, as an instrument to help us to govern ourselves more effectively, has become narrowly associated with territorially-based competitive regular elections, which increasingly seem distant from the ideals of democratic polity (Fung & Wright, 2003; Pateman, 1999). Ideals such as active political participation and deliberation to craft public policies and programs that create grounds for democratic and healthy societies and economies are diminishing election after election. In our contemporary societies economies are detached from the realm of society and unchained from control and supervision of popular forms of democracy (Rankin & Goonewardena, 2004). This problematic detachment is a contributing factor in diminishing trust in public institutions and this problem will continue unless our current practice of "democracy" is expanded and democratized. As John Dewey (1954 [1927], p.146) once put it: "the problems of democracy are overcome only through more democracy". I would further argue for a more sophisticated form of democracy, embracing a more integrated approach in how it sees and understands development, community and sustainability, if we are to overcome the challenges. This approach implies that the sphere of our social and economy vis-à-vis state and civil society should be popularly politicised, thus further democratized. This is contrary to the view that diminishes the role of state and leaves the economy untouched in the invisible hands of the market.

One of the few prospects to re-integrate the realm of social economy into the sphere of our democracies is the idea and proposal of Civic Engagement in Public Expenditure Management (CEPEM), direct deliberation and participation of community groups and individual citizens in the process of setting local government priorities, budgets and implementing strategies. This is an innovative practice to bring a cross-section of
communities together to deliberate on policy issues and public program outcomes while including a variety of experiences and viewpoints. Smith (2005) in his report on 57 such democratic innovations around the globe suggests that “if a diverse range of citizens is brought together they have the capacity and skills to deliberate and make recommendations on complex public policy issues” (p. 9). Such an expanded role for citizens as primary stakeholders in governance processes and economic decision-making is believed to improve accountability and policy efficiency and to enhance the sense of community and democratic learning among citizenry (Baiocchi, 2003, Schugurensky, 2004a and Smith, 2005). Participatory Budget (PB) as one form of CEPEM has been widely practiced in Brazilian cities and tried in many other municipalities in South America, Asia and Europe and in Canada it has been practiced in Montreal and Guelph as well as Toronto. While these experiences have increasingly attracted the attention of academia and practitioners concerned with enhancing local democracy in Canada, there is only piecemeal research into the prospects for developing participatory processes that fit with Canada’s political and cultural contexts.

Inspired by the practice of PB in Porto-Alegre, Brazil, Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) introduced a Tenant Participation System (TPS) to allow individual tenants to participate in the process of setting TCHC’s priorities, budgets and property management strategies. Not much research has yet been done on the dynamics of this participatory exercise to contribute to our understanding of CEPEM practices in a Canadian context and to evaluate the lessons that may be adapted to various policy and program designs, aiming at enhancing state-sponsored initiatives on integrated local democracy and specifically future practices of CEPEM in Canadian municipalities. Furthermore, if a state
organization such as Toronto Community Housing Corporation is to adopt and sponsor participatory community governance, issues of on-the-ground systems of implementing participation is in need of empirical analysis; examining whether such innovative experiment yields the outcomes scholars have attributed to stronger forms of democracy; one of which is the educative effects of such stronger forms of democracy on citizens. This explains my intention to critically explore the multifaceted system of tenant participation, while exploring the learning dimensions of this deliberative and participatory community management initiative.

1.3. Research Setting

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) is the second largest publicly owned housing corporation in North America, and the largest in Canada. It houses six percent of the city’s population (twelve percent of the rental population) in 58,000 units across the city. Residents living in TCHC housing include seniors, families, non-traditional families, refugees, new immigrants and persons with special needs. The housing portfolio of TCHC is also varied; divided into 27 Community Housing Units (CHU) across the city, it is comprised of 351 high-rise and low-rise apartment buildings as well as roughly 800 houses and duplexes, and is scattered throughout Toronto communities (TCHC, 2003).

TCHC itself is a new enterprise. It was formed in 2002 as part of the merger of the Metro Toronto Housing Corporation, and the Toronto Housing Company. In these two organizations, there was no formal system of tenant inclusion in policy making. Service delivery was managed at the corporate level. When the two companies merged, a new system
of administration unique to the new TCHC was created in order to assume its own identity independent of what had preceded.

Tenants at the TCHC have a history of forming interest groups; however, the implementation of the formal TPS was not the result of a grass-roots movement. The City of Toronto had mandated that the new TCHC would have to include some form of stakeholder engagement in the decision making process, but gave no further direction as to what form it should assume. TCHC documents also refer to community-based service delivery as a priority for the Corporation and a commitment to a community management model in which tenants have a significant say in their communities (TCHC, 2003, p. 1-2).

1.4. Research Purpose

Two main goals are sought in this research:

A. To explore the informal learning of tenant representatives through the process of participation at the Tenant Participation System;
B. To explore the characteristics, accomplishments and challenges of the Tenant Participation System at the TCHC.

These goals are pursued through the following five questions:
1. What prompted the TCHC to design and implement a model of participatory democracy?
2. What are the main characteristics of the Tenant Participation System?
3. What are the factors motivating tenant representatives to participate at the TPS?
4. What is their informal learning through their engagement at the TPS?
5. What are the main challenges in promoting tenant participation through the practice of TPS?
1.5. Research Significance

Since the early 1990s, there has been overwhelming attention dedicated to the idea of active participation of communities and individuals in the development of policies and programs that affect their livelihoods (Putnam, 1996; Gutman, 1997). In simple words, there is a loud demand to democratizing our democracies (Fung, 2000). Alongside this trend, there have been normative and theoretical arguments demonstrating policy efficiency and effectiveness that result from more engaged citizenry within stronger forms of democracy. In addition to policy outcomes, there has also been a view that upholds participation as a social instrument to build democratic capacities amongst citizenry (Abers, 2000; Barber, 1984; Cooper, 1991; Kaufmann, 2002; Putnam, 1995; Santos, 2007; Schugurensky, 2002; Tocqueville, 2001). The core, commonly agreed upon, argument is that people’s current involvement in politics is too narrowly defined to produce significant educative effects (Mansbridge, 1999, p.317); and that deeper political participation is believed to be an effective tool to foster democratic learning amongst general public and democratic governance within our societies (Barber, 1984; Nye, Zelikow and King 1997; Schugurensky, 2003). In this research I aim at further exploring the kinds of educative effects of participation on those individuals engaged in a participatory form of local governance.

Literature, so far, mostly provides theoretical analysis supported by quantitative studies of voting patterns, volunteer engagement and organizational membership and the like (Campbell, 2006). There is a dearth of empirical studies and qualitative analysis of the learning effects of political participation on citizenry; this is mostly due to intrinsic challenges in measuring subtle learning and psychological effects (Mansbridge, 1999, p. 319) that are attributed to participation. This study is an endeavour to assess the individual-level
effects of participation; narrowing the gap between theoretical hypotheses and the perceived reality of pedagogical effects of participation as experienced and elaborated by those individual tenants who have been participating at the TPS.

As a researcher, I hope that this work, documenting a pioneering state-sponsored practice of participatory public expenditure management in a Canadian urban setting, will have policy implications for Canadian public service provision and local and municipal governance. This study is significant for urban planners, community development practitioners and social housing managers for it allows them to understand the interrelationships within tenants-focused partnerships and the facilitative role of public servants within such collaborative structures. This study analyzes the concept of tenant participation, illuminating strategies to institutionalize a collaborative and participatory paradigm within the culture of public service delivery, specifically in the context of marginalized communities. Furthermore, this research contributes to the literature on informal citizenship learning vis-à-vis participatory democracy and community-based development literature. This study adds learning, an additional dimension, to the literature on social housing governance and tenant participation, which have been predominantly focused on political, economic and social analyses.

1.6. Outline of Dissertation

In this chapter I provided introductory remarks and tried to situate myself as a researcher within the context of the research. I also described briefly the statement of problem, the research purpose, goals and significance. Chapter 2 serves to provide insights into the social housing portfolio and social housing governance in the Greater Toronto Area.
In addition I will discuss the organizational context of Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and the Tenant Participation System. I will, then, in Chapter 3, develop a working definition of tenant participation to provide a clear understanding of the context. Chapter 3 also provides the pertinent literature shaping and guiding this research. Here I will introduce and discuss theories of participatory democracy and underpinning public administration theories explaining the emerging trend to incorporate citizen participation in crafting public policy and program planning: New Public Service Delivery and Empowered Participatory Governance. I will also discuss and analyze in detail the literature on educative effects of participation.

Chapter 4 explains the applied qualitative research methodology and the rationale behind its usage to collect, organize, and interpret data. Chapter 5 identifies tenants’ motivation explaining the reasons behind their participation at TPS. Chapter 6 discusses the main research question. It provides a detailed discussion and analysis of respondents’ informal learning through the process of their participation. Chapter 7 serves to highlight procedural and communicative challenges impeding the growth and expansion of tenant-focused collaborative partnerships within TCHC. In Chapter 8 I conclude the discussion by relating the case of the TPS to four different theories of democracy: Representative (thin) Democracy, Polyarchal Democracy, Deliberative Democracy and Participatory Democracy. Lastly, I present a list of recommendations for future research and practice.
Chapter 2: Tenant Participation System at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation

2.1. Social Housing in Toronto: Historical background

From the end of the Second World War to the mid 1980’s, housing policy in Canada was ruled and administered by the federal government (Carroll and Jones, 2000). Canadian housing policy first took form through the establishment of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) in 1945. While subsidized housing for low- and moderate-income households, or “social housing”, found some policy attention, the initial emphasis of housing policy in Canada was on private market housing. As social housing programs evolved, they aimed to provide affordable rental dwellings for low- and moderate-income households and to provide housing with support services for individuals with particular needs, i.e. the elderly, new immigrants, and the disabled (Sousa, 2006).

The evolution of social housing policy in Canada from the 1940’s to the present has been shaped by various demographic and economic conditions. Carroll and Jones (2000) trace the path of housing policy development through several stages since the establishment of the CMHC. These stages include economic development (1945-68), social development (1968-78), financial restraint (1978-86), disentanglement (1986-94) and, finally, disentanglement and privatization (1994-present).

The economic development stage grew in response to the need for a large-scale housing industry to deal with the many returning World War II veterans during the 1930s and 1940s. The program, meant to relieve this demographic pressure, was nationally driven and paid little attention to provincial or regional concerns. The second stage, the social development of housing policy, progressed in a social climate that encouraged
comprehensive social planning and a rational approach to problem solving. The reforms of this stage involved individuals at all levels of government in policy-making. A period of recession in the 1970s led to the financial restraint of the third stage, marked by policies that reduced federal spending and introduced some downloading of program delivery to the lower levels of government. The federal government’s focus on deficit control coupled with the increasing involvement of community-based organizations in housing provision led to a markedly reduced government focus on social housing programs. This stage ended in 1994 with the end of all federal funding for non-profit housing. From this point on, social housing policy in Canada was increasingly characterized by privatization. In Ontario specifically, no new non-profit and co-op housing projects were funded following the election of the Conservative Party in 1995. Private sector investment was encouraged to fill the resulting gap in the provision of housing services.

In 1998, the downloading of housing responsibilities continued when the province devolved the majority of its funding portfolio for social and public housing to the municipalities. The Social Housing Reform Act of 2000 formally removed the province from financial responsibility for social housing. Following the enactment of this legislation, municipal governments became responsible for social housing expenditures. Funding for and administration of housing was decentralized to 47 local service managers, and new regulations for the governing of social housing were introduced. This devolution of responsibilities from the provincial government to the municipalities was primarily rationalized as a means to allow the level of government closest to the people, thought to best understand the needs of the community, to provide them with the services they need. The devolution also aimed to allow aspects of program delivery to be shared with other social
service agencies, such as Ontario Works, in the hopes of providing better service to recipient individuals and achieving lower costs for taxpayers (Sousa, 2006).

2.2. Toronto Community Housing Corporation: History, mandate and values

Once the Social Housing Reform Act was approved in January 2001, the City of Toronto voted to create the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), an Ontario Business Corporation and an independent third party agency, to take control of the City’s social housing portfolio. A year later, in May 2002, the responsibility for funding and administrating social housing programs was formally transferred to the City of Toronto. This transfer included projects previously administered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as well as those, formerly administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, that were transferred to the Province under the 1999 Canada-Ontario Social Housing Agreement. Federal co-operatives administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation were not part of the 1999 Canada-Ontario Social Housing Agreement.

At this time, the City approved a Shareholder Direction that set guidelines, high-level objectives and an accountability framework. Municipal politicians arrived at a fixed formula for the funding and administration of this independent corporation. According to their direction, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) is responsible for the provision of public housing across the Greater Toronto Area. The TCHC was created as an independent entity on the first day of January 2002 following the amalgamation of the Toronto Housing Company (THC) and Metro Toronto Housing Company (MTHC). It is operated by a thirteen-member board of directors and has the City of Toronto as its sole stakeholder. The board of directors includes three city councilors, the mayor or a mayor’s appointee, and nine citizens of whom two are tenant representatives (TCHC, 2003).
To maintain the independency of this newly-formed enterprise, TCHC is to be governed by those directly involved as producers and consumers. This devolution of management authority opens up a space for both the TCHC and the tenants to co-govern the social housing portfolio of the Greater Toronto Area. Co-operating in this manner distributes responsibilities and reduces the pressure on politicians in managing the complex requirements of social housing, while providing an opportunity to revitalize the sphere of local democracy through popular engagement in and control over TCHC as an institution of public service delivery.

TCHC 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.

![Fig. 2.1: TCHC Building Types (TCHC, 2002)](image)

Almost all of the tenants living in TCHC (93%) pay rent geared to their income, while the rest pay market-based rent (Toronto Community Housing, 2006e). The average
annual income of a household in TCHC is $15,400, which is well below the City average (Lerner and Wagner, 2006). Families comprise the largest proportion of residents in the TCHC at 38 percent, seniors comprise 31 percent and single adults account for 33 percent of the residents (TCHC, 2006e). Refugees, immigrants and people with special needs make up a significant proportion of the tenant population.

Fig. 2.2: TCHC Tenants – Age (TCHC, 2002)

Fig. 2.3: TCHC Tenants – Gender and Age (TCHC, 2002)
The TCHC aims to be “the pre-eminent social housing provider in North America that sets the standards and benchmarks against which other not-for-profit housing providers are measured.” To achieve this vision, the TCHC is committed to creating “healthy sustainable communities” by implementing a community-based management approach that
engages tenants in decisions that affect them, their homes and their neighborhoods (TCHC, 2006a).

Toronto Community Housing Corporation’s community-based management approach operates through the decentralization of the housing portfolio into specific districts known as Community Housing Units (CHUs). There are 27 such units throughout the Greater Toronto Area. These units span the city and comprise numerous buildings and neighbourhoods, each of which is directed by a CHU manager. CHU managers are responsible for all aspects of the unit’s operation, including security, finances, maintenance, and overseeing CHU staff. At the same time, they are accountable to the participation structures.

As the Shareholder Direction suggests, TCHC is, and has been since its inception, committed to the development of a formal community involvement process and participatory decision-making at all levels of the organization. Prior to the creation of TCHC, social housing operated by the former Toronto Housing Corporation involved elected building representatives, community-unit Tenant Councils, and a City-Wide Tenant Council. In addition, many buildings had informal, special interest tenant associations. Individuals living in units managed by the former Metro Toronto Housing Corporation participated in the Resident Advisory Council, four local resident councils, and several tenant-initiated associations. The focus on resident involvement and participation continued once the two organizations merged to create the present TCHC.

The TCHC’s official document, the Community Management Plan (CMP), details the plan by which it aims to achieve its vision. The first CMP (TCHC, 2002) clearly sets out how TCHC intends to proceed as an agency in charge of providing affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income households. In each of 2004 and 2005, TCHC updated the initial
CMP according to the outcomes and objectives set out in the first document. The second and third CMPs lay out the operating strategy for the agency until 2008.

Toronto Community Housing Corporation’s mandate is to provide affordable rental housing for low and moderate-income households in a way that minimizes community risks while promoting resiliency (TCHC, 2003). The complexity of housing needs in a city the size of Toronto requires TCHC to increase the scope of its operations beyond the provision of shelter in order to fully achieve its aim of providing “quality housing, quality service, and quality communities”. To be a “leading organization against which other publicly-owned social housing providers are evaluated”, the agency intends to focus on building “healthy” communities with active, involved residents. This emphasis on the participation of residents is how TCHC managers intend to establish themselves as architects of community building.

2.3. Community Participation at TCHC

Anticipating the inception of the TCHC, staff from both the Toronto Housing Company and the Metro Toronto Housing Corporation cooperated to create a consultation plan for the development of an official management framework for the new agency. Upon its creation, the new agency accordingly spent six months in consultation with 6000 tenants, staff and community members to examine the organization’s vision, values, and mandate; to identify the TCHC’s key priorities; and to develop the strategies by which the agency intended to achieve those priorities. Further, they worked to formulate a structure for the Tenant Participation System, detail how the system should function, decide what should comprise such a partnership between the tenants and the corporation, and determine the extent to which tenants wished to participate. The result was an agency-wide planning
document known as the “Community Management Plan” (CMP), a three-year strategic plan that is updated annually as a measure to keep the Shareholder accountable. The first budgeting cycle, which ran from 2001 to 2003, set the direction for the TCHC and identified the macro strategies by which the organization would thereafter proceed. Regularly updated, the document continues to be an opportunity for tenant input.

In 2004, in order to amend the previous CMP, the TCHC consulted broadly with tenants, staff and other stakeholders to identity the organization’s achievements and challenges in preparation for the next budgeting cycle. At these sessions, participants raised issues and proposed strategies to address them. In the second round of consultations, Toronto city councilors and key staff were briefed on the recommendations from the first round and were given the opportunity to respond. With the feedback from this cooperative process, a Community Management Plan for 2005-2007 was drafted and brought back to the initial participants for overview. The final set of inputs from each stakeholder was then integrated into the CMP. The same consultation process was carried out the next year to frame the 2006-2008 strategic directions.

Community Collaboration in TCHC Affairs

The 2003 CMP was the first step towards the merging of the agency’s resources in order to achieve its vision. Through the joined efforts of multiple stakeholders, strategic objectives for the organization were identified, and the actions needed to achieve these objectives were planned.

The stakeholders embraced an emphasis-on-community model and willingly encouraged a partial transfer of authority to the community. This would allow groups on the local level to respond to local circumstances. Later debates on community health, healthy
organization, and good governance further emphasized that the organization’s operating process had to respect the principles of a community model. Stakeholder comments during this process highlighted the need to integrate communities and engage tenants throughout the formal decision-making processes. Their intention was then solidified in a formal system of tenant participation (TCHC, 2002).

**Implementing the Community Model**

To implement a community model, TCHC undertook the following six specific initiatives (TCHC, 2002).

1- Identifying effective Community Housing Units;
2- Developing Governance models for CHUs;
3- Structuring the organization to support the community model;
4- Developing the accountability framework for the community model;
5- Building capacity to realize the potential of the community model; and,
6- Implementing a tenant participation system.

Implementing a successful community model required that the TCHC subdivide its portfolio into manageable community entities initially called community-based business units. Now known as Community Housing Units (CHUs), these units are meant to ensure a higher-quality delivery of service while adhering to the principles of the community model. This organizational model differs from its predecessor structures of governance in social housing due to the downloading of operational roles to local communities within the TCHC.

There was a consensus among the corporation’s stakeholders that smaller, more autonomous community units would be a better vehicle for operational decisions such as developing local business and service delivery plans, engaging the diverse population of
tenants, delivering services more efficiently and equitably, and managing human resources locally. The immediate benefits of this model have included more freedom and flexibility to meet organization standards in a way that suits each individual community, timely decisions better mapped to local conditions, and a greater likelihood of delivering more cost-effective services. The guiding principle in creating and identifying effective CHUs was to enable management to make day-to-day decisions more efficiently and to implement service delivery more effectively. Management was to be able to maintain excellent understanding of their communities and close contact with community leaders. To this end, there were many things that had to be considered as part of the CHU identification process: the ideal size of portfolio units in order to maintain efficiency, the complexity of the community, the diversity of residents, natural geography and the location of buildings and complexes, as well as the service needs of individual communities.

Prior to the merger of the two social housing companies, the MTHC had divided its housing portfolio into numerous Community Operating Units (COUs). After the MTHC and THC merged, this portfolio expanded considerably. Building upon the existing COU structure and the preceding criteria, the new TCHC identified and formed 27 Community Housing Units throughout the City of Toronto.

In order to develop a governance and management framework that supports the community model, Toronto Community Housing Corporation had to restructure its operations and common services with a view to shifting operational reserves and most of the primary decision-making to the CHUs. The creation of the CHUs, and tenant councils within them, comprised the first step in developing a structure that would be accountable to the development of local business plans meeting financial goals and responding to local priorities.
and issues. This decentralization of organization roles was carried out to allow CHUs to develop self-management schemes and, ultimately, to adopt the status of Subsidiary Corporation or Non-Profit Co-up Housing.

To this end, TCHC establishes service standards and financial targets, retains ownership of assets, and manages capital planning and reserve allocation throughout its portfolio. Meanwhile, the CHUs set individual budgets for their communities and are fully accountable for operational results (TCHC, 2002, p.80). In simple words, at one end of the spectrum of governance envisioned for the community model, TCHC sets performance requirements and is ultimately accountable for financial and service results. At the other end of the spectrum, CHUs are self-determining business units governed by their own Board of Directors and set their own standards and budgets and therefore are fully accountable for operational results.

Delegating power to local actors and achieving community involvement through tenant participation and community councils enhances local responsiveness, accountability and efficiency. Derek Ballantyne, CEO of the TCHC, envisions that, over time, TCHC will act as a hub organization coordinating a complex network of community units. Each will engage tenants to develop action plans to address the needs and priorities of the neighbourhood in which they operates (TCHC, 2002, p. 1-3).

In order to abide by the community model, Toronto Community Housing Corporation assigns each CHU a manager who is responsible for each aspect of that unit, and accountable for what occurs within it. The TCHC expects decision making to occur within a balanced environment where CHU flexibility and participation comply with the corporation’s requirements and meet the standard criteria.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TCHC</th>
<th>CHU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting financial targets and service standards (condition of buildings and maintenance delivery);</td>
<td>Work with Tenant Council to establish local action plans and budgets and be accountable to this Council for achieving results;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding capital repair;</td>
<td>Establish budgets and plans directed to meeting prescribed operating benchmarks;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing a limited number of policies (eviction prevention, tenant participation and human rights);</td>
<td>Determine the approach to meeting the corporate standards;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting legislated obligations pursuant to the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000;</td>
<td>Develop plans to achieve community health goals;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and assessing performance of CHUs.</td>
<td>Be accountable for financial service level and community health results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Framework of Responsibility and Accountability at the TCHC (TCHC, 2002. p.78)

Staffing is an important means by which local requirements are met. Within each CHU, superintendents are assigned to groups of buildings. The CHU manager coordinates the superintendents’ responsibilities and provides administrative and maintenance staff as needed. This process is guided by reviews of benchmark ratios in staffing resources, an overview of the services proposed in each community, and an assessment of the skills and knowledge of staff with respect to what is required by a particular job. In each CHU, staffing is implemented alongside a detailed training program that will bring each new member fully into a skilled, locally responsive unit. Throughout the process, transparent communication with all stakeholders is maintained.

In establishing an accountability framework, there is a fine balance in determining what standards need to apply throughout the portfolio and what standards need to be developed locally. Consistent to its values, TCHC continues to set organization-wide operating standards and policies to ensure a strong performance. To the greatest degree
possible, TCHC endeavours to facilitate the development of community standards and local business approaches. An accountability framework for each CHU outlines performance expectations, a system of adhering to performance measures, the consequences and rewards inherent within the accountability system, and a framework to satisfy the legal obligations to the TCHC Board.

2.4. Tenant Participation System

The City of Toronto Shareholder Direction mandated that the TCHC develop a tenant participation scheme but gave no further direction as to what form it should assume. Since its inception, the TCHC has been committed to tenant participation in decision-making at all levels of the organization. In order to develop the tenant participation system (TPS), a working group of tenants and staff from the predecessor organizations negotiated a consultation plan to develop a participation format unique to the new enterprise. Guided by the suggestions made by these groups, and inspired by the practice and success of participatory budget in Porto-Alegre, Brazil, the TCHC spent one year in consultation with 6000 tenants to devise the structure of the new tenant participation system. Throughout the process, they sought ideas as to 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.

TCHC documents refer to the establishment of community-based service delivery as one of the agency’s top priorities (TCHC, 2003). The tenant participation system is the manifestation of the TCHC’s commitment to local governance, a goal that is reiterated
throughout the Community Management Plan. Each updated CMP continues to find the source of good governance in ‘local’ endeavours.

Implementing a community model of governance would be impossible without a system of tenant participation through which all stakeholders could effectively communicate and work cooperatively. The TPS is intended to be a structure that enables tenants to engage in matters that affect the livelihood of the communities in which they reside. Throughout this system, the TCHC aims to provide a forum for tenants to discuss community issues and concerns. Tenant representatives from within each CHU sit on community councils that meet regularly with CHU management to set priorities, allocate resources and solve problems at the community level. The participatory structure of governance provides the opportunity for tenants and staff to join forces in improving the TCHC operations within each community (TCHC, 2006d). The voluntary participation of the tenants is a way for them to be directly involved in how their community is managed.

Within each CHU, the tenant council works with the manager and community leaders to develop local business plans and address issues that arise (TCHC, 2006d). The primary responsibility of the tenant councils in these proceedings is to convey tenant priorities and complaints, devise local actions, review the performance of service delivery to their units, and identify broad issues that must be addressed at the corporate level. Each tenant council also develops an accountability framework so that tenants can monitor progress of their local projects and business plans, including repair and maintenance.

To better advocate on behalf of tenants and to broaden the scope of participation, tenant representatives in each community are required to hold meetings to investigate tenant concerns. The meetings convened by these volunteer representatives enable better
communication between the TCHC and the tenant population, informing the tenants about decision-making and changes at the TCHC as well as bringing the opinions and concerns of tenants to the attention of staff. Decision making at the local level involves envisioning the comprehensive needs of the community within the broader context of social housing in Toronto. Tenants work in partnership with the board of directors of the TCHC and community staff to determine what their communities need to run effectively and encourage a healthy, supportive living environment.

The tenants that sit on community housing councils are elected every three years from their communities of residence. The election process is complex, and involves nominations, campaigning and an election day held in each housing complex across the city. Any resident over sixteen years of age can nominate a candidate, run to be a representative and vote in the elections. The first election for CHU council representatives was held in 2003 and the second round of elections in April 2006. Currently, there are 400 tenant representatives across the 27 CHUs in the Greater Toronto Area.

More than any other, the component that comes to mind when people think of the tenant participation system is Toronto Community Housing Corporation’s system of participatory budgeting (PB). In 2003, a working group of tenant volunteers and TCHC staff developed a set of criteria for the distribution of 9 million dollars. This amounted to 13% of the total capital budget of the TCHC for its 27 community housing units. The budgeting framework instituted in 2003 continued to be used in following years. According to the structure established by the TCHC, 60% of the capital funds were to be allocated to CHUs according to their size, 20% to be distributed equally between the CHUs and 20% to be allocated through the annual participatory budgeting exercise. However, it is important to
remember that tenants’ influence over and contribution to budgeting is not limited to this exercise. Through their input to individual CHU business plans, tenants are able to negotiate funding priorities within their community housing units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community level</th>
<th>Building or complex</th>
<th>Tenant Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elected building/complex representatives sit on a local Tenant Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff work with a representative group of tenants to define the “community” for purposes of representation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Roles and responsibilities of tenant councils is defined by the degree of operating and governance autonomy of the local business unit and the issues being discussed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tenant councils work with management of Community Housing Units**

- Development of local business plans
- Resource allocation
- Review of local performance
- Identification of corporate and strategic issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporate level</th>
<th>Issue-Based Committees</th>
<th>Corporate Planning</th>
<th>Nominations to the Board</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Representatives from interested Tenant Councils, tenants-at-large, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Representatives from each Tenant Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Representatives from each Tenant Council</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Staff work with representative groups of tenants to identify the process for participation in corporate forums**

Table 2.2: Tenant Participation Framework (TCHC, 2003)

The annual PB process is as follows: To identify issues and priorities in each building or housing complex TCHC holds community planning meetings in the fall of each year. At this level, tenants identify and prioritize their capital needs that are not covered under the current CHU budget, choose their top capital priorities, use a democratic process to prioritize the issues and send their top five priorities to their local CHU council. Later at the CHU councils, upon deliberation, tenant representatives rank the forwarded priorities from each building to identify one and only one priority project to be submitted to the Inter-Community
Housing Unit Group, a city-wide forum of delegates. The selection process is also communicated to the general tenant population in the CHU.

The Inter-Community Housing Unit Group is made up of one tenant delegate and one alternate from each CHU. Their role is to determine how to allocate the 1.8 million dollars amongst the priority projects introduced by all 27 CHUs. The decision process is accomplished by way of a one-day open forum where delegates introduce their proposals, present the type of project proposed as well as the associated cost, how it would enhance the health of the community, and discuss the project’s urgency. Then, delegates are asked to cast their votes to rank the projects. The delegates vote secretly through “dot-mocracy”, which is a process whereby each tenant receives an equal amount of dots to attach to the projects, other than their own, which they believe should receive the available capital funding. The total sum is then distributed according to the votes, and the $1.8 million allocated to the top-ranking projects. The CHU managers are in charge of implementing the projects and are obliged to provide monthly updates to the council members on the project’s progress. In turn, tenant representatives inform community members and tenants about the status of the project in their building or community housing unit.

I attended the City-wide final allocation day of the annual PB process in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Here I provide a snapshot of this exciting day for the TCHC and the tenants. On March 31, 2007, more than 175 tenants, staff and guests participated to allocate $1.8 million PB capital fund. Tenant delegates, one for each CHU, passionately presented their proposals. They were hoping to get a percentage of the $1.8 million for the selected projects in their CHUs. Proposals included requests for new lighting, security upgrades and creating community gardens. Following the presentations, tenant delegates reviewed a display for
each proposal. Then, the tenant delegates used the new electronic voting system to allocate their votes. They were able to cast 10 votes each and could not vote for their own projects. In the end, 17 CHUs received funding for their projects. The winning projects included upgrades to a community recreation centre used mostly for youth programming and installation of lighting in to improve community safety.

According to TCHC this format of participatory budgeting is a “democratic way of allocating scarce capital dollars in areas that have a day-to-day impact on tenants…” (TCHC, 2006c, p. 2).

Tenant representatives act as decision makers and communicators. To perform their tasks effectively, capacity development programs are introduced as part of the educational mandate of the organization. The main goal of capacity development is to educate tenant representatives on governance issues. In order to attend to the needs and interests of the learners, tenant representatives themselves choose the types of training they need. The education coordinator, through time spent sitting with the tenant councils, helps tenants identify their educational needs. Each council is allocated an education budget and tenant representatives, pending council approval, have discretionary spending powers on educational needs. In addition, once, or some times twice, a year at the citywide forums, tenants spend a day or two together and attend various skill-building workshops. During a recent forum in April 2006, workshops were provided to the incoming tenant representatives on many topics, including: how to better communicate, how to work as a team, how to deal with antisocial behavior, rights and responsibilities of a tenant representative and getting to know the CHU budget.
At the CHU level, the Health Promotion Officers and Managers are directed to coach tenants about how to carry out their role. The Health Promotion Officer is a resource, an advocate, and a facilitator in the council meetings, helping to direct the tenant representatives’ attentions to common and public concerns within the community. CHU managers also facilitate productive and respectful discussion and help the tenant representatives understand CHU operations, including budgets and business plans.

In this Chapter, I intended to provide a picture of the organizational context of this research. Now that the research plan and the context is introduced, I will turn to Chapter 3 to discuss the theoretical literature pertaining to citizen participation in public service delivery, aiming to further clarify the reasons explaining the rationale for participation and to examine its educational effects on the participant tenants.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

As I specified in Chapter 1, the research focus is on the outcome and practice of participation beyond the immediate and intended scope of the program. That is, in addition to concern for the impacts of participation on efficiency and decision-making, attention is also directed towards assessing the pedagogical effects of participation. Specifically this research is about the communicative dimension of participation and its educative effect on individual tenant participants. Accordingly the theoretical framework addresses the context of participation and its association with individuals’ learning. To address the dynamics between tenant participation and tenants’ learning, this study focuses on two domains of literature. One provides the context within which this research is conducted; that is the theories of public administration that endorse a participatory approach for public service delivery. The second domain highlights the theories inducing learning through participation:

1. Theories of public administration that support participatory local\(^1\) governance and community-based service delivery;
2. Theories of informal learning that explain how individuals gain proficiency and learn the values of democracy within the associational space known as participatory democracy.

In addition, I will also introduce concepts such as tenant participation and participatory budgeting and further discuss their implications for community development within the context of social housing. In the following section, I start, though, with a brief overview of the historical evolution of public administration theory. To better understand and analyze the case of TCHC’s Tenant Participation System, in the following section I will

\(^1\) Here local is referred to the standard definition of Community Housing Unit (CHU) at TCHC documents (see Chapter 2).
review theories aiming to institutionalize civic participation within the culture of public administration.

3.1 Towards the New Public Service

In search for a synthesis of normative ideas calling for renewed civic engagement and expanding democratic citizenship as the foundations for local governance processes and public service delivery, I found the theory of new public service as crafted by Janet Denhardt and Robert Denhardt (2003) in their book *The New Public Service; Serving not Steering* most helpful and relevant, for they reaffirm the values of democracy and citizenship as the paramount foundation of public work. To present a clear picture of the theoretical framework illuminating the TPS, in this section I begin with reviewing the background to the New Public Service and conclude by introducing the principles of empowered participatory governance.

Herbert Simone's "Administrative Behavior" (1957) as a classical text in public administration portrays the "administrative man" as a rational individual whose goals are premised by those of the organization and strives efficiently towards achieving those goals. Derived from this core and the liberal political tradition, public administrators are charged with the implementation of policies, which set by the elected officials and it has been assumed that separation of politics and administration would hinder political corruption and would best suit the conduct of public service delivery.

"Economic man" like the administrative man is rational, self-interested and, according to the ends set by the organization, permanently attempts to achieve the highest outcomes with the least costs. In the last two decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, derived from the

\footnote{The word “man” in this phrase is a direct quote.}
"Public Choice Theory" and the application of economic-based models to design and implement public policy the "New Public Management" as an efficiency alternative to the traditional bureaucracy was introduced, this has been a call for "running government like a business". Among the core of its assumptions is that wherever possible, the market apparatus should run the administration; thus consumers would have choices among public service options, changing the focus from authority-driven into competition-driven tactics (Kettl 2000, p. 3). Entrepreneurial and results-based management became the primary move towards efficiency and productivity. Privatization of and contestability in public service provision became a dominant reality, public servants have been encouraged to take the burden of service delivery off their shoulders and contract them out, the administrative terms of reference from rowing have changed to steering (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003, p. 20-24).

Thus, throughout the 20th century, rationality and efficiency have been assumed as the core values of the design of public administration.

Although there has been a theoretical transition from political theory to economic theory in the New Public Management, Denhardt and Denhardt (2003) argue that although there are apparent differences between the Old Public Administration and the New Public Management; however they share theoretical foundations and both heavily rely on the same principles of “bureaucracy, hierarchy and control” (p. 26).

The Old Public Administration and the New Public Management, according to political and economic theories, are rooted in the premise of rationality and efficiency, with higher priority of quantifiable results over quality processes. This, Denhardt et al argue, has bestowed hierarchy and entrepreneurship upon the organizational structure of our societies to guarantee control and managerial efficiency. The public in general is assumed as clients and
customers and the public interest is either defined politically and expressed legally or calculated as the sum of individual interests.

The New Public Management, if compared to the Old Public Administration, would be more efficient (Osbornne & Gaebler, 1992). Nevertheless, Denhardt et al (2003) reject the idea that business-like and market oriented public management should only be compared to the older traditions in public administration. They argue for a core set of principles as a basis to contrast and merit various theories of public management. The New Public Service, they further articulate, encompasses such organizing principles as democratic governance and civic engagement. The degree to which, theories of public management have incorporated and integrated such ideals, should be the norm of judgment, they conclude.

Founded on democratic theory, Denhardt et al (2003, p. 42-43) offer an inspiring and timely alternative to the so called efficient, productive and entrepreneurial New Public Management; specifically significant for those theorists and practitioners calling for the reaffirmation of democratic values and citizenship within the domain of public administration. In this view, the public interest is the result of dialogue about shared values in a collaborative and trustful environment among citizens and public servants and public servants should be attentive not just to market norms but also to community values, citizen interest, shared notion of public interest, shared interests, and shared responsibility.

In the long run, if state and civil society operate through principles of collaboration and the processes of “shared leadership", it is more likely to successfully sustain effective public service delivery while adhering to democratic values. As an indication of policy effectiveness towards a stronger democracy, the New Public Service promotes maintaining democratic values: collaboration, dialogue and shared leadership among public servants and
citizens. In this view, public are seen as citizens and public interest is developed through dialogue over shared values (see Figure 3.1). The following are the organizing principles of the New Public Service (Denhardt et al 2003):

1. Serve Citizens, Not Customers:
2. Seek the Public Interest:
3. Value Citizenship over Entrepreneurship:
4. Think Strategically, Act Democratically:
5. Recognize Accountability is not Simple:
6. Serve Rather than Steer:
7. Value People, Not Just Productivity:

It would be incomplete if I did not address the postmodern turn in public administration theory, which has shaken the traditional grounds of public administration and helped engender theories like the New Public Service. Here, I, briefly, introduce this underpinning theory as is pertained to public service delivery.

Postmodern thought refers to “certainty” as a potential evil. Certainty, either as a moral or scientific concept, provokes evil in human relations. Orion White and Cynthia
McSwain (the two authors who write as O.C. McSwite) in their book “Post Modern Turn in Public Service” argue that unquestionable facts and values, through the medium of moral or scientific reasoning, shape virtual truths and certainties; these historically have produced totalitarianism and social calamities. According to McSwite, any endeavor to do the right thing is nothing but waste. Reasoned and justified results, founded on one interpretation of truth, mobilize energy and direct social action if shown against unreasoned and illogical results. Thus pursuing such reasoned and planned results based on our sketch of value and the derived facts, itself ends in an authoritarian evil. McSwite introduce process theory to theorize human interaction as a "process", which, if proceeds properly, redefines public service structure and develops an alternative orientation for the exercise of authority. Process theory advocates for a pragmatic collaboration among citizens to set the mutual terms of alterity so as to share the ownership of diversified and relative truth, which is “neither objectively certain nor ultimately tentative”.

Recasting public service so as to aim for the ethos of process rather than achieving anticipated and reasoned results could prevent the universal evil to prevail. What matters, then, is to achieve a fluid status, within which authority is prevented to be dominated by one or few over others. In relation to one another, McSwite (1997, p.272-273) propose the ultimate task of public service as to achieve the “correct existential stance” regarding one another at the same time and in the same moment. McSwite (1997, p. 277) portrays the reality of human condition as: “I am you” and characterize this fluid status as a transformed reason; reason that embraces an alternative style of dialogue and assumes the primacy of receiving the other as oneself. The first step is then “to listen”. Fox and Miller (1995) in their book on “post modern public administration” highlight the multi-faceted act of listening.
They argue “listening is work, but also shows a caring attitude as characterized in the role of a midwife”. Like the midwife, the whole system of a public service should facilitate the appearance of new possibilities (Fox and Miller, 1995, p. 158).

An urgent implication of such transformed reason is a pragmatic and collaborative relationship with citizens, better called: citizen-oriented bureaucracy. Stivers (1990) explains that active relationships between citizens and administrators should be the basis of redefining public administration. One could claim that encouraging and engendering the role of citizenship in local governance is, at least, partly due to the emerging influence of such post modern thoughts as elaborated in process theory in response to the existing problematic social relations. It is also through the practices of process-focused public management that alternative identity for the now rigid and scientifically reasoned public administration could be developed.

3.2. Public Service Delivery as Empowered Participatory Governance

The New Public Service is a public administration theory, which introduces an alternative format of governance; rooted in democratic citizenship, revitalizing community and strengthening state-civil society partnerships: “government should not be run like a business; it should run like a democracy … Public servants do not deliver customer service; they deliver democracy” (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003, p. xi). They further elaborate that words like democracy, citizenship and pride ought to be more widespread than words like market, competition and customer in both the literature and conduct of public administration. One of the working models that embraces the principles of the New Public Service is
Empowered Participatory Governance, developed by Fung and Wright (2003) through a series of case studies of participatory governance structures around the world.

In their seminal work, *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, Fung and Wright (p. 3) argue "representative democracy plus techno-bureaucratic administration seem increasingly ill-suited to the novel problems we face in the 21st century". Complexity and efficient progress, they argue, would be the force behind our retreat to privatism and political passivity, which have consequently diminished our traditional democratic values. Upon examining several participatory governance practices they propose a format of empowered participatory governance that as they argue advance the values of egalitarian social justice, which they articulate as “individual liberty combined with popular control over collective decisions, community and solidarity and the flourishing of individuals in ways which enable them to realize their potentials” (p. 5).

Among other cases they have studied the practice of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brasil, which was inspirational for TCHC in developing such practices within the TPS. I found Fung and Wright’s format of empowered participatory governance congruent with the TCHC’s agenda for its community management plan. To realize democratic values through the act of governance they promote extensive participation of citizens in the affairs of their local communities and beyond. In order to motivate and sustain participation they propose three principles (p. 16-24). Inviting bottom-up participation in deliberative initiatives to tackle practical and immediate problems of communities, they argue, establishes venues for those directly affected by the problems and brings, often disenfranchised, people to the forefront of local decision-making. It also provides
opportunities for people to apply their knowledge and skills to co-formulate solutions and helps to build more congenial relations among people. Therefore, according to Fung and Wright (2003), expanding spaces of decision-making to allow bottom up participation in deliberative processes of resolution making over practical issues would spark and encourage participation.

To institutionalize and sustain the above motivational principles, Fung and Wright propose an institutional configuration (p. 22). It is based on delegating decision-making and executive authority to emerging local units along with a state-orchestrated coordinating body to harmonize the work of these local units (e.g. distribution of resources).

These, as described in Chapter 2, also characterize the TCHC’s mandate and the structure of its community management plan including the participatory budgeting. So far, in this Chapter I have presented theoretical literature embedding such practices as PB; practices that are state-sponsored, therefore are part of public service agenda, and follow a coordinated decentralization path towards harmonized local and community-based units of decision-making with sufficient enabling structures to consistently assist in shaping the process and improving the participatory outcome. In the next section, it is imperative that I review the practical aspects and developments of PB in the global context.

**Participatory Budgeting**

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a process of collaborative management of the allocation of public funds for local needs as prioritized by citizens. This process brings citizens and local communities closer to the decision-making processes around the public budget allocations that impact their daily lives. Civil society organizations, donors, private sector actors, local government representatives and other stakeholders participate in a
supportive role to provide information on the financial, legal and feasibility implications of the proposals. According to the World Bank PB can occur in three different stages of public expenditure management:

- **Budget formulation and analysis:** Citizens participate in allocating budget funds according to priorities they have identified in participatory diagnostics; formulate alternate budgets; or assess proposed allocations in relation to a government's policy commitments and stated concerns and objectives.
- **Expenditure monitoring and tracking:** Citizens track whether public spending is consistent with allocations made in the budget and track the flow of funds to the agencies responsible for the delivery of goods and services.
- **Monitoring of public service delivery:** Citizens monitor the quality of goods and services provided by government in relation to expenditures made for these goods and services.

Scholars and practitioners support the idea of participatory budgeting for the following reasons:

- **Urban areas house more than half of the world's population.** More than 261 cities in developing countries have populations of over one million people. To manage change in urban areas successfully, new ideas are needed to manage and pay for the public services on which people depend;

- **Economic power is accompanied by political power.** Neighborhoods with sparse financial resources may find it difficult to make their voices heard, and the poor are frequently underrepresented in the political process. This disparity in public sector participation tends to be reflected in the decisions made by national and local authorities, which often do not promote the interests of the marginalized. Without an avenue for local political participation, disadvantaged populations are unable to affect change and may find it impossible to ameliorate their own living conditions. Without the full participation of its citizenry, a government is unable to fulfill its mandate as the people's elected representative. It is therefore in the
interests of both the state and marginalized populations to facilitate the political participation of the latter;

- PB enhances local democratic culture, nurtures civic engagement, and stimulates the development of social capital;
- PB ensures that the finances of the local government are properly accounted for and decreases the potential for abuse by individuals both within and outside of the system.

**Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre**

The history of public budget management in Brazil is marked by serious deformations related to the concentration of power, resource waste and political corruption. For decades, there has been a highly centralized and non-democratic government, creating an enormous barrier to a transparent relationship between government and society. In 1989, the Worker's Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT) of Brazil won their first municipal election in the City of Porto Alegre. Prior to 1989, public budget decisions had been principally made by city councilors, who allocated investment to gain political support from well-established groups of well-off residents and professionals.

Upon election, the PT initiated an alternative form of city expenditure management called Participatory Budgeting (Orçamento Participativo), which is a “populist method of allocating public infrastructure investments that has the potential to address the challenge of patronage.” (Baiocchi, 2003; Abers, 2000) Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a process through which the capital portion of the City’s budget is allocated by newly created structures—Regional Assemblies and the PB Council— which have both been through an engaged process to prioritize and categorize local needs in their neighbourhoods and at city-wide public assemblies respectively. These priorities— through a cycle of neighborhood, local and
thematic meetings—are aggregated into an overall city budget. The final responsibility rests with the mayor and the legislative assembly to implement the budget decisions.

The PB Council is composed of delegates from regional meetings, thematic working groups, municipal unions, neighbourhood associations and representatives of local government. Many of long-term neighbourhood activists have been employed to facilitate the process and work with community delegates. In 1995, 14,000 residents of Porto Alegre participated in a minimum of one TPS meeting (Taylor, 2003, p. 171). The main goals of PB are to: encourage a dynamic citizenry; establish a sustained mechanism of joint management of public resources through shared decisions about the allocation of budgetary funds; and create government accountability around the effective implementation of such decisions (Santos, 1998).

By opening up the process and involving citizens—especially marginalized communities—in the process of budget allocation, PB has been successful in changing public spending priorities. According to Baiocchi (2003), this has resulted in substantive and remarkable changes in the overall quality of life in Porto Alegre. The percentage of neighbourhoods with running water has increased from 75 to 98 percent, sewer coverage has grown from 45 to 98 percent, and the number of families offered housing assistance has grown sixteen-fold. In addition, the reforms seem to have substantially reduced the influence of patron-client relationships in City politics. The number of civic leaders who admit to client-patron exchanges of benefits for political support has declined by 18 percent since the introduction of PB.

The process has also reversed the tendency of the municipality to focus on expensive structural projects; instead, the local government has substantially invested in small-scale
infrastructure projects (Taylor, 2003, p.171). Another study by Avritzer (2002) found that 41 percent of associations secured benefits by directly contacting politicians prior to the PB and none relied on such unmediated channels after the establishment of PB.

This short review of the practice of PB provides some evidence of its effects on community leadership and local governance; in the following section, I return to the concept of tenant participation in the context of social housing and refer to the spectrum of approaches defining community development in such contexts.

3.3. Tenant Participation in Social Housing Portfolio

To put it rather bluntly, tenants in social housing suffer from a vicious circle of poverty and marginalization, which results in a lack of confidence and lack of influence over local decision-making. This, in turn, ends in more marginalization and deeper status of poverty (Table 3.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marginalization Effects:</th>
<th>Political Inefficacy:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>• Lack of confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor housing</td>
<td>• Lack of influence/control over delivery of public services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor health</td>
<td>• Lack of social structure to motivate local action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inaccessibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low quality service</td>
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Table 3.1: Dynamics of Disempowerment for Social Housing Tenants

In response to the disempowering effects of living in social housing; the way we produce housing should be the way we intend to build and shape our communities. Housing policies, as Professor Larry Bourne in his course on housing research that I took with him puts it, are the architects of community building.
Providing the opportunity to be adequately and appropriately sheltered, social housing is a formidable element in removing major sources of unfreedom\(^3\). However for the socially deprived and economically neglected communities, social housing could mean more than shelter; it should also encompass community, education and health. Social housing as a social and economic arrangement should substantially contribute to expanding opportunities for the housed individuals and communities to flourish and develop. Building more social housing, solely providing the physical infrastructure, does not necessarily result in developing and maintaining supportive and inclusive communities for the housed individuals and families. Social housing policies, as architects of communities, entail various aspects of cultural, social, economic, political and environmental considerations. To enhance the general livelihoods of the housed individuals and families, in addition to lodging, applying mechanisms like tenant participation as a socio-political means could advance the cause towards building a more politically aware and socially responsible communities.

To alleviate the disempowering effect of living in social housing, various approaches have been applied (Twelvetrees, 1991; Cooper and Hawtin, 1997): some in harmony with and loyal and some oppositional to status quo (Fainstein and Hirst, 1995, p. 183). A radical community worker seeks the roots of local problems within social relationships and political realities and believes it is through social change, class struggle, and re-arrangement of power that disempowering effects of living in social housing could be alleviated. According to this view, the outsider (intervener) encourages bottom-up approaches and helps enable individuals and communities through popular movements to tackle local problems and pursue social change. Often, activists within the community determine the direction of community action and fill the leadership role. On the other hand, a professional community

worker applies directive social planning. The goal is neither to change social relationships nor to challenge the power but to deliver services and provide facilities to meet the pre-set agenda of community development.

The overall goal of community involvement determines the applied strategy. Results-oriented approach is applied when the focus is on achieving concrete changes in a locality such as improvement in physical environment. In this approach community involvement is viewed as a mechanism to treat a specific local problem in a more efficient manner. Process-based approach, on the other hand, is considered when the goal is to build individual and group confidence, develop capacities within the community, facilitate citizenship learning and empower who are traditionally deprived of power and control over their common affairs. Tenant participation as a process-based approach endeavours to invite participation into the realm of local decision-making, hoping that this would result in developing local leadership and generating empowered community-based institutions.

This spectrum of approaches is well depicted in Arnstein's (1969) classic "Ladder of Citizen Participation". She illustrates various types of participation as arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung from the bottom to top shows the extent to which citizens control power in establishing the end results, thus, differentiating between "citizen control" and "citizen manipulation". As is evident here, citizen power, first and foremost, requires power devolution from the power-holder's side to the powerless; transferring authority to community and their elected representatives. For without power devolution, participation is a frustrating process for powerless.

- The level of non-participation: although participation is invited, authorities tend to educate participants and engineer their support for pre-established agendas.
• The level of tokenism: although citizens are informed of their rights and options, the emphasis is placed on a one-way flow of information from authorities to participants.

• The level of citizen power: citizens gain increasing degrees of decision-making and managerial clout through power delegation and partnerships.

Within this context, tenant participation can be regarded as one form of citizens’ collective action to pursue social betterment in a housing locale. Adopted from Bengtsson (1998, p. 260) I define Tenant Participation as an organized collective action by tenants to address local affairs within a housing setting. This definition implies that tenant participation is beyond the landlord-tenant relations, it also encompass community. Here, I avoid incorporating the objectives of its practice into its definition. One cannot simply define the objectives of tenant participation without critical reflection on the concerns of each specific context.

Last but most important and relevant to this research, is a discussion of the pedagogical aspects of participation. In the following section, I will address this main theme of this research in order to better understand what has already been discussed and debated on the issue of pedagogy of participation.

3.4. The Pedagogical Dimension of Participation

The other stream of literature that I discuss before proceeding to the next chapters deals with the educative effects of participation and whether those effects further advance participatory forms of governance. The review begins with a broad discussion concerning the role of participation in fostering the democratic learning of participants and then moves into the importance of such participatory initiatives in enhancing the quality of our democracies.
There is an extensive literature that addresses the assumed effects of participation on those who participate. Benjamin Baber (1984) in his eminent book, *Strong Democracy*, argues that participatory democracy, due to its deliberative nature and its roots in the philosophy of praxis, has potential political and social transformative implications. Schugurensky (2002) also emphasizes that participation in public policy planning and public service delivery, such as participatory budgeting, provides a significant context for learning democratic values and skills. Cooke (2000) highlights the core of the argument that “participation improves the moral, practical or intellectual qualities of the participants; it makes them not just better citizens but also better individuals” (p. 948). In a nutshell, the literature on participatory democracy recognizes participation as an important domain of learning democratic citizenship within democracies, with the underlying assumption that the benefits of participation are personal.

Citizenship in the participatory mode, or as a membership in a political community, is “mindful of the extent to which citizens take it upon themselves to participate in civic and political life” (Mettlre, 2002, p. 362). In other words, the participatory mode takes into consideration the type, frequency and depth of citizens’ participation, where the other mode of citizenship tend not to. Democratic citizenship, in the participatory mode, is promoted through allowing citizens’ voices in crafting policies that deeply affect their lives (Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2002; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2003). Rousseau, in his classic work *The Social Contract* (1762/1968), argues that the very qualities required of individuals, for governance to work successfully, are those that the process of participation itself develops and fosters. This work emphasizes the fact that there is an

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4 In contrast to the participatory emphasis applied in this thesis, ‘citizenship’ has traditionally had a more limited usage, being defined as a legal status in which the State extends social, civil, and political guarantees upon citizens through law and public policy.
interrelationship between the working of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals interacting with them (Pateman, 1970/1999). Building on Rousseau’s argument, Pateman suggests that large housing developments are good sites to provide opportunities for residents to participate in decision-making, and “the psychological effects of such participation might prove extremely valuable in this context” (p. 109).

Instilling more engaging local governance, scholars argue, will advance and develop democratic learning and competencies among the citizenry. More engaging local governance, in this context, would require/means accommodating deliberative and participatory approaches in policy making and public service delivery. Deliberation is believed to illuminate self-centred ideas and helps citizens look beyond their self-interest to the larger public interest (Sandel, 1996; Schugurensky, 2003). At the same time, and through the same process, deliberation and participation help citizens develop a sense of ownership over what they deliberately plan to implement (Box, 1998; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2003; Schugurensky, 2003). In other words, through rearranging governance structures, removing bureaucratic impediments to local participation, and providing deliberative public spaces for active engagement of individuals in this praxis of community planning, informal citizenship learning is integrated into the domain of local governance. In this format, learning is not designed but as Wenger (1998) suggests, it is “designed for” (p.32). And individuals, while exercising and consolidating their rights, reshape their subjective experience of what it means to be a citizen (Mettlre, 2002). Although this connection is assumed, there is little research on the kinds of learning that occur at local forums where individuals participate in planning for the affairs of their communities. In
Chapter 6, I will present the pedagogical and psychological effects of such participation on volunteer tenants active within the Tenant Participation System of the TCHC.

To better understand the personal effects of participation, it is important now to review the literature for a more in-depth analysis of interpersonal and intrapersonal effects of participation. There are three categories of arguments; one line of arguments deals with the transformative implications of civic participation for citizen development (Chambers, 1997; Scott, 2000). The other set of arguments deals with the empowering potential of civic participation for participants (Zimmerman, 1995; Couto, 1998). The third group of arguments deals with developing a critical awareness of oneself and a mutual understanding amongst those who participate (Ryfe, 2002; Scott, 2000).

First, civic participation enhances participants’ sense of self and self-confidence. Scholars advocate that civic participation is a significant factor in developing a sense of identity. As King and Kenson (2002) indicate, identity formation is a result of political action and interaction with others. They argue that through relationships and “speech acts”, individual’s identity is revealed and achieved (p. 109). According to this perspective, identity is understood as a social construction that develops through social relationships and experiences. In other words, as Cerulo (1997) points out, identity can be permanently renegotiated through social interactions and exchanges. By providing further opportunities for public participation we are creating learning instances in which social interactions and dialogues can take place. Thus, it can be argued that our identities can be transformed through our broadened civic participation.

Second, it is generally believed that participation is an empowering act and those who participate get empowered through the process of their participation. The process through
which an individual or a community obtains control over the issues that affect their livelihoods is generally understood as an empowerment process (Peterson, Hamme & Speer, 2002; Zimmerman, 1995; Campbell, 2006). Participation affects our attitude, knowledge and awareness, and social action (Schugurensky, 2000); these are the three dimensions of an empowerment process, which shape our emotional, cognitive and behavioral abilities (Campbell, 2006). Attitudinal or emotional empowerment involves how much one feels control over his/her own life; knowledge or cognitive empowerment is an individual’s ability to be critically aware of socio-political factors determining the distribution of power and resources (Couto, 1998, p.338). Behavioral empowerment is being able to take action in and beyond the process of participation (Peterson et al., p.338).

Third, developing a mutual understanding amongst those who participate, or in simpler words the ability to understand other people’s perspectives, is also believed to be another dimension of empowerment in the act of participation (Campbell, 2006). Social interactions increase the chances for people to confront others with different experiences, worldviews and viewpoints from their own. Such interactions also allow people the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from those of others. Therefore, it can be argued that participation increases the chances that people see several dimensions of any given issue and that they develop a sense of connection with others; as Ryfe (2002) points out: “the most important result of these interactions is the construction and maintenance of a shared sense of belonging” (p. 370). In other words as Scott (2000, p.263) argues, we forge our individual interests into shared and common interests through the process of participation. Similarly, Battistoni (1997, p.151) indicates that participation helps individuals
develop a sense of mutual responsibility, which is a building block of free democratic societies.

The above arguments clearly illustrate that participation is potentially a transformative learning exercise where we can change and shape our views and identities through interactions with others. In other words, derived from the above we can suggest that learning through social action can be transformative. To better understand transformative learning through community action, here I review the concept of “perspective transformation” as introduced by Mezirow. “Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167). Mezirow’s work is part of a critical tradition in adult education associated also with Collins and Brookfield as well as Freire, owing its roots to Dewey on the one hand and its theoretical base to Habermas on the other (Atherton, 2005). According to the above definition, through critically reflecting on our assumptions and belief systems and consciously renegotiating the ways we define our world, transformative learning occurs.

O’Sullivan well describes the concept of transformative learning:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (O’Sullivan, 2003, p. 327)
Mezirow’s emphasis on individual transformation has been understood as a focal point within community development programs (Schugurensky, 2002). Drawing from Dewey, Mezirow views individual’s transformation leading to social change. According to him, knowledge is action-oriented, experiential in nature and dependent on the context in which the experience occurs (Dewey, 1966), and learning is dependent on the meaning deducted from the interactions between the individual and the social context (Blumer, 1969); this learning could lead to “individual emancipation” as well as “societal emancipation” (Finger & Asun, 2001, p.57). Mezirow argues that when an individual’s experiences challenge his/her worldview in relation to his/her own perspective, learning can occur that can be transformative (Mezirow, 1991). The concept of transformative learning calls on Habermas (1984), who also advocates that through rational discourse and critical reflection individual emancipation can occur. For this process to happen, there is a need of mentoring or facilitating, and it is the facilitator’s role to guide the process. It is likely that through the combination of a process of reflective discourse, a mentoring community and opportunities for action, individuals and groups integrate and assimilate transformative ideas that gradually change their perspective and engagement in social action (Schugurensky, 2002). Mezirow also suggests that incremental changes in meaning schemes, through critical reflection on definitions of the world, causes gradual, yet transformative, learning for the engaged individuals (Mezirow, 1991). Finally, for Mezirow, a thorough transformation is beyond changes in meaning schemes, it is rooted in meaning perspectives, which are deeper schematic changes.

It becomes evident that participation has significant educative effects on those who participate. In this section, so far, the immediate pedagogical effects of participation have
been discussed, now I turn my attention to explore other implications and participatory attributions as deducted from already presented learning consequences.

The third category of intrapersonal effects discussed above deals with participation as a process of developing empathy between the participants (e.g. between residents of a neighbourhood and city officials, who are collaborating on planning and implementing a neighbourhood project). Embedded in this argument lies the fact that there is a link between participation and improved relations between citizens and government: “One positive aspect of engaging in a participatory approach... is the improved rapport between the community and the responsible government agency. As different people get involved in a consultation, discussion and or negotiation process, different parties start to know and understand each other” (Buchy & Race, 2001, p.295, as cited in Campbell, 2006). This is an important consequence of participation, especially in this era in which citizens hold negative or skeptical attitudes towards branches of government.

The other categories discussed above deal with empowerment and personal development. These, scholars argue, enhance one’s political efficacy. Political efficacy involves the extent to which individuals “believe they possess the competence and ability to participate in the political process, are entitled to participate, and will be successful in these efforts” (Campbell, 2006, p.41; Pateman, 1970). One’s level of political efficacy is connected to his/her self-confidence and the degree to which s/he possesses certain knowledge and skills, such as active listening, creative conflict resolution, negotiation, organizational and communication skills and collective decision-making skills (Lappe & Dubois, 1994; Kirlin, 2003). Finkel (1985) indicates that there is a theory of circular causality of participation and political efficacy: “as one participates in politics, one acquires political skills and perceptions
of self-competence” (p. 893), consequently it is more likely that one will participate in the future as well. Political efficacy involves a positive sense of self-competence and political and civic knowledge and skills, which are exercised and reinforced by the practice of participation. This aspect of participation, that deals with the relationship between political and civic learning of participants on the one hand and political efficacy on the other, reasserts the previously discussed fact that participation is not only a right and an obligation of citizenship but also an education for citizenship.

3.5. Conclusion

In a democracy where citizens run the government, civic participation not only contributes to the betterment of the society but also to the citizens' own growth as active and responsible human beings (Denhardt et al, 2003). According to this argument, if public service re-orient its theory and practice to accommodate deliberative processes and participatory action plans, it will not only enhance the effectiveness of its service delivery but also improve the democratic learning and competencies of the participants. This can be encouraged by creating communities of practice through the practice of deliberation and participation. This process of civic engagement extends opportunities for citizens to exercise and consolidate their rights while it reshapes “communities” and “individuals” subjective experience of what it means to be a citizen. In other words, it provides grounds for citizens to act democratically and educate themselves through this civic practice (Merrifield, 2002, p. 32).

Although there are numerous normative arguments indicating the benefits of participation on individual participants, there is a dearth of empirical research to discern
whether participation in fact affects the individual in any significant way. Generally speaking research in this area is especially thin. More specifically, there is little research that has been conducted to examine what kinds of participation has what kinds of effects on what kinds of participants; and most directly related to this study, there is no previous research determining the effects of participation on tenant representatives in the context of social housing in the Greater Toronto Area.
Chapter 4: Research Design

4.1. Doing a Qualitative Research

In this chapter, I will outline the research design explaining sample selection, data collection and data analysis. I will conclude by referring to some of the limitations of this study. One of the challenges in doing research on Tenant Participation System at TCHC is that there has been no prior research and documentation of this initiative; there exists no reliable quantitative information on tenant representatives and their specific experiences within the TPS. Even, I was not able to gather detailed demographic information of all the current and previous tenant representatives. Therefore, to explore and examine the tenants’ experiences and learning at the Tenant Participation System I adopted a qualitative approach (Morse, 1994; Creswell, 1998; White, 2000), so this dissertation explored the qualitative data gathered through personal observation and interviews with staff and tenant representatives rather than the data collected through surveys.

I should emphasize that I consider myself as an advocate for strong democracy, I see myself part of the social movement proposing a more engaged governance where there are enabling structures for citizens to participate and deliberate over the affairs of their communities, be it local or global. And through this dissertation I aim to present some of the prospects and challenges pertained to tenants’ participation in this realm of local governance and public service delivery. Despite this, I cannot present this work as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Hall, 1981; Koch, 2006; Morris, 2002). However, when conducting this research I, as much as it was possible, adhered to the philosophy of PAR by letting the research participants lead interview sessions according to their own judgement of a research aiming to create socially useful knowledge to advance tenant participation within TCHC and
beyond. My constructive dialogue about this research and the TPS and their input to my research plan not only enhanced the quality of this work but also helped me gain their trust as a companion in their efforts within TPS. I am still in touch with some of the socially activist tenant and we are in the process of making a web-based advocacy group echoing tenants’ voices.

Given the lack of empirical research on the actual experiences and outcomes of systems of tenant participation at building, neighbourhood and community levels in a multicultural setting like Toronto, I was not able to formulate hypotheses in advance; rather I chose to focus on conceptualizing what was going on by gathering and using empirical data. This explains why, amongst various qualitative methods, the concept of grounded theory was most appealing to lead this research. This inductive approach allows both the research question and the explanatory framework to emerge from the data. Grounded theory is developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967& 1978) and elaborated by a number of other scholars including Strauss and Corbin (1994), Wilson and Hutchinson (1996), and Ian Dey (1999).

I chose grounded theory for three main reasons, the first being that very little is known about the meaning and dynamics of tenant participation in this social context (public housing portfolio in the Greater Toronto Area) being studied, and this context must therefore be explored rather than assumed. Second, the grounded theory is flexible in mediating between various theoretical paradigms, the flexibility and evolving nature of grounded methodology helps to move between data collection and data analysis, promoting the discovery of ways to define concepts and relationships among them (Gilgun, 1994, p.116), which indeed made this research an engaging endeavour. This flexibility gave me the chance to capture the multiple experiences of tenants as they perceived and interpreted them. Finally,
rather than attempting to fit findings deductively into an existing theory, grounded theory provided me with the opportunity to construct new theory based on data obtained from participants, their experiences and the associated meanings (Creswell, 1994).

### 4.2. Sampling and Data Collection

An exploratory methodology can easily cause a researcher to lose his/her way out of the guiding themes and generates masses of extra data that may not ultimately be informative. To avoid this and to enhance research accuracy, a triangulation methodology (i.e. using different data sources and multiple theories to understand the phenomena) was applied. Triangulation is a method applied in participatory action research and is based on the idea that using multiple sources and methods is the best assurance of the validity of the collected information.

Borrini (1997, p.100) suggests two basic modes of triangulation, external and internal. External triangulation involves comparison between the information generated by the research and data from external sources, such as census and local independent research studies. Since this research is the first of its kind in this setting external triangulation was impossible to conduct. However, I rigorously tried to do an internal triangulation to gather confirming evidence for tenants’ arguments. Different perspectives were compared utilizing different methods and techniques for exploring the same topic by discussing the same issues with different individuals (tenants, staff and managers). The information generated through interviews was also compared with the data gathered from the observation of the respondents’ participation behavior over time.
In this research, data was collected from four main sources, namely the staff of Toronto Community Housing Corporation who are in charge of design and implementation of Toronto Participation System, tenant representatives participating at the Tenant Participation System, notes from personal observation of tenants’ councils, forums and other social gatherings, and internal document review. Secondary Data was also used to contextualize the research and build an initial understanding of tenant participation. All documents produced by TCHC concerning this initiative were reviewed. This consisted of press releases, training guides, meeting minutes, and annual reports.

Although this research was not conducted in a completely linear fashion, I present the different stages in a chronological format. Initially, I attended various TCHC meetings, where I was introduced as a researcher. I observed and took notes of what was happening; tenants’ interactions amongst themselves and their relationships to staff and managers in the participatory planning sessions. Throughout these meetings I also had informal conversations with tenants and staff on the idea of the research and how best to conduct it. I then contacted CHU managers for the permission to attend specific CHU council meetings in order to present the research and to recruit respondents. I was granted permission and actively attended several CHU council meetings in four different CHUs. I sent a letter of invitation to research to the tenant representatives of these CHUs; initially, thirteen tenant representatives anonymously and individually approached me and participated in the interview process. Meanwhile, seven tenant representatives from seven other CHUs also contacted me. In total I interviewed twenty tenant representatives (9 males, 11 females; 12 visible minorities, 8 Caucasians; 10 adults, 4 youths and 6 seniors) from eleven CHUs. The only common denominator among the respondents is that they have been formally representing their
communities at the Tenant Participation System for at least one year. I also participated in group discussions with tenant representatives as they get together casually and spontaneously in community events or TCHC-sponsored meetings.

In addition to tenant representatives, I also sent an invitation to research to the TCHC staff; those who are directly involved with the Tenant Participation System. I received fifteen responses and I anonymously interviewed them (8 female, 7 male; 7 CHU managers, 8 other staff: health promotion officers and the staff from the head office). Since there have been detailed discussions about different experiences and stories within TPS, to keep the anonymity, I cannot disclose further information on the titles of the staff respondents to avoid their identification. I will generally refer to them as “staff” throughout this paper.

In total I conducted 35 interviews from June to Dec 2006. Throughout this time I continued to actively participate in CHU councils and other tenant-focused meetings. This was to further examine and document the respondents’ experiences in light of their input and arguments in the interviews. Prior to the Tenant Election Day in March and April 2006 I attended several community meetings where all candidates presented their platform. I also attended “how to campaign” sessions where TCHC staff would advise the candidates on how to campaign. On the Election Day, April 2006, I was present at two voting stations where I observed the election process and casually conversed with tenants about the TPS.

In-depth or open-ended interviews are widely used in anthropology, psychology, and other applied qualitative research. They are based on an organized sequence of questions whose answers are beyond simple “yes” or “no” statements. This kind of interviewing aims at discovering elements of the insiders’ perceptions of the topic under investigation. In-depth
interviews are a powerful means to catch qualitative information, thus, has been a key component of this research.

Although I had prepared an interview guide to provide the initial structure to the interviews, but I made sure to be flexible enough to hear what the tenant representatives had to say. All the individual interviews were conducted at the time and place most convenient for the respondents. Throughout the interviews, as suggested by Borrini (1997, p.90) I kept the discussion a relaxed dialogue, helped the interviewees feel at ease, phrased questions in clear but not leading ways, introduced probing questions appropriately when respondents gave general answers. Often, the respondents responded in a narrative way, in form of a story, which offered a more comprehensive and much richer response to the questions.

Such qualitative information provided by open-ended interviewing can be completed by other methods and techniques such as direct observation. These two techniques combined have been my key instruments in collecting and interpreting information about the individual’s experiences within the social setting of TPS. Observation was aimed to discover issues unknown to me; I also conducted observation as a follow up to keep track of the respondents’ behaviour and engagement at TPS. Over 110 hours of observation throughout the life of the research have been conducted. It included observing the tenant councils, tenant forums, tenant-led ad-hoc committees, tenant representatives-staff interactions and training sessions pertaining to TPS. This technique was broadly promoted in conventional anthropology.

Anthropologists utilized this technique in a regular routine of onsite-taking notes, reflecting, and making many repeated observations to confirm or develop hypotheses (Borrini, 1997, p. 86). This approach was also useful for me to understand the social
environment of tenant participation and the ways in which tenant representatives applied and managed their resources. This method also helped me to document the types of discussions amongst the tenants and the staff as well to examine the power dynamics among the tenant representatives themselves. To ensure that I, as an outsider, do not misinterpret what I see, following Borrini’s (1997, p. 87) suggestion, I openly communicated and discussed my specific observations with the respondents at the time of the interviews.

According to Yin (1994), in the participant-observation mode of data collection, the researcher may involve in a variety of roles and may participate in the events being studied. In this situation, I was introduced as a researcher, however in many occasions, I engaged as a volunteer, assisting tenants and staff in organizing tenant assemblies. Through this mode of observation I had increased opportunities for data collection due to insider access to meetings for increased data collection. It also has the pitfalls of bias and balance of time between participant and observer role. I attempted to avoid potential problems by acting as a neutral attendant and in few cases as a facilitator to the process. This, in some cases, allowed me to guide the activities and conversations and still allow the tenant participants to contribute and move the process according to their interests.

The data collected for this thesis is, therefore, the result of 35 in-depth and open-ended interviews with staff and tenant representatives, my notes from over 110 hours of observation of tenants’ community-focused activities, be it at CHU councils, tenant forums, building-level discussion groups and more as well as my notes from internal documents. The whole process lasted for two years from Jan 2005 to Dec 2006.
4.3. Data Analysis

Once data was collected, my attempt was to extract meaningful content from the statements of the interviewees. After each interview I transcribed it so that my memory of the interview was still current. According to Creswell’s guideline (1998, p.12) and by using Nudist6 I first broke the data into component parts (open coding, where each coding describes a meaning derived from a given data bit) and then drawn into categories (axial coding, where coding families, together, explain part of an emerging theory or concept). These categories were then linked to develop higher order concepts. Through on-going comparison of data as being collected, the most relevant findings were confirmed and explained theoretically. In other words the process of coding was not a one-time exercise, I have been engaged in several cycles of coding and recoding data, began from the first interview to the time I first drafted the findings, and it was only then when I began to understand how best to develop the structure of this research.

In this process data collection, coding and categorising, analysis and theorization all advanced simultaneously. As I was analyzing each interview, I looked for emerging thematic areas under which the findings could be organized. Some of the areas followed the purpose of the interview such as questions about tenants’ learning. Other areas such as tenants’ motivations and the diversity of the perception of participation among various stakeholders emerged from the data itself. Upon completion of the interviews I read through all the interviews several times and selected key quotations that found their way into the following chapters.

The analysis presented in this piece is based on my continuous interpretation of the data through the theoretical lenses previously outlined. The insights provided by the
respondents through these interviews contribute to our understanding of tenants’ experiences and learning within tenant participation initiatives here in Toronto, but likely in other jurisdictions as well.

4.4. Assumptions and Limitations

I would like to acknowledge that the methodology, sample selection, data collection and analysis of this study are based on certain assumptions. First and foremost, one general assumption is that through research in this qualitative format we can understand the reality of tenants’ experiences while attending to the TPS. Although the results of this qualitative research cannot be generalized as in the case of objective quantitative research, these qualitative findings based on in-depth interviews and observations shed light on our understanding of participatory and collaborative structures of property management and tenants’ learning within such contexts. Objectivity is the leading characteristics of scientific research, nonetheless, qualitative research on social action is seldom objective. Thus, it is important for me to express my own subjectivity. As I have noted earlier in this chapter, I am an active member of the community of social activists promoting deeper democratic arrangements within the making of the public policy and public service delivery. This definitely influences in how I see and interpret data.

In this study my goal has not been to produce generalizable findings; nonetheless, it is worth mentioning some of the limitations of this study. First, there was no portfolio of tenant representatives available so that I could choose a sample that statistically represents the tenant representative population in terms of such indicators as age, gender, ethnicity and immigration and citizenship status. It would have been more informative to have been able to
obtain those in order to make comparisons among participants and better contextualize each individual participant’s journey through the TPS vis-à-vis his/her own life story. For the same reason, I was also unable to clearly determine correlations and causality between characteristics of participants and the effects.

Second, I attended only the CHU councils where I was granted permission to; due to my continuous interaction with the tenant representatives at these specific CHUs, 13 out of 20 (65%) of the tenant respondents are from these 4 CHUs. The overall size of the sample, 20 out of 385 tenant representatives (5.2%) is such that the research findings are only suggestions for further studies and investigations. Third, in the earlier interviews I realized that the respondents are not eager to answer personal questions; thus I decided to avoid asking questions on their income, education, marital status, life history in social housing and other personal questions. Therefore, I am not able to describe the respondents except for their gender nor can I determine any meaningful dependency of findings to personal attributions. Fourth, because I used open-ended interviews, the interviews were not standard, making it difficult to report numerically on aspects of tenants learning and experiences; for example I inquired about tenants’ learning but did not specifically asked each individual respondent whether they had learned and engaged in resolving conflicts per se. So I am unable to numerically report on the frequency of specific learning indicators amongst the respondents. However, I am able to highlight the importance of acquiring social skills (e.g. conflict resolution and public speaking) as a learning experience for the tenant representatives. The fifth limitation is that the need to preserve anonymity prevents reporting various revealing characteristics of respondents of both tenant representatives and staff. Specifically due to the detailed discussions with the staff respondents, I am unable to specify their working title.
Because the number of staff involved in TPS is relatively small, it would be possible, through a process of elimination, to find out who have been the participants and even identify who said what. When quoting, if a name or a specific case/issue was mentioned, I eliminated that part while trying to keep the core argument alive.

Lastly, not all respondents replied to all questions and there were some tenant representatives who did not participate in the research but provided me with some insights regarding their participation. I also observed over 100 hours of CHU council meetings in which I took notes of changes in individuals’ participatory behaviour; these notes are not part of the formal interviews. Compiling all these data together makes it impossible for me to accurately report on percentage of specific answers to a question, for example I cannot statistically argue that x percent of the respondents did improve their listening skills through their participation since I cannot certainly argue whether those who only reported one specific skill had or had not improved their listening skills.

In order to enhance the quality of the research, in my original proposal I planned to conduct focus-group discussions, a participatory research tool that can build on the concepts introduced by the initial interviews and to relate them in different ways back to the participants for re-adjustment. My argument was that the theoretical concepts that are derived through this mutual communication would be more comprehensible to the participants, thus giving participants shared ownership of the research parameters and themes. Throughout the initial conversations with tenants and staff I realized that they were not willing to attend group feedback sessions. They have shared with me personal and sometimes emotional experiences and it was understandable that they did not want to reflect on those experiences
in the presence of other tenants. Finally, I should emphasize that the staff interviews have been used to enrich the discussion with no specific statistical significance.

Now that I have detailed out the research plan as it was conducted and with these assumptions and limitations in mind, I turn to the next chapters on research findings and analysis.
Chapter 5: What Motivates Tenants to join TPS?

5.1. Why studying motivation?

Over the past decade, scholars from a variety of disciplines have given specific attention to civic renewal and democratic governance. This has engendered multidisciplinary approaches to enhancing civic engagement in public decision-making. Civic engagement covers a variety of disciplines including political science, sociology, social psychology and urban planning; it also encompasses literature addressing social capital, citizenship and participatory and deliberative democracy to name a few. An examination of these fields of inquiry reveals several thematic areas of investigation, among them are why people get involved and what the effects of participation are on those who participate. The former constitutes the discussion in this chapter and the latter covers the content of the next.

In this era of civic renewal, it's particularly relevant to uncover the motivations of the citizens who do participate in common and collective pursuits. In this chapter, I will examine the data specific to the motivations of citizens who engage in an institutionalized format of participatory local governance like the Tenant Participation System (TPS). These motivations include those that inspire tenant representatives to participate to begin with, as well as those that encourage tenants to continue volunteering as representatives of their communities in the TPS. They are significant for a variety of reasons. First, by focusing on those who participate in spaces of citizen participation like the TPS, we can identify motivational factors encouraging people to participate in civil society, which can be used by policy makers in the creation of new participatory local governance structures. These factors form the meat of this chapter. Second, when examined at an empirical level, detached from its social context, this data reveals the reasons behind peoples’ decisions to participate – an important contribution
for social choice theorists interested in the kinds and levels of rationality of individual tenant representatives. This aspect is an objective sought in this chapter. Third, if studied in relation to its context, this data has implications for public service provision, urban planning and democratic theories, all of which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Individuals’ decision to participate in collective endeavours for the common good has primarily been explained in terms of selfish reasons (Birchall and Simmons, 2001). The literature on which this premise is based is found within rationalist accounts of cost-benefit analysis, reflecting neo-classical economic theory, game theory and theory of social situations (Argyle, 1991; Hardin, 1982; Ross, 2006; Somerville and Steele, 1995). According to these theorists, even when participation is beneficial to the whole community, each individual would rationally conclude that s/he would be better off when s/he did not participate. Instead, it would be more profitable for tenant representatives to choose to let others do the work of participating (Somerville and Steele 1995, p.262), an effect commonly known as the “free-rider” syndrome. This account implies that, if all tenants were acting rationally, tenant participation would not exist as everyone waited for others to undertake the work. The dilemma lies in the fact that participation, nonetheless, happens.

It is worthwhile, then, to pay closer attention to tenant representatives’ motivations in order to understand what inspires them to overcome their ‘rational’ selfish behaviour and participate in the TPS. This chapter is an attempt to mediate the rationalist account of tenant participation in order to fully describe why participation actually occurs and, in addition, why it often continues over a number of years. In the following sections, I will detail the reasons why tenants choose to participate in the governance of their housing communities. I will also examine the factors that contribute to long-term commitment to community work.
Prior to further analysis, here I would like to broadly look at the literature beyond the rationalist account. The following is a discussion about primary motivations, those serve as impetus for tenants’ initial involvement. Atkinson and Birch (1978) introduced three main reasons justifying individual’s involvement in the organizational behaviour literature; those are achievement, affiliation and power (Schmiesing, Soder, and Russell, 2005). These three categories of motivations have served as the benchmarks for several studies, examining volunteer motivations (Culp and Schwartz, 1999; Campbell, 2006). Later it was the work of social psychologists that introduced six motivational categories explaining volunteers’ engagement in collective pursuits (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas and Haugen, 1998, p.1517-1518): 1. Values (e.g. concern for others); 2. Applying certain skills and learning new skills; 3. Social relationships; 4. Career aspirations; 5. Protective (from negative feelings); 6. Enhancement (personal growth).

The other important benchmark study was conducted by Teske (1997). Teske (p. 96) presents a challenge to our dual views of humanity that the idea for civic participation is either altruistic or selfish. He indicates that the motivation behind civic participation is primarily to enrich and develop us as individuals and that people get involved as a result of conscious hope to become a certain type of person.

Finally, Carpini (2000) explains that people get involved for a number of reasons: a sense of responsibility; sense of satisfaction in pursuing common goals; sense of curiosity to identify problems affecting one’s life; and a feeling that through involvement one can make a difference.
5.2. Tenant Representatives as Volunteers

This form of community involvement through tenant representatives is arguably a unique form of volunteer work, in that it is tied to a competitive election process. While recognizing that there is no universal and thorough definition of volunteering, and that volunteering refers to a great variety of activities, Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth (1996), suggest the following conceptual framework of volunteering encompassing twelve categories and four dimensions (Table 5.1). Their framework is based on an analysis of the existing working definitions of volunteering used by various organizations. Each dimension can be seen as on a continuum, with generally the higher up being closer to what is inarguably a volunteer, while the categories further down being less characteristic of volunteer work, and more open to debate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volition</th>
<th>Remuneration</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Intended beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Relatively un-coerced</td>
<td>2. None expected</td>
<td>2. Informal</td>
<td>2. Benefit/help friends or relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Obligation to volunteer</td>
<td>3. Expenses reimbursed</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Benefit oneself (as well)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Stipend/low pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Dimensions and Categories of Volunteer Work (Source: Cnaan et al., 1996, p. 371)

Using the above framework, Duguid, Mundel and Schugurensky (2009, p.2) offer a simpler evaluative matrix to assess whether an activity can be considered volunteering. An activity is understood as a volunteer activity, with little debate, if it fulfils the following four characteristics:

1. Freely chosen;
2. Unpaid;
3. Part of a non-profit organization; and,
4. Benefits the larger community.

The tenant representation role within the TPS fulfils these four characteristics. First, the tenant representatives freely choose to participate; second, tenant representatives are unpaid for their work; third, the role of representative is found within the non-profit organization, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation; and finally, the role is intended to benefit the tenant community at large. As a result, I can refer to tenant representatives as volunteers.

As we shall see in the following sections, the motivations and responsibilities of the tenant representatives reflect many points along the continuums of volition, remuneration and intended beneficiaries – showing a diverse definition of volunteering within the tenant representative role itself. The extent of volition of the representatives varied, from tenants choosing the representative position on their own, to being encouraged by the staff or invited by fellow tenants, to representatives feeling as though they had to take on the role so that they could guarantee the benefits and also because they were qualified to take on the role. Similarly, the intended beneficiaries factor was not constant. Some tenants were focused on personal benefits such as gaining higher social status, respect, confidence or even new skills; others spoke of contributing to their community or even advocating for the more marginalized who do not or could not speak for themselves. In fact, the only common dimension, as defined by Cnaan et al. (1996), was that of remuneration, where all tenant representatives in this case volunteered for free, and were not compensated for their time and effort.
5.3. Scope of the Tenant Representative Role

Before identifying tenant representatives’ motivations, it is important to understand the time and commitment that this type of participation entails. The first component of the Tenant Participation System is an election process, for which candidates must first organize community meetings, then outline and speak about community needs and priorities, and finally, plan and run a campaign. Once the tenant representatives are elected, they dedicate their time and their reputation to the TPS. At a minimum, they attend tenant council meetings once a month and a few community meetings, tenant forums and specialized committees throughout the year. Their duties, however, can go well beyond these formal activities, and include for example attending neighbourhood-based committees and informal discussions around the specific concerns of the residents.

In short, tenant representatives are engaged in three distinct yet interdependent types of participation, which include unpaid activities detailed in Table 5.2. The first type of participation deals with education of themselves and their fellow tenants whom they are representing. The second type mainly involves decision-making and ensuring that decisions are followed through. The third type entails outreach to their fellow tenants, in order to encourage more participation. As one can see in the table below, the interdependence of these three types is intrinsic to effective participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Decision-making and follow up</th>
<th>Outreach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Educating themselves on what is happening at TCHC and in their community;</td>
<td>• Informing their fellow tenants about CHU budgets and plans;</td>
<td>• Participating in specialized committees at the head office; and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Delivering the needs and opinions of their fellow tenants to the CHU council;</td>
<td>• Providing input to the CHU business plan;</td>
<td>• Taking part in short-term social and community programs linked with the TCHC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Monitoring the public works at their communities;</td>
<td>• Participating in specialized committees at the head office; and,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Tenant Participation: Domains and Activities.
Some tenant representatives say that they dedicate so much time to the role that they feel as though it is taking over their lives. Many tenant representatives describe themselves as a “full-time volunteer,” and their role as an “unpaid second job.” These tenant representatives, who generally struggle to make ends meet in their private lives, voluntarily dedicate long hours to the exhaustive list of community work outlined above in Table 5.2. In the following section, I will use interviews with tenants and staff along with my own observations to analyze what motivates tenant representatives to engage in the TPS and in their communities.

I should note that the word community is used in two ways in the following discussion. First, ‘community’ formally refers to one unit of housing—one Community Housing Unit (CHU)—as officially designated by the TCHC (Chapter 2). In this sense, there are CHUs spread out over the Greater Toronto Area. Respondents, however, also use the word community to refer to small and informal groups encompassing a building, high rise, or a small cluster of homes in a given neighbourhood. In both cases, community has a geographical sense, which is either predefined by the Corporation or informally presumed by tenants and staff.

5.4. Tenant’s Motivations to Participate

In this section I review and document the reasons behind tenant involvement in the TPS, as shown through interviews and extensive observations of tenant council meetings. My goal is to present a clear picture of the motivating factors behind tenant representative participation and volunteering.
In the course of the interviews, tenant representatives provided a number of reasons for participation. Nine motivations in particular emerged from the data, explaining why tenant representatives participate and volunteer. As explored in depth below, the main reasons given for tenant participation were:

1. To address local issues and improve community conditions;
2. To engage in social activism;
3. To educate oneself and others on issues relevant to the governance of social housing;
4. To respond to an invitation, nomination or encouragement of others;
5. To get recognition;
6. To associate with management;
7. To represent a racial or ethnic group;
8. To socialize and to feel productive;

These reasons were given through their answers to the question “why do you participate?”, through the stories of their nominations, or through exploration of other unrelated questions. Staff also gave their opinions on the reasons behind tenant representatives’ motivations, complementing the responses of representatives. Finally, my own observations about motivations during both formal interviews and my presence at various stages during the TPS process further showed reasons for participation. In addition to the above, there are two more factors, which I will further discuss later in this section. One is the feeling of qualification and the other is the factor of time and availability.

1. To address local issues and improve community conditions

Tenant representatives’ need to improve their community and the living conditions of their building was a primary motivation put forward by respondents to explain their
participation. Tenants referred to both general issues as well as specific concerns that they intended to tackle through their role.

Tenant representatives often mentioned general changes they wanted to see in their communities. Many saw “problems in their community and wanted to do something about it.” They recognized that the problems in their buildings were not “getting enough attention from the management” and that this might be “remedied through the tenant representative’s role.” One of the respondents believed that her community was a “neglected one”. For her, the role of representative was a way to put her community on the agenda of the CHU management. Another tenant representative stated that she was unhappy about the unresponsiveness of the management in addressing the needs of her fellow elderly tenants. She said she chose to be a representative to “make sure that the problems are listened to.” Another representative explained that in her building “there was a missing link between the management and the tenants” and she ran to become a tenant representative to “fill this gap.” Another respondent expressed a desire to address the missing link: “I was interested right from the beginning. I got the feeling [that] something is missing, you know with the tenant and the whole relationship with the housing company.”

Those who named specific concerns listed security, maintenance and repair as priorities, which they believed could be improved through their participation. For example, one tenant said that he hoped to bring about a faster and more reliable maintenance schedule: “the maintenance and repair situation, it was a situation right from day one… People would say… this is wrong and that is wrong and when is this going to be fixed?”
Other specific issues discussed revolved around the health of the community. A self-described “caring tenant” explained that she wanted to become a representative to do something about mental health issues in her community:

In my community we had lots of mental health issues, MDs and many suicides, lots of isolation problems. I became involved because I thought I could make a difference at the level of my own building.

Tenant representatives also referred to drug dealing as a specific problem needing urgent attention. One of the representatives complained that his community was “very much infiltrated by cocaine dealers and alcoholic people, more than ever.” The possibility that he “could improve this situation through the tenant representative role” motivated him to participate.

In communities with older buildings, issues of unit cleanliness and the consequent problem of bugs overwhelmed the everyday lives of many residents. As one representative said “bugs are everywhere, we cannot do anything for it. We spend so much money on sprays. TCHC should pay for it… Something should be done.” In this CHU, following the establishment of the tenant council, tenant representatives formed a pest control committee to eradicate the problem.

Tenant representatives were also motivated to volunteer to address management issues in their buildings, some of which were run by the TCHC, and others whose maintenance the TCHC had contracted out to private companies, it seemed that tenants believed that there was a lower service delivery standard. Many said that private companies operate for profit and that their “management philosophy is not the same as the TCHC.” One of the interviewees who lived in a privately-run building believed that these buildings were “less important” to the TCHC. One respondent indicated that that he ran to become a
representative mostly to enhance the quality of service delivery and improve “the condition of his building’s environment”:

I am basically trying to change the scope of the involvement of the TCHC in my building, obviously I would like [the TCHC] to take over the building and have staff from TCHC to standardize the whole CHU… Let’s say I request something from the property manager, If [s/he] doesn’t want [to address my request]. I have to go to the boss, if [s/he] doesn’t want, I have to go to the CHU manager… This is a kind of thing that is getting very tiring sometimes and I don’t think it is sane. It slows down the process and it discourages tenants from complaining… So, that is the way I see the fact that we are operated by a management company that slows down the process of doing things.

Many of the comments expressed by the tenants demonstrated an awareness of and concern for the issues facing their communities and the belief that the TPS provides an opportunity for representatives to have a positive impact on these issues.

2. To continue engagement in social activism

Tenant representatives generally saw the TPS as a space for community activism and advocacy work. This point of view extended across three different categories of tenant representatives: those with a history of community involvement and social activism, broadly speaking, those with a longstanding interest in community work within their neighbourhoods and those inspired to begin engaging in community work through present concerns. Activist tenants in particular were motivated by their passion for social justice, broadly speaking. They saw the TPS as an additional venue for their activism. Proactive engagement in community and social affairs was part of their system of values and beliefs, as reflected in the words of one tenant representative:

I was active in the community before [the TPS] because this is my nature… I used to go to the managers meetings all the time… So my role… I took it upon myself to be proactive… I would honestly go out and knock on the doors and say there is a lot of stuff that could be done here if only you [fellow tenants] would come out to address these issues of this community… I would
talk to this one, and talk to that one, and that’s how I got more involved in becoming a tenant rep.

Another tenant activist referred to herself as the one who would rise so that “others shall rise” for the betterment of all:

The point that I am trying to make is that…there is always going to be someone waiting to see [if] someone [else] makes the first move…And if you're waiting and I am waiting, so what's going to happen? We are all in limbo here… And if you happen to be that person who is always making the first step, I tell you there is going to be a lot more people recognizing that it’s always you. And [they] come on board and ask you, “Would you like a rest? I am here to help”.

A third tenant representative was socially active before and after she immigrated to Canada. She explained that community work is a way “to give up yourself… and give for the service of the community for [your own] personal fulfillment.” She further described how she initially got engaged in the TPS:

I wanted to do something proactive in a unique way… I feel good about doing something… I don’t want to sit on the fence, I want to be a part of something. So I jumped into the ring and I decided to share my ideas and get ideas from other people.

Another tenant representative with almost three decades of experience in social activism, both in and out of social housing, explained that her past experiences motivated her to become a tenant representative—she explained that she had been “representing [her] community anyway.” A fifth active participant said, “Since I came to social housing [in the early 1990s], I had a tenant association and I was the president of the tenant association for the first two years.” Ever since then, she has been representing her fellow tenants through various initiatives.

One of the respondents bravely recalled her numerous past social endeavours. Since the late 1950s she had been engaged in social struggles, from union recognition to anti-
apartheid and peace movements. She had also been instrumental in various fundraising
events for tenants' initiatives and had volunteered for her community on many occasions:
“Wherever I lived in social housing, from the very day I went into it, I was involved.” For
her, being a tenant representative was simply another step to further her commitment to
social justice.

While some tenant representatives had experienced engaging in broader issues
through social activism, the experience of others was limited to their immediate
communities. Nonetheless, both groups became involved in the TPS, though their scope of
participation varies.

Past involvement in his neighbourhood was a determining factor in persuading the
following participant to become tenant representative:

Prior to TPS I was involved in some of the neighbourhood’s initiatives. Then
at the time of election, I decided to become a tenant rep. It was an opportunity
for me to do social activism by involving in TCHC.

Another tenant representative recalled her early days in social housing and explained
that her early motive to participate, was due to the paradox of living in social housing: "I
thought [social housing was] a transitional form of housing for people who need to pick
themselves up and move… But this was not the case." Initially, as a single mother, she chose
to move temporarily into social housing so that she could afford better care for her daughter.
Over the years, however, she was never able to afford living outside of social housing. A
research project got her interested in learning more about the system of social welfare:

When I first got into social housing I participated in a research project on
helping abused and oppressed women, from there it [social activism] was just
snowballed in all former social housing organizations where I lived.
With this research project as the beginning, she began to explore why it becomes almost impossible for welfare recipients to get out of the cycle of disempowerment. Later on, she assumed an active role in her community to bring about “positive change” at least where she lived.

Among the representatives there was a belief that, through their role, they were able to give voice to tenants' silent concerns. They referred to reluctance of the general tenant population to ask for their rights. As the representatives of their communities they believe they can “speak up for those tenants who do not or cannot speak up”; for those “recent immigrants”; for those who are unable to effectively communicate in English; and, for those who are afraid to speak up for the fear of eviction. For example, one tenant representative was an active freelance journalist who had, for over 15 years, dedicated his time and skills to help refugee seekers in Canadian courts. He referred to his representation role as "one more way" that he found to pursue social activism.

Tenant representatives were also motivated to participate through the potential to change their present situation. In 2001, tenant input was sought into the establishment of the TPS and the THCH. Tenants who participated in that process at the time of the merger recall that experience as “an exciting participatory process.” One of them explained that it was a “tenant-driven experience and probably the most positive experience” she had throughout her extensive years of volunteer work. Some of the tenants who participated in that specific round of community consultations prolonged their commitment and have participated in TCHC community initiatives ever since.

I was a member of the committee to set up the guidelines for the role of tenant representatives at TCHC, it was an organic relationship with the company from the very beginning which evolved and now I am a tenant representative.
3. To learn about and educate others on governance issues of the TCHC

The third motivation for participation commonly put forward by interviewees was the belief that acting as a tenant representative would provide an opportunity for them to educate both themselves and their community on various issues related to the TCHC in particular. The Toronto Community Housing Corporation was a new entity, along with the Tenant Participation System, so the curiosity to get to know the organization among the general tenant population was high. In 2003, during the time of the first tenant election, TCHC tenants did not know very much about how the TCHC would function. Since housing is an important factor in one's welfare, tenants followed policy changes closely, to determine how they might affect their lives. A substantial number of tenants said they chose to become representatives simply because they were curious about the new TCHC and wanted to know how decisions were made and budgets allocated by this new enterprise.

A self-described “controversial” tenant representative explained that the main reason why he wanted to get involved was to familiarize himself with the new social housing management in Toronto: “I simply wanted to know who does what, who supervises whom and what the management structure of TCHC is all about, and so on and so forth”. Another representative explained that upon moving to the TCHC he decided to do community work. Through his engagement as a tenant representative he wanted to find out where in the TCHC he could “find the money to do community work.” He also wanted to know “who was who in the Corporation,” and was eager to find out about the types of community work possible in the TCHC communities.

Another representative spoke of herself as a “reference in the community”, and always had fellow tenants come to her with their concerns and questions about housing and
welfare issues. As such, she wanted to run for tenant representative in order to broaden her knowledge of the TCHC's policies:

Because many tenants have come to me and asked for transfer, I got involved at the [transfer] policy level… I am now able to tell [fellow tenants] exactly how it works… now I can help them out even better than the CHU staff.

“Tenants don’t really know their rights,” argued another representative who was determined to do her best to educate herself and fellow tenants on their rights. Respondents with limited background in Canadian social and civic life, particularly youth and recent immigrants, also explained that they ran to be tenant representatives to gain an understanding of how political procedures are exercised at the local level. One of the youth tenant representatives said, “I chose to participate to know deeper about what goes on and how rules are made and how decisions are made in the city.” She explained that she hoped to gain knowledge not only for her own benefit but also for the benefit of the members of her ethnic community. During his campaign speech to a group of youth, another youth tenant representative said that one of the reasons he chose to volunteer was to improve his work experience. Indeed, his participation did help him get a better job at a cultural organization. In fact, according to him, the tenant participation was “the only item on my resume” that attracted the cultural organization. According to the youth representative, for youth representatives with no prior out-of-classroom experience, the TPS “is a learning opportunity and an exciting real life experience.”

4. To respond to an invitation, nomination or encouragement of others

Some tenant representatives were motivated to volunteer through the encouragement of other tenants or staff from their local social service providers. These tenant representatives
usually had experience in community and volunteer work outside of the TCHC, and had proven they could be effective community workers.

One tenant representative explained that she was encouraged to run by people that she knew through her other community involvements. Another tenant representative talked about how other tenants in his building encouraged him to run because they he would be appropriate for the job. “Whatever you say we accept,” one group of tenants said to an older tenant, who, due to her many years in community care, was encouraged by other tenants to run and give voice to their concerns. A youth representative described how she had been encouraged by the staff at a community centre where she works as a youth coordinator to run as a tenant representative:

When the issue of being a tenant rep came up… the HPO and the staff asked me to run. I was hesitant at first, but then decided to run because I thought that might be a good opportunity for youth to get engaged and get other youth involved in the community.

Another representative explained how the members of her ethnic community encouraged her to run so that she could advocate on their behalf for more positive programs for children and youth:

I was active in the community through volunteering in schools because of my kids…There was a meeting where the community [an ethnic community] decided for me as a tenant representative, [in order to address] the main problem that there needed to be more youth programs created to give youth more positive things to do.

Another tenant representative, who enjoyed a good reputation, described how he got nominated due to his active involvement in eradicating a “crack-dealing” problem in his building:

Before my term as a tenant representative … I used to kick out the crack heads from our building. I had a permission from the landlord’s security officer to do this with all the responsibility on me… We had tele-guards who
only patrolled for five minutes at eight in the morning and everybody knew their schedule and after they left, crack heads came in... The majority of tenants knew me because of me kicking out the bad guys... Then at the meeting I did not want to become one at all, tenants nominated me and I accepted it. … I was thinking that they would vote the other person, who was a very active person in the community. Everybody knew him…I thought I had no chance… I did not want to insult them and accepted the nomination but all of a sudden I won.

At the senior residences, physical ability seemed to play a role. On one occasion I observed tenants nominating somebody who, in their view, had the physical capacity to perform the responsibilities of a tenant representative—he was relatively younger and better fit to work. This representative said: “the humour is that I was the only able body in the building.”

5. To get recognition

Through my observations at CHU council meetings, and through remarks by staff and tenants, I have concluded that the fifth motivating element for tenants to run as representatives is the strong desire or need to be recognized. As one observant tenant put it:

It is a sense of power and craving to feel like they are needed… because it is the only recognition they are getting from anywhere.

Quite often during meetings, tenant representatives referred to themselves as holders of power and knowledge, and implied that they should be the focal point for any consultation plan about their community. The position provided them an opportunity to feel important and recognized in the community. This is reflected in what this tenant had to say:

The problem is that all of a sudden tenant representatives change and think that they are employees… It is almost a status for them.

On several occasions I personally observed tenant representatives complaining about tenants nagging them: “Get these tenants off my back! They are knocking on my door all the
time.” Or, as the following quotes by staff make clear, there are some representatives who embraced the opportunity to obtain recognition:

There are some representatives who are just there for their own self-grandiose to say that they are representatives. They go to all these meetings, and all of the little things they do is badges of honours, but they do not do anything. It is all just the feeling that they are important. A lot of them are on the council in a self-serving way, not that they feel the greater good for the community, although some do. I do not want to paint them with the same brush. There are also hidden agendas that you are not aware of until they are floating to the surface.

At the same time, the desire to be recognized can be a positive factor. For example, there was a common belief among staff that the TPS allowed recent immigrants, all of whom enjoyed a higher social status prior to their immigration to Canada, to obtain recognition, develop confidence and improve their social status through representing their communities. This community recognition was a strong motivating force, as this tenant representative explains:

I will definitely run again [to become a tenant representative]... I just love it; I love it because I am always there. I’m always invited and I am always asked to come and participate in certain things.

6. To socialize and to feel productive

The tenant representative position gave participants the appealing opportunity to socialize while performing a respected philanthropic task. Both staff and tenants directly and indirectly referred to the fact that there were unemployed and retired tenants who found this position a fulfilling experience that allowed them to socialize while engaging in a positive initiative for the whole community.

On the Election Day, I observed that an elderly tenant (and past representative) almost fainted when he realized that he might not be elected. Later he told me that being a tenant representative was his only engagement in his life at the time.
In another community, during the election process, there was an elderly, grandmother figure in her community. The CHU staff were worried about her because they believed that being a tenant representative was all the meaning she had in her life:

It was everything for her, If [she] failed she would be defeated. [The elderly tenant] made a list of everybody and called them on the Election Day to go and vote for her. She got a new dress for the Election Day… [but] she lost hard.

The CHU manager therefore found something to keep her involved after the woman lost the election. Although, the elderly tenant was no longer an official member, she attended the tenant councils as usual.

7. To associate with management

The staff, in particular, noted that the position of tenant representative brought tenants in close contact with CHU manager[s] and that there were those representatives, as one of CHU manager argued, who wanted to establish a “personal pipeline to the CHU management.” Staff refer to several cases of tenant representatives bypassing bureaucratic procedures and contacting the staff for faster follow up to their complaints. For example, one of the staff described that a tenant representative asked to be transferred to another building for his contribution to the role.

8. To represent a racial or ethnic group

Race and ethnicity is the seventh factor encouraging tenants to run as tenant representatives. During the nomination process, and on Election Day, I observed that ethnic and racial identity played a significant role in four separate communities: motivating tenants to run or encouraging other members of their ethnic community to compete for the position. The following quotes make clear that strong and emotional ethnic affiliations are significant motivating factor.
I have to compete because the other two candidates are not appropriate for our black community. 
I decided to come in because I was sure this… candidate could not help our community.

“They are everywhere,” said an upset tenant who believed that another ethnic group had begun to dominate the neighbourhood. She wanted somebody from her own community to take some action against it. Even in one community where nationals of one country resided, language and regional differences dictated the process—each specific ethnic group sent its own nominee for the one and only one available position in the building. Although racial and ethnic factors are important in analyzing tenant’s motivations to participate in the TPS; it should be noted that they also create tension amongst different groups and communities within each CHU.

In describing why tenant representatives participate, staff respondents discussed various reasons. A highlight of their suggestions includes two main elements; one is tenant representatives’ desire to associate with the management as a higher authority, intending to achieve a higher social status and personal satisfaction. The second is tenants’ affiliations (including race and ethnicity) as strong motives for tenants to compete for the representative role. Group affiliations and the desire to have some power over the affairs of the community are not theoretically detrimental to tenants’ motivation; rather they encourage and maintain participation. Thus these cannot be counted as de-motivating factors per se. However, staff referred to these two motivating factors (association with management and participation on the lines of ethnicity) as unhelpful to the practice of TPS. The reasons why these two elements contribute more harm than good will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 7.
5.5 Tenants’ Motivations to Continue Participation

As suggested above, tenants were inspired to become tenant representatives by a number of factors such as having a positive impact on the community, gaining knowledge, building work experience and gaining social status. Here, I briefly examine why tenants opted to remain in the position and asked tenant representatives to explain what motivated them to continue working in the TPS. I do not have any statistics accompanying this analysis; nonetheless I present a brief account of their extended participation.

In nutshell, tenant representatives said they decided to run for the second time for almost the same reasons they ran the first time. Tenant representatives who feel they are effective tend to continue on. The following quotes clearly highlight some of these factors that contribute to tenant representatives volunteering a second term. This includes engaging in a specific community affair, finishing unfinished business, leaving a legacy behind in the form of a major accomplishment for the community, or simply the passion and desire to do more.

I wanted to do it… As long as I can I will… there is always something better we can achieve or we can have, we can always bug the housing company for something.
I will run again because I am passionate about this, and they can tell, when you’re passionate about something they will always bring you back.
Our youth club is not there yet; I need to continue working to have one for our many young residents.
The community garden in our neighbourhood is now there because of me as the catalyst.

Tenants’ relationships to management also played a role in the continued volunteering of a few of the tenant representatives. Two of the respondents said that they felt obliged to continue volunteering due to strong support and encouragement from the management. Conversely, another two tenant representatives expressed that their
commitment to run for the second term derived from their struggles with the management.

One tenant representative had been discouraged by the CHU manager to run for the second term, as he was already an active member in the community. The CHU manager had previously told him to “be a tenant representative not an activist.” Another believed that he had to “stay and fight it till the end” until he resolved all his issues with the management.

Some remarks from personal observation

Based on observations over the long-term at various CHU activities at election time, and from informal exchanges with tenants running for the position, I can argue that the motivations discussed above, although necessary, are not sufficient to fully explain why tenants run for this representative position. In addition to the aforementioned reasons; there are two other factors which I find significant in analyzing the tenant representatives’ motivation. These two were not directly specified in the interviews, though, I found them important and relevant.

First is the feeling that one is particularly qualified to be an effective tenant representative. No matter how motivated a tenant might be by the urgent needs of the community or a desire for personal gain, running for office also required a feeling of self-worth and some measure of confidence. As one representative emphasized one needs “a brain to be a tenant representative”. Because this form of representation is tied to a competitive election process and framed as a privilege, it required a feeling of efficacy – the belief that one already has the ability to be an effective tenant representative.

Many of the tenant representatives described some type of knowledge or experience which, they believed, made them the best candidate for the job. For some, tenant representatives developed this sense of confidence from their past volunteer work,
educational backgrounds, professional experience and knowledge about housing, the neighbourhood and other relevant issues. For other tenant representatives, this feeling of being qualified was also conveyed to them by other tenants, community leaders, colleagues or CHU staff. A youth tenant representative explained that her boss encouraged her to run, and that her boss’s support fostered the development of her own self-confidence. It reassured her that she could effectively represent her community.

Above all the factors discussed, first and foremost, one’s ability to make time available to volunteer is the prerequisite of participation and a necessary requirement. This makes the second factor untold in the interviews. Tenant representatives need to rearrange their everyday schedules to find available hours to dedicate to the TPS. Tenant representatives have a variety of time commitments outside of the TPS and include full-time employees, part-time employees, students, senior citizens and unemployed people. Other factors influencing the time allocation of tenant representatives included family commitments, health concerns, and volunteer commitments outside the TPS.

After examining the data, I concluded that an excessive amount of time at one's disposal was not a primary motivating factor for tenant representatives. Instead, availability played a complementary role, helping tenants to expand and broaden their engagement within the TPS and beyond.

5.6 Understanding Tenants’ Motivations to Participate

To better understand tenant motivations, in this section, I will explore the general trends seen throughout tenants’ motivations. I will distinguish between the underlying reasons for participation, those encouraging tenants to join and get involved at the Tenant
Participation System and those motivating them to continue their commitment through a second term or more. As well, I will highlight the differences between motivations articulated by tenant respondents and those emphasized by staff and CHU management (Table 5.3). In nutshell, I suggest that there are three conditions underpinning tenants’ involvement in the TPS.

These three reasons combined make the sufficient requirement for participation to occur: First is a desire to influence the decisions affecting their housing is the most acknowledged explanation for volunteering, given by both the staff and tenants themselves. This reflects tenants’ aspiration to exercise authority over their housing issues. Through TPS they are moderately provided with the opportunity to share decision-making power with local executives.

Second is the recognition that the role has important benefits whether this is personal or altruistic also inspires volunteering. This is projected in various forms of motivations presented in Table 5.3. One can identify between selfish and altruistic reasons behind tenants’ motivation to participate. Some tenant representatives saw their participation as a form of charity, hoping to help other fellow tenants and community at large; while others saw this as an opportunity to further their personal agenda. The majority of the interviewees, however, saw their participation as an exchange in which they volunteer for the good of the community while the position provides them with some form of satisfaction.

Third is the perception that they are either already qualified or are building the required qualifications, so as to be able to take on the role of a tenant representative. Tenant representatives also discussed how their experience and the positive effects of their participation have been a strong incitement for them to continue. The positive effects
included an enhanced feeling of self-confidence, increased sense of political efficacy, and active learning of social knowledge and skills. This was evident in their campaign speeches to the community, where they referred to their experiences and learning acquired in their first term as an important asset, making them more qualified tenant representatives.

In explaining what maintains participation, based on interviews and my observations, there are additional reasons explaining tenants’ commitment to stay on board. First, those tenants who received intrinsic fulfillment through their participation are more likely to stay committed. Those whose reasons to participate were accommodated (at least to some degree) show a gratifying feeling of accomplishment and are willing to further contribute to such community initiatives; Whether for a cause of charity, care, and responsibility or self-aggrandizement. Even those whose further involvement is due to their struggle with an issue or an authority hope to achieve an accomplishment sooner or later.

Second, as tenant councils begin their task and engage in community activities, tenant representatives interact. This purposeful social interaction creates an environment of both cooperation and competition among the council members. In either case, representatives feel more attached to their roles and feel more compelled to continue and dedicate time and expertise to achieve what they perceive as their collective or even personal objectives. Along this argument, tenants’ commitment to further participation, as Bengtsson (1998, p.5) puts it, is the result of the development of “conventions of cooperation” among participating tenants. That is, through competitive deliberation and resource allocation, representatives, confined to the democratic rules, extend their participation for whatever objectives they might have. What matters, in this analysis, is that the cooperation and competition motivates tenants and maintains participation.
Table 5.3: Reasons Underlying Tenants’ Participation in the TPS

In Table 5.3 I provide a detailed list of the findings. It includes necessary and sufficient conditions, as the titles suggest in this context, necessary conditions are those reasons without which there would be no participation. Sufficient conditions are those reasons whose existence makes participation possible. Here, necessary conditions are those that are deemed vital by the respondents themselves. Upon an analysis of both tenant representatives and the staff points of views I name and define sufficient conditions as those underlying conditions that make and sustain participation. For example resolving a specific
local problem has been a necessary condition for some tenants to step forward and volunteer as tenant representatives, without the existence of this problem, they argue, there would be no participation; however, it is the desire to influence the current situation, the recognition of the benefits and the feeling of qualification that make participation a reality.

Motivation to Exercise the Right of Participation

Respondents’ main reference to volunteering as tenant representatives, through the TPS, was as an opportunity to exercise authority in order to tackle issues in their building or community, as well as to educate themselves and the community on various issues in relation to governance aspects of social housing in their own housing unit and beyond. Embedded in this observation lies a persuasive argument: that tenants participate out of a desire to exercise their right, i.e. the right to influence the decisions affecting their housing welfare, an opportunity seldom offered to recipients of state welfare arrangements. As both tenants and staff described, tenants living in social housing have long been intruded upon by state institutions in charge of providing social assistance. They have even been questioned about details of their private matters, a very demeaning experience. Therefore, the Tenant Participation System for tenants was an opening through which they could attempt to have a say in how their housing services should be delivered. Coupled with this right, tenant representatives assumed the responsibility to participate; they also clarified that they intend to develop the knowledge and skills required to exercise this given right effectively.

This reveals an interesting pattern of thought amongst tenant respondents. They view the TPS as a domain where their desire to participate in the decision-making over their housing welfare and their desire to develop valuable knowledge and skills are mutually satisfied. It is evident that through TPS they see themselves engaged in developing
competencies while exercising community management; both taking place in one (and only one) space provided through the Tenant Participation System. In this dynamic, the more they are engaged, the more they develop competencies and build confidence; and the more they learn, the higher their enthusiasm for further engagement will be. This interpretation clearly echoes the argument that citizen participation and civic learning go hand in hand (Schugurensky, 2003; Van Der Veen, 2003). Here I can also conclude that maintaining a space for tenant participation in CHU management and the learning acquired through participation both are major motivators for further engagement at TPS and beyond.

5.7 Discussion

Three major national surveys have been conducted to explore why Canadians, in general, choose to volunteer. The first is part of a longitudinal study of 600 people who were interviewed in 2004 as a follow up to the first interviews conducted through the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) between 1996 and 2001, led by David Livingstone, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

Second, upon the completion of NALL, the research was further continued by many of the same researchers under the Work and Lifelong Learning network (WALL). The third was conducted in 2000 and 2004 as part of the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP), a national survey studying both the practices of donating and participation in volunteering by Canadians. The CSGVP was conducted by Imagine Canada (formerly the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy) in 1997, 2000, and 2004. The survey’s focus is on contributions of both time and money by Canadians to other Canadians and to their communities.
The CSGVP examines the practices of volunteering and donation behaviour among Canadians. In these studies, the respondents had to answer a variety of questions about their participation in unpaid work activities (Duguid et al, 2009). The results of these three surveys can be used, as benchmarks to better understand tenant representatives’ motivations to voluntarily participate in the TPS, as compared with other Canadian volunteers.

In contrast, available studies on the motivations of tenants in social housing who participate in the affairs of their communities are limited to few empirical research projects done in the context of the British Council Housing (Cairncross et al 1997; Hague 1990; Millward, 2005). These studies are based on surveys of active tenants who represent their communities in regional forums and those who participate in national tenant associations (Millward, 2005).

The following sub-sections comment on similarities and differences that have emerged in comparing the above volunteer and social housing literature with this current study. The topics I address are:

1. Volunteering to improve community
2. Volunteering to learn
3. Volunteering as social activism
4. Volunteering to share skills
5. Volunteering to socialize
6. Volunteering for recognition or power

1. Volunteering to improve the community

In the previous section, we saw one of the reasons tenants chose to volunteer was in consideration for their community. In particular many tenant representatives demonstrated an
awareness of and concern for the issues facing their communities along with the belief that the Tenant Participation System could provide the opportunity to positively impact these issues. Tenant representatives felt they could benefit themselves and others by addressing the issues in their communities and at the TCHC. These kinds of motivations—making improvements in the community to benefit both oneself and others—correlate with the motivations of Canadian volunteers captured in the 2004 Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) survey and the 2004 Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP, 2004).

The WALL survey reported that 83% of Canadians who volunteer do so to help their community and the CSGVP (2004) found that 60% of respondents reported volunteering because they were affected by the cause. The need of tenant representatives to improve their community and the living conditions in their buildings is also highlighted as a motivating factor for tenant participation in the context of Council Housing in England (Cairncross et al. 1997; Hague 1990; Lowndes et al. 2001; Millward, 2005). As Millward (2005, p.745) specifies, tenants who considered themselves activists expressed that they participated due to a specific major local issue or set of issues that they believed was affecting the general tenant population.

2. Volunteering to learn

The other category of responses commonly put forward by interviewees was their desire to learn through their participation in the TPS. This finding is unique in comparison to the Canadian research on volunteers (WALL, NALL and CSGVP studies), in which learning is rarely noted as a motivation for volunteering. Within the context of social housing in Britain, however, the desire to learn is well-documented as a motivator for participation. In a
survey of 125 tenant participants in London, England, respondents demonstrated a desire to learn in general and to learn about housing issues in particular (Millward, 2005). In both the British tenant housing setting and at the TCHC, tenant representatives were eager to pursue opportunities to learn how and how much they can influence the decisions affecting their housing welfare.

This variance in findings from research on volunteers and on tenant representatives stems from the fact that in the Tenant Participation System, tenant volunteers are supposed to make decisions for property management and local governance purposes, an opportunity seldom offered to them previously. Therefore, learning has been an expectation in this tenant representative position. In addition, as it happens to be, the more volunteers have learned about the workings of TCHC, the more they practically got engaged in their housing’s activities.

3. Volunteering as social activism

Among the respondents are those who chose to participate simply to pursue their desire for social activism. This finding is in line with the findings on tenant activists in the British context. An interest in general notions of “justice” and “social change”, as well as a “strong feeling for other people” and “a commitment to help those who are not able to help themselves” have been widely cited as defining motivations among active tenants (Millward, 2005, p.743). There is no data in the Canadian research specifying volunteering for social activism, though in CSGVP (2004), they found that a large majority of volunteers (92%) donated time to an organization in which they believed in the cause. Another large majority (77%) volunteered because it allowed them to put their skills and experience to good use.
These two reasons for volunteering, I can roughly argue, show a desire to volunteer for a social cause; yet I cannot surely say this is a direct commitment to engage in social activism.

4. Volunteering to share skills

Volunteering in the TPS is seen as a domain where tenant representatives can apply their already acquired knowledge and skills while learning new ones. This is similar to the findings of the CSGVP survey (2004), which found that a majority of respondents were motivated to volunteer because it allowed them to put their skills and experience to good use while providing them with opportunities to further develop new skills.

One motivating factor uncovered in this study was the feeling that one is particularly qualified for the position. This is not documented in the Canadian literature on volunteering, however, it does appear in the British context. British tenant activists referred to their qualifications to support their participation, as well as elaborating that they are in the position to be able to help others (Miller, 2005).

5. Volunteering to socialize

An interest in socializing, networking and meeting others has been documented by the CSGVP survey in the Canadian context, as well as the TPAS participants in the British context. According to CSGVP survey, some Canadians have been encouraged to volunteer because their friends do so; in the case of TCHC an encouragement or an invitation by other members of the community has been cited as a motivating factor. This has also been the case where British participants explained that their participation is partially due to a “response to an invitation to a meeting or to join a committee” (Millward, 2005, p.744).

6. Volunteering for recognition or power
Several new findings in this study are undocumented in either the Canadian volunteer literature or the British social housing literature. They include the volunteering motivations of tenants’ desire to be recognized; tenants’ wish to be associated with the management; and, the competitive racial and ethnic affiliations as motivators. One reason why these motivations emerged in this study, but not in the others, is that these findings were drawn through a qualitative process, including semi-structured interviews with staff and observations of tenant behaviour at the CHU councils, as well as informal conversations with non-representative tenants. In contrast, the other studies were solely based on structured surveys of individuals.

In sum, through the above comparisons it is apparent that tenant representatives’ motivations to volunteer are in many ways similar to those of other Canadian volunteers. The major variance is tenant representatives’ emphases on learning as a motivator whereas learning has not been cited as a motivator for volunteers in general. This signifies that in the context of social housing provision, learning plays a distinctive role in motivating tenants. This is projected in two distinct yet converging paths; one is a desire to build knowledge about the community in general and the political structure of social housing in particular; and second is a desire to develop socio-political skills (see Chapter 6 for tenant representatives’ learning). Learning knowledge and developing socio-political skills is perceived as an instrument, used to widen the influence of tenant representatives within the community and within the organization.

**Moderating the Rationalist Account**

At this point, I would like to return to and address the rationalist account discussed earlier in the chapter that people choose to participate solely for costs-benefits calculations.
In this chapter I showed that after some time tenant representatives learned how to better cooperate with each other and with the management at the council level. In other words, they participated according to the conventions that they collectively developed overtime. This explanation is in line with modifications made by game theorists to cost-benefit analyses. First, as game theorists point out, individuals, given time, can learn to cooperate. Second, social psychologists express, the growth of social solidarity and achieving high-trust relationships modifies individuals’ perception of costs and benefits (Birchall and Simmons, 2001, p. 209). It also became evident that the tenant representatives’ engagement satisfies their rewarding feelings of responsibility, association to power, ethnic grandiosity or even self-importance. In both cases, it seems that tenant volunteers receive intrinsic fulfillment from their participation. Therefore, it is safe to argue that personal and psychological factors vastly encourage and maintain participation; consequently, as Bengtsson (1994, p.3) argues, the rationalist account should be moderated to accommodate such social and cultural norms.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some connections between tenant representatives’ motivations and their involvement within a project where tenants practice active participation on issues that affect their communities. As has been noted in the WALL and CSGVP studies, people are motivated to volunteer for a variety of reasons, the most common being that they saw a real need or potential for change in their community. However, in contrast to past volunteer research, tenant representatives also volunteered out of a desire to learn – to learn more about their community, the TCHC, and civic/political procedures. Motivation also often came from a history of community involvement and activism, as well as encouragement by
other tenants or staff. These combinations of motivations also reflect the diverse definitions of volunteering presented in Table. 5.3.

To make sense of tenant representatives’ motivations, I sought explanations from tenants’ participatory behaviour and staff’s point of view. For tenant representatives, I concluded that participation is generally perceived as a right; it is an informative exercise where they provide input into the governance of their housing welfare. Tenant participation, viewed as a right, calls for a genuinely democratic process of tenant involvement in decision-making over the TCHC and its resources. This approach is far from assessing tenants’ needs; it intends to foster tenants to recognize and claim their rights, and for the TCHC to honour these rights and take steps accordingly – for example through policies and programs whose purpose is to promote and fulfill tenants’ rights within their housing communities. According to staff, though, I postulate that tenant participation is generally perceived as a venue for social and sometimes material gain. Furthermore, what eventually helped tenants run for the position, as both tenants and staff emphasized was a feeling of qualification.
Chapter 6: Tenant Representatives’ Informal Learning

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will focus on how tenants, deliberately or unintentionally, participate in informal learning as they engage with the Tenant Participation System. The main purpose is to reflect on tenant representatives’ informal learning processes and acquisitions, how and where informal learning occurs within the TPS. By clarifying the scope and importance of informal learning through the TCHC’s participatory governance structure I also aim to acknowledge that informal learning is a significant mode of lifelong learning.

In this Chapter I argue that the TPS, as a socio-political space plays a significant role in providing spaces for informal learning with significant pedagogical effects on participating tenants. I provide evidence for this from my interviews with tenant representatives, staff and management as well as my observations of tenant-focused initiatives and the activities at the CHU councils.

The idea that social activities and interactions are informal schools for our learning and cognitive development has been discussed by psychologists and educational theorists (Woolfolk et al, 2006 & Rowe and Wertsch, 2006). The social perspective of learning, as outlined by Vygotsky, develops that people learn through social interactions; Vygotsky argues that human development is inseparable from social and cultural activities. Social interactions and the associated learning play a large part in creating our cognitive structures. Vygotsky conceptualizes cognitive development as the transformation and internalization of socially shared activities among individuals; knowledge, he suggests, results from a collaborative and situated endeavour that we rather learn via constructing meaning from and through our social interactions with others or even objects (Woolfolk et al, 2006, p. 42-45).
In the following sections I will first review the concept of informal learning. I will then go on to present the evidence demonstrating the informal learning experienced by tenants through their engagement with the TPS. Next, I will contextualize the informal learning experiences of tenants by examining their circumstances and consequences. I will, then, compare different learners by demonstrating variations of informal learning amongst the respondents, followed by an examination of paths through which informal learning had occurred.

**Informal Learning**

The term "informal learning" projects itself vividly. However, for the sake of grounding the discussion, I will review a number of its working definitions. There seems to be a consensus among scholars on the general definition of the term. Church et al (2000) define informal learning as “any learning process that occurs outside of the context of school programs or continuing education courses.” Livingstone (2001) defines the concept vis-à-vis other related learning paradigms: “formal education denotes full-time school programs; non-formal education refers to classroom-based courses; informal learning refers to all other deliberate forms of self-directed or collective learning.” More precisely, Livingstone (2001, p. 3) refers to informal learning as:

> Any activity involving the pursuit of understanding knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria. Informal learning may occur in any context outside the pre-established curricula of educative institutions.

Foley (1999: p. 2) distinguishes incidental learning from informal learning arguing that incidental learning occurs through people’s engagement in social action at work and in their lives, while informal learning occurs as “people teach and learn from each other”
Schugurensky (2000) views informal learning as a kind of learning that occurs “outside the curricula of educational institutions and not [necessarily] outside educational institutions, because informal learning can also take place inside formal and non-formal educational institutions.” In other words, informal learning, he argues, is not associated with any “educational institutions, institutionally authorized instructors or prescribed curricula,” and, as such, informal learning may occur within institutions, but independent from planned curricula. Schugurensky also draws a distinction between informal and incidental learning. In his proposed framework (Table 6.1) of understanding for informal learning (2000), he incorporates incidental learning as a category, defining it as learning that occurs when the learner has no prior intention to learn and would only become conscious of his/her learning through reflection following the experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Informal Learning</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-directed</strong></td>
<td>Learning projects undertaken by individuals (alone or as part of a group) without the assistance of an 'educator' (teacher, instructor, facilitator). It is both intentional and conscious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incidental</strong></td>
<td>Learning experiences that occur when the learner does not have any previous intention of learning something out of that experience, but after the experience s/he becomes aware that some learning has taken place. It is unintentional but conscious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socialization</strong></td>
<td>Internalization of values, attitudes, behaviours, skills, etc. that occur during everyday life. Not only is there no a priori intention of acquiring them, but there is no awareness of the learning. It is neither intended nor conscious at the time of learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1: Types of Informal Learning (Schugurensky, 2000)

Although informal learning is undoubtedly the earliest form of human learning, it has just recently found attention in academic circles as an independent form of inquiry (Elsey, 1993, Elsdon, 1995, Livingstone, 1999, Foley, 1999). In reference to earlier studies, Livingstone (2001) refers to Malcolm Knowles (1950) in America and Allen Tough (1971) in Canada as pioneers in establishing research traditions for self-directed and informal
learning projects in their respective countries. Outside of North America, it was Josephine Macalister Brew (1946) who published, *Informal Education: Adventures and Reflections*, the first text of its kind on informal education in Great Britain; a significant contribution to the “development of thinking about and practice of youth work and informal education” (Smith, 2001: p.3).

Malcolm Knowles, the first Director of the Adult Education Association of the United States of America, was the first American scholar to highlight the importance of informal adult education practice (Smith, 2002), and popularized the notion of Andragogy as the art and science of “helping adults learn” as opposed to “educating” them:

> The major problems of our age deal with human relations; the solutions can be found only in education. Skill in human relations is a skill that must be learned; it is learned in the home, in the school, in the church, on the job, and wherever people gather together in small groups, (Knowles, 1950, p. 9).

Inspired by Knowles, Allen Tough (1971) initiated a major empirical research project on self-directed learning, in which he argued that there are extensive intentional learning projects carried out by individuals during their lifetime. Individuals in Canada spend approximately 500 hours per year on intentional learning projects (Livingstone, 2001). Tough also refers to informal learning as a “social phenomenon,” speculating that informal learning involves more social interactions than classroom learning (Tough, 1999). This idea that adult learning is a complicated social phenomenon and is heavily embedded in one’s social, political and economic realities and experiences has also been presented by Vygotsky and later elaborated and discussed in Freirean thoughts.

More recently, Foley (1999, p. 2-3), in his seminal work on understanding informal education emphasizes that:
The most interesting and significant learning occurs informally and incidentally, in people’s everyday lives. And some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it.

He recommends studying adult learning “in all its variety” to identify “generally unrecognized (even sometimes to those involved in them) forms and traditions of adult learning and education.” Other scholars talk about the lack of research on informal learning and call for proposals to document adults’ informal learning experiences as distinct from adult’s informal education. Livingstone (2001) argues that there is a scarcity of data on “the extent, processes, content, outcomes and trends of adults’ informal learning”. In addition, according to Schugurensky (2000), there is a lack of acknowledgement of informal learning on behalf of organizations and individuals. Church, Bascia and Shragge (2008) also call for more academic attention to this concept; they argue that informal learning deserves more attention, even though the term may not be familiar. This explains why paying a closer attention to the documentation and analysis of informal learning of tenant representatives through the TPS is important.

6.2. Exploring the Tenant Representatives’ Informal Learning

In broad terms, the Tenant Participation System provides tenant representatives with opportunities to exercise leadership within their housing communities. Through these opportunities, they learn and grow both individually and in groups. In this section, I will delve into tenants’ informal learning as manifest in the acquisition of knowledge and skills and changes in attitudes and behaviour. Here I decide to summarize the experiences and consequences of informal learning vis-à-vis individual tenant representatives and the organizational change; in other words, here I illustrate informal learning as enhances
individuals’ interpersonal and managerial skills necessary to navigate Community Housing Unit (CHU) management practices as well as the partnership committees, and learning that effects individuals’ social values and civic behaviour.

The research findings suggest four main categories of informal learning by tenant representatives. The first is knowledge about the political and organizational structure of social housing management and municipal governance. Second is the learning that augments social, political and civic skills of tenant representatives that help them to engage with and affect community at large. Third is the learning that enhances self-esteem and develops self-confidence to pursue community change through political action. Fourth is the learning that improves the conduct of the TPS and the community management.

6.2.1. Learning on the political and organizational structure of social housing

As was discussed in the previous chapter, my interviews revealed that one major motivation for tenants to participate in their CHU activities was the potential for learning about the TCHC so that they could influence change. Tenant representatives acknowledged that their position provided an opportunity for them to educate themselves and the community on the workings of the TCHC in the hopes of securing more attention and resources for their communities. Some respondents even pursued self-directed informal learning projects, where they intentionally sought to learn how they could secure resources for a specific problem in their community; while others explained that they learned through reflections on their experiences within the TPS. In this context, informal learning occurs both intentionally, as a result of conscious planning through informal paths; and tacitly,
acknowledged through self-reflection on an individual’s experiences within the participation system and also includes unacknowledged learning.

As a result of their engaging in the TPS, many tenant representatives said that they are more aware of policies on social housing provision in Toronto including how decisions are made and resources allocated at the TCHC. As a result, they developed insights into how they could immediately and effectively impact the bureaucracy. Respondents generally refer to this knowledge as important since TCHC is a new enterprise in charge of their housing provision. One representative explained:

I learned what button to push to get something done… I learned how the system works, who you should get hold of to get something done.

Reflecting on her experience at one of the capital budget allocation meetings, a young tenant representative explained:

I learned a lot, actually, when I went through the capital fund meeting; I believe that was a great experience because it actually showed all the politics that was involved in like communities.

One of the respondents clarified that he had learned all about the TCHC on his own, through “slowly gaining experience” in his role. Now he goes “outside of the council to get things done,” and for him it seems that “the head office is the most valuable place to get things done.” He mentioned that his knowledge about the TCHC has gained him respect among other representatives and the staff; even the CHU manager relies on his information on the TCHC and the social housing policies. Using his knowledge of the workings of TCHC, he has proposed solutions to some of the bureaucratic problems he found tenants face when applying to be transferred to another unit.

Tenant representatives are involved in budgeting processes at both the CHU level and the city-wide capital funding forums. Through this engagement, respondents also reported
acquiring a better understanding of the criteria and mechanisms involved in allocating monetary resources at TCHC and CHU levels. The process of participatory budgeting allows tenants to learn how to apply for funding to address the capital needs of their community.

Tenant representatives are also more aware of wider political structures relevant to social housing in Toronto. As one tenant representative explained, she studied the relevant laws and by-laws: “I went from A to Z.” This knowledge has helped her, in particular, advocate for residents in her building who faced a problem and waited a long time without receiving an appropriate response from management.

As tenants learn what level and type of participation is available through the TPS, they learn how and where they can apply pressure. It is evident from this that tenant representatives are now more aware of the limitations of what can be done within the Tenant Participation System.

Some of the respondents mentioned that they now know how to make the TCHC move into action by applying pressure to the TCHC both vertically, via higher levels of government, and horizontally, via other authorities within the organization. As one of the respondents explained that she had approached other levels of government to express her concerns regarding her place of residence:

I, for the first time, dared to go outside [of TCHC]…I made it my business to get to know my councillor, I went to Queens Park, I phoned City Hall… and got the permission to speak to the council,… so I spoke a couple of times to the council, [until it resolved].

Sixteen out of twenty of the respondents know their elected officials and three mentioned that they meet with their councillors. Respondents also reported that their knowledge about municipal politics and local affairs—including an understanding of jurisdictional limits and responsibilities—has significantly increased.
6.2.2. Learning to Engage with and Affect Wider Community

The second aspect of informal learning that was found included learning that motivates change in social, political and civic behaviour of tenant representatives. Social behaviour is affected through learning through socialization amongst various partners within TPS and political and civic skills are enhanced through learning through direct engagement in performing the required tasks within TPS.

Within TPS, tenant representatives are in constant communication with other tenants, other tenant representatives and TCHC staff and management. This, as tenant respondents described, increased their connections with their neighbours and people from other CHUs, which help to developed a sense of community even beyond their immediate neighbours. Through this communication tenant representatives familiarize themselves with others and the needs of other communities. As one respondent explained:

I have made friendships not only in my own CHU but in all other 26… Honestly, I built a relationship with these other individuals and… [they became] extended part of my family.

The following quotes illustrate how tenants developed a greater understanding of the problems and needs of people in their community and in other communities.

Not only us in CHU… but also in CHU… and in CHU… they got the same graffiti problem, they got the same security issue… You know you get to hear these things! And you say hey, I’m not alone in all of this.

Great learning opportunity… I have definitely developed a better vision after this experience. I look for things that I did not look before. I am much more aware of the challenges [other people have] that are completely different from my own experiences.

Something you think is so trivial to you is explosive to the other person… So it’s a good experience. I see myself different in the way that I have gained more knowledge… I have seen a lot of different things in different perspectives.
According to the above quotes and my observations, I can underline this important finding that TPS acts as a connector amongst diverse tenant population and a great potential to make intra-ethnic friendships.

Nineteen out of twenty of respondents emphasized that they have learned a great deal of skills, which I categorize as political and civic skills. As participants explained it was through their experiences with the TPS that tenant representatives learned how to better resolve conflicts, how to chair council meetings, organize group work and make collective decisions. One representative described this learning process through his experience chairing a CHU council meeting:

…I remember one of the things I learned was how to chair the meeting and so I did it; I listened to everybody’s business… like a judge… set the stage…read the minutes, confirm them… made notes…I balanced it out… you got to wait for everybody gets a chance…if you do not balance it you going to choke…you got to be fair so everybody can put what they want to put in…you cannot get hot-headed… you can’t be for one side you have to be for everybody…

This learning on how to organize and personally interact at a CHU meeting was a significant informal learning. One of the respondents explained that at early TPS council meetings, the CHU manager had to chair and facilitate the session because the tenants did not understand how to balance and manage the situation. Now it is the tenants themselves who chair, record and facilitate the council meetings.

This type of behavioural learning has far reaching affects even if the beginning of the process is difficult. A tenant representative described her first experience chairing a council meeting as truly "exciting" although she was "too nervous" and her "heart was racing." She added that, since then, she has been a much better and more confident public speaker and she has volunteered more often and has voluntarily chosen to participate on behalf of her peers at
her college courses. She refers to this experience of public speaking as “learning and experiencing a life skill.” One of the CHU managers explained that positive changes can be clearly noticed, such as an increase in self-confidence, in tenants even after a short while in their new role as representatives:

Tenant representatives change through the process. I compare them with the older ones, I realize that they have changed and learned stuff.

The respondents’ informal learning extends to professional skills, such as proposal writing and presentations. A small number of tenant representatives from each CHU volunteer to write proposals and deliver presentations about the concerns and needs of their community. Among the respondents, those who have been engaged in such tasks referred to their experience as a means to learn how to professionally develop and present ideas. One of the respondents, referring to her engagement, explained that “this [writing and proposal presentation] was motivating; I felt that I was getting the skills while I was doing something for the community.”

6.2.3. Learning Confidence

Associated with increased knowledge and active involvement in the TCHC and the wider political arena is an increased sense of confidence and the feeling that one can impact political decisions that once seemed remote. In the interviews I conducted tenant representatives reported how their experience with TPS contributed to their feeling more capable to impact political and management decisions within their CHU and even beyond the TCHC. As tenant representative from an underrepresented ethnic minority explained:

I never campaigned before; I’ve never gotten involved in politics [this experience] made me feel like I can do something… the participatory budget
was a really good experience because we were able to fight for what we wanted but in a democratic way.

Not only did this tenant representative gain confidence in her own abilities, she gained a sense of how individuals can affect change in local participatory forums. It can also be seen in this tenant representative’s reflection on her experience at the annual participatory budget forum:

I guess it sort of made me feel like I mattered, especially this year when I got to be the speaker, it really felt good, 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 when I pass by it and say that was me.

In addition, the confidence gained in these experiences lead a few tenants to point out that participation has helped them overcome their fear of authority. In this regard, one tenant said:

I had no prior involvement in any thing before; I have always avoided approaching any kind of authority before that… if you take a small step and you do it successfully it gives you some confident and you go for the next step and then other steps.

Many tenant interviewees also discussed that their participation had made them feel that they "mattered." A youth tenant representative felt fulfilled that her participation had helped motivate other youth to become active, this gave her "a good feeling motivating to continue." She went on to say that:

When I say [I] matter more I don’t mean just me I mean youth in general. The manager…in the community… 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 sorts of councils and that me being involved… I felt liberating… I felt like it was really the beginning of a journey.

The same respondent explained how her engagement has elevated her self-esteem:

I have a certificate now, it is good in my portfolio… my teacher is amazed and respects me more.
According to her, during the first months of her involvement with the council she was too shy to talk about her concerns. Eventually, she realized that her fellow tenants might ask her about her work at the council, and, gradually she overcame her shyness:

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… I made it my priority that I am going to say what I have to say.

Another tenant representative said that "what participation taught me is that I am never intimidated by titles; people at any rank are still people."

Another respondent believes that participation for her has radically changed the way she used to complain:

Instead of passive and tedious nagging and begging that the management has to do this and that… TCHC has opened up for tenants to be part of the CHU management, so if you do not participate you should not complain, but if you do participate you could.

She noted that there are still challenges but, "we can now be part of the change we would like to see."

Improved feelings of self-worth and confidence in tenant representatives were noted by both staff and the more active tenant representatives. A tenant with two decades of community activism stated that:

people living at [social] housing have been put down all their lives by their parents, teachers, spouses and housing staff… They believe they are among the lowest people, they have no self worth.

This tenant representative referred to one's self-worth as the “founding block” of one's confidence, which in turn encourages one's socio-political engagement: "self-worth is more important than self-confidence, thus needs to be touched first so that tenants come up."

The interviewee’s remarks attest to the idea that by recognizing that one's ideas matter and
one is able to act based on them can inspire positive changes in tenants’ attitude and capacity. It is this boost in one's self-worth and self-esteem, which can, in turn strongly encourage further political engagement.

6.2.4. Informal Learning and Participatory Community Management

As is revealed in previous section, informal learning plays a significant role in shaping respondents’ overall learning experiences and they rely heavily on informal learning to enhance their effectiveness as tenant representatives and as such, advocates for their communities. In this section, I intend to discuss some immediate consequences of tenants’ informal learning on the functioning of the TPS and participatory behaviour amongst tenant representatives.

Often, tenants’ informal learning was revealed through their depiction of their experiences and their evolving role within the TPS. In other words, it was from the tenants’ stories of their participation that led me to realize that the learning being done here was closely associated with their participation. Tenants’ behavioural and attitudinal changes through the process of involvement with the TPS are indicators that the learning occurring is an evolving process. Therefore, to better understand this process, it is imperative to discuss how respondents, both tenant representatives and staff, in their interviews discussed tenant representatives’ experiences over time, which is presented below:

It became clear that tenants develop awareness and knowledge relevant to their work with the TCHC. This has generally enhanced their awareness of the realities of property management at TCHC. As tenant representatives gain experience in the process of decision making at their CHU and the TCHC, they became more aware of the limitations; for example
one of the respondents described that through her engagement, she became unhappily aware of the time requirements and bureaucratic delays within the organization and now, instead of nagging, she helps to speed up the process. Tenant representatives through their involvement reached a level of mutual understanding with the management; for example, one of the CHU managers explained that:

I think now sharing the information on finances and the budget... that they have an understanding also of the constraints... One example is the Tenant Protection Act I think tenants in general... had difficulty understanding that if there is a drug dealer in the building... how come you [TCHC] have not evicted them... And when we discuss that as a landlord we cannot evict anyone until we go thorough the court tribunal. It’s the tribunal that makes the decision judgment and the process is long but the information that you provided is very useful to us. I think that has helped in their understanding in some of the challenges we face... they had the understanding that we can do anything we want as a landlord but we can’t under the law. They now understand that.

Developing a better understanding of the budgeting criteria also allows tenants to apply their efforts to impact budget decisions that they feel are urgent for their constituencies. This has enabled tenant representatives to keep the management accountable as they describe how they now monitor the quality of the work at both their buildings and the CHU levels.

As tenant representatives learn about TCHC and as they further their engagement within the TPS, they build working relationships with TCHC staff, which is one of the most important outcomes. As most of the TCHC staff whom I interviewed described, the relationship between tenants and the public housing staff has not historically been a cooperative one. Through TPS tenant representatives now have the opportunity to work with staff in partnership and in collaborative structures that have enabled TCHC management and tenants to work collectively to campaign for more resources. One of the respondents
explained that she feels she is now "part of the management team" of her CHU while keeping her "independence from the TCHC." All tenant respondents emphasized that they now know the health promotion officer well and work with him/her as a team. This process is well reflected in how one of the senior staff describes this process:

At the beginning [there was] scepticism, doubt, [and] sabotage. Tenants felt it was lip service, staff thought it was silly or giving them extra work… It has created more interactions and a mutual respect between tenants and staff.

As tenant representatives gain a better understanding of the barriers and complications that management may face in responding to tenant needs, they can also take on a role of communicator to other tenants. Through this role, the knowledge that they have gained about resources and procedures at their CHU is also passed on to the general tenant population. The communication function that the tenant representatives take on is a great advantage to the TCHC. As a source of information for both tenants and the staff, the tenant representatives take on a role of liaison, enabling better communication between both parties.

This can be readily seen in the work of one group of tenant representatives. As was revealed through my interviews, these representatives have joined together to lobby government and external organizations to secure major capital funding. They have begun advocating on broader levels (i.e. the provincial level) for increased resources to improve the quality of the housing portfolio. They explained that they have done this because they have realized the financial limitations of the TCHC to provide and maintain quality housing for all tenants.

The participatory process itself can also improve as the tenant representatives learn through practicing. As tenant representatives continue to work with each other, they learn how to better interact and work as a council. Abers (2000) describing the transformation of
participatory budget councils in Porto Alegre, Brazil, says that, over time, the meetings changed from chaotic events with people interrupting to more respectful and organized proceedings as budget council members learned how to better facilitate meetings and participants gained deliberative skills. Learning that can improve the participatory process was noted within the Tenant Participation System as well.

CHU managers speak of changes in tenant representatives’ behaviour as they gain experience and confidence in their new roles:

I have observed changes; some have started initiatives on their own... Some have started their safety committee. I helped with the ... association and then it led to other initiatives. As they get involved they get initiatives on their own which is very good.

Some of the tenant reps do a fantastic job… They take a lot of initiatives they run programs in the building from funding that has been given by the CHU council… it has made a huge difference in the building… They run a variety of programs for youth for children and they have other agencies that are involved; they have regular barbeques themselves. So it gives a sense of belonging for the tenants.

tenant reps organized stuff, as they grow, it has been a help for the CHU and the council. As they understood how budget works it helped. They also know how to apply pressure, how to negotiate.

The staff also explained in the interviews that over time tenant representatives became more curious and they sought to learn more about problems in the neighbourhood so that they could present issues and propose solutions to the management. The tenants’ volunteer involvement has gone well beyond the CHU level, as the interviews indicated that tenant representatives attended a variety of community meetings. For example, my interviews revealed that a committee of tenant representatives invited the mayoral candidate to their CHU to seek her political stand on the issues in their neighbourhood. One tenant representative described how she had learned through her involvement that if "you would
like to see something happen in the community, you have to make it happen yourself.” This same tenant representative also described how, as a result of her participation, she felt an increased "sense of belonging" to and "importance" of her community.

From the analysis of my interviews tenant respondents said that their CHU councils have become more accepting of each other and tolerant of conflicts and differences. To increase the efficiency of council meetings, one of the respondents explained that the most important lesson he had learned was to develop "mutual respect" among tenant representatives so that a cooperative and friendly culture could thrive. This cultivation of mutual respect was found by interviewees to speed up the process of decision-making. The same respondent, as I mentioned earlier, suggested that one has to “listen very well by your eyes, ears, mind and heart." For him, working with other tenants and the management is a “delicate matter.”

From my interviews the staff noted that they observed changes in attitude among tenant representatives towards representatives from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. One of the staff mentioned in my interview with them that such attitudinal changes help trust building amongst the council members. Another staff mentioned that the participatory process, over time, has also improved tenants’ attitude towards working with staff. As one of the health promotion officers explained better working relationships with both tenants and superintendents, occurred due to working together through the TPS:

I think their confidence level has improved as a tenant rep and with that their relationships have improved with tenants in the building because its very critical for them… to establish that relationship with the tenants in the building and then sometimes they just deal with issues at the very local level in the building itself with the superintendent… that has worked very well.
6.3. Who Learns What?

In the prior section I demonstrated that noticeable and significant informal learning occurred through the practice of tenant participation. However, the degree and kind of learning depend on individual participants and it is individuals’ backgrounds and experiences that significantly impact their learning. In this section, I would like to briefly highlight the variances in learning by further discussing what is learned and by whom in this participatory exercise of community housing management. To do so I draw on my observations and interviews with tenant representatives. For the sake of clarity and to help contextualize learning experiences I divide the respondents into assumptive groups.

The tenant representatives who were interviewed, all identified themselves as active tenants, though with varying scope and kind of activism. Here I hypothetically group them to distinguish between them according to their kind and degree of activism:

1- Social Activists: Tenant representatives with significant previous experiences in their own community and Canadian society at large;

2- Youth Activists: Tenant representatives under the age of 29;

3- Custodians: Tenant representatives whose domain of activism is limited to property management issues;

4- Guardians: Tenants who are widely-known for their extended care for their immediate community;

Social activists are tenant representatives with a history of community activism in various social domains. One of the staff respondents said they are “already local leaders and sophisticated tenant reps, they are connected and knowledgeable and TCHC cannot introduce many new things to them.” On many occasions, I have observed that it is the activists who
record, chair and organize council meetings. In addition, they attend various community meetings in and out of the TCHC, give public talks, write proposals and more. Their ideas are listened to and valued by the CHU council. Often, they are viewed as mentors. The TPS provides a forum for social activist representatives to apply their already-acquired knowledge and skills to advance the community agenda as they perceive and define it.

Due to their high involvement, representatives I have labelled social activists, demonstrate a want to learn so they can better perform their duties as community representatives. Here representatives are invested in accumulating information so that they are better able to design more effective action plans or readjusting their strategies towards the TCHC, the CHU management and the community. In the interviews, all of the representatives that I have labelled activists reported acquiring two principal forms of knowledge. The first is knowledge they seek actively, the knowledge they need to enhance their efficacy in influencing decisions in the presence of competing forces. Activists tend to have a strong presence in the reality negotiations where needs and limitations overwhelm available resources and where the negotiators carry different weights of potential power over those limited resources. I refer to this process, where all stakeholders deliberate in order to legitimately win, at least partially, the limited available resources, as politics of efficacy.

Those interviewees that I have categorized as activists all stated that they have to struggle on two fronts. First, they mentioned that they had to cautiously negotiate with the management over priorities and resource allocations. Second, they mentioned that they had to fight with the narrow-minded demands of some tenants, who, as they describe, “do not see the big picture.” As a result, in this field of intense struggle, they constantly review their strategies and embrace new learning to equip them for their quest. To do so, they often look
for resources outside of the TCHC to support their ideas and proposals for the community. For example, I observed that in one of the CHUs, two of the so-called social activist tenant representatives sought information on the assets of other agencies in the community and have presented well-rounded solutions to the management on how to pool those resources for a common cause. As presented earlier, some respondents expressed that they have gained new knowledge on issues like “which button to push,” and “where to find more resources in the community.” They also reported that they have learned how to be more “diplomatic” when involved in a dispute with the management. These are the types of learning deliberately sought by those I have articulated as activists, those that they believe will potentially increase their chances to win the battle of efficacy.

The second form of knowledge that the group known as social activists reported acquiring came through a different process. Upon reflecting on their experiences, these social activists realized that the opportunity to participate at their CHU council and even at the portfolio-wide forums and committees has significantly broadened their understanding of other tenants and communities in terms of race, socio-economics and gender issues. This has changed their attitude towards other tenants, especially those with different backgrounds. An activist tenant representative who has been helping a group of Afghani youth for a community project said “I know them now; I had no clue of their problems and their life before.” Another active senior tenant says “I helped the youth in my community to develop a proposal … we have good relation and we talk together now.” Learning about other tenants’ lives, their culture and their problems can potentially enhance tolerance and help build communities of diverse membership.
Amongst the activists are youth tenant representatives, those under the age of 29, with shorter history of activism. For youth, the role of tenant representative is a new and exciting “out of classroom” experience through which they can learn a great deal, including civic procedures to proposal development, presentation skills and the political realities within communities. All of the interviewees in this category mentioned learning about how to speak in public, how to chair meetings, and how to communicate in a strategic and effective manner. For those that I have classified as youth representatives, the analysis of their interviews confirms that they conceptualize their work as a tenant representative as a context for learning and self-development that has impacted their attitude towards themselves, the community and local politics.

Custodians and guardians are the other two categories of self-identified active tenant representatives. The main distinction between these two groups and the social activists is primarily their scope of activism; while social activists are active in their life within and outside of their housing communities, custodians and guardians are solely active in their immediate locale.

Custodians are the category of tenant representatives whose main concerns are the property and the security of place. Interviewees who fit into this grouping all attend meetings for the purpose of getting things done in their own building. The scope of their participation rarely stretches beyond their building. In portfolio-wide forums, they are the listeners and prefer to protect their views by not participating too often, even when they are asked to. The respondents in this category often show that they believe they are knowledgeable enough about their building and that this position can provide them the venue to make things work better at their building. One of the interviewees I have categorized as being a custodian gave
me a tour of the property while providing detailed information about all the corners of her building. She also took me into her office where she receives referrals from tenants regarding their problems. It was my impression that she was trying to emphasize her qualifications and prove that she was the best person for the job.

The category of custodian also necessitates seeing the position of tenant representative as a form of status through which they are finally given a formal channel to the management. This in turn allows them to apply their thorough knowledge of the building for better service delivery. They see themselves, in a sense, as professional tenants and the legitimate link between the management and the tenants.

From the interviews, I can conclude that custodians are motivated to learn primarily in order to find ways to negotiate and get things done. They often mention that they have learned how to better deal with the staff: “I finally found a way to work with the superintendent,” says a custodian tenant representative. Another respondent that I classified as a custodian remembers that how she always complained to the one staff about day-to-day problems of her building, but now she realizes “how difficult it is for one person to take care of the whole building alone.” This respondent mentioned that she is now trying to cooperate and help the superintendent by “organizing and prioritizing tenants’ needs.” Finally, I can add that through their expanded contact with general tenant population, those in the category of custodian have also learned a lot about the residents of their building and their specific needs.

The Guardian classification for tenant representatives includes those who are widely known and also hold a community care agenda. Those I have deemed guardians are the panacea to all the needs of the residents. They are the reference point for all types of
problems: from finding a homework club for the children to fixing a broken window. They are often referred to as the mothers or fathers of the community. They are well respected and, often, are known by almost all tenants. In other words, to be categorized as a guardian an interviewee had to be a community activist within his/her own small community. As one respondent described his role:

I walk around in the building at busy times to talk with people about their problems… as soon as I receive a same problem from more than two tenants, I am heading to the management office to solve it.

For these interviewees, becoming a tenant representative has not necessarily impacted their conventional role: "I have been representing the community anyways," said a guardian tenant. "She has never asked anything for herself… all she is there for is the other people of her building," said a staff member in describing a guardian tenant representative.

Since those classified as guardians do not distinguish between their roles as formal representatives and their roles as community care-givers, it is challenging to determine their exact learning in the context of the formal Tenant Participation System. Judging from the interviews, I can argue that through their participation in the TPS, they have the opportunity to broaden their knowledge of the residents and their problems while striving to learn different ways to impact decisions relevant to the social needs of their community. The scope of their activism is limited to their building and they already possess a great deal of knowledge about local issues. In fact these representatives often present the solution alongside the problem since they know what should be done because of their intimate knowledge of the situation. In one community, for example, the youth needed a playground and they asked their guardian representative to help. The representative supported them by
putting the item on the council agenda. At the same time, she asked the youth to prepare guidelines for the use of the playground and to prepare to defend their idea at the CHU council.

Guardians, like their custodian counterparts, tend to be pragmatic, intentionally avoiding tedious bureaucratic procedures, hoping to get things done faster. They pursue informal ways to get things down and they find their own way of doing things.

It seems that the TPS has provided those I have classified as guardian representatives with credibility in their communities. It has also broadened their activism and has enhanced their political efficacy by giving them some formal authority to pursue positive change and keep management accountable to its promises.

Throughout my observations of CHU councils, I met with many tenant representatives among whom are two types of representatives who were absent in my formal interviews. They are tenant representatives who are recent immigrants and those who are silent listeners. Based on my field notes and staff interviews, here I elaborate further on these two categories of tenant representatives.

Singled-out Immigrants are the category of tenant representatives who are recent immigrants and who have no significant prior involvement in their neighbourhood, but who stepped forward when they realized that there would be a formal representative role to be filled. This classification includes tenants who are from immigrant communities and have no significant Canadian experience and because of this, they lack the social and cultural capital to support them in their political ambitions. Based on my observations and informal talks with two tenant representatives who fit this category, this role seems to be the only civic responsibility that these participants had felt confident to participate in. Their learning has
been predominantly about the civic and managerial procedures at the community and even at the city-levels. One of these representatives mentioned that through his role as a representative he has learned about the required procedures and even the vocabulary used in the context of a formal meeting. The other representative who enjoyed a relatively high social status before immigrating to Canada explained that it was through his involvement at the TPS that he found his way to apply his expertise in environmental issues to policy work at the TCHC; he has proposed specific environmental research plans for the TCHC. These two respondents expressed that they were willing to contribute further if given more chances of this kind.

I conclude that the learning acquired by this group of tenant representatives is more of methodology—they gain knowledge about the TCHC, how it works and how they can contribute. Although I cannot strongly argue, it seems that the TPS also helps this category of tenant representatives develop confidence and learn how to apply their knowledge to further the interest of their community.

Silent Listeners are the category of tenants who are generally indifferent and their contribution is almost negligible. They are silent listeners with minimum participation and expression at the council meetings. Their participation is limited to voting and sometimes naming the problems of their buildings, which they would often prefer to convey directly to the management to avoid possible debates in the council. “They just vote or bring a concern of their community to the management,” explains a CHU staff. They seldom socialize and prefer to be neutral during heated discussions. This category of representatives are often overwhelmed by the nature of the job and the intensity of the environment. Many of the CHU Staff believe that they often do not understand the procedures and are “simply manipulated”
by the more powerful and dominant representatives. In describing their apathy, one of the CHU managers explained:

For those who have the capacity I saw changes in them. It is up to their capacity. One tenant rep sat there for three years, nodded the head and agreed all the times, supported issues, and then I realized that she knew absolutely nothing about what we were doing, she was absolutely clueless. She was somebody who [was] easily manipulated by the stronger; she was fed by others…

Through my conversations with staff I realized that staff believe that this type of tenant representatives are not intellectually prepared for this kind of activity, and soon pull themselves back and participate as observers, as these quotes from two of the staff clarify:

Some never participate since they do not believe in themselves as capable enough… They are so afraid for more involvement. You cannot build capacities for them… you can just fill a cup to its rim.

Some are very skilled at the job and others for some reason or another do not have the capacity to even hold meetings.

It becomes evident that the degree and kind of informal learning vary amongst the tenant representatives. Furthermore, I can conclude that the TPS provides an interactive space for learning to occur and one cannot expect specific learning outcomes for every individual tenant representative. In the following section, I will highlight the paths through which tenant representatives acquired informal learning.

6.4. Paths to Informal Learning

In the previous section, the types and significance of informal learning acquired by tenant participants were introduced and discussed. This was to acknowledge the teaching and learning, that is, the pedagogical effects of deliberative and participatory practices on participants. It is evident from my analysis of interviews with the tenant representatives that
informal learning of various kinds and degrees occurs through the TCHC’s Tenant Participation System. To further enlighten our understanding of informal learning in this context, I discuss below the four paths through which participants suggested that their learning occurred:

1. learning through strategizing
2. learning through struggle
3. learning by doing and observing
4. learning through engagement and socialization.

As the representatives of their constituencies, they are constantly involved in reflecting on the problems of their community. As representatives they are also asked to reflect on issues that are beyond their own community. Through the interviewee’s active reflection they suggested that an important aspect of their learning involved their attempt to strategically achieve the best outcome based on the existing resources. The interviews reveal that this learning was done alone, through informal conversations with others and even through the planning processes in council and committee meetings. In these situations tenants actively strategized to secure more resources for their communities. Due to the limited available resources, competing demands and the slow responses of the bureaucracy, tenants discussed how they struggled to achieve improved services. This process of struggle was prominent in the interview and seems to have informal educative effects on participants. In addition, learning the necessary skills to increase the managerial efficiency of the council is mainly developed through observation and direct involvement in carrying out organizational responsibilities. The inevitable socialization among tenant representatives, staff,
management, general tenant population and other stakeholders also provides another domain in which informal learning occurs.

Learning through strategizing

It has long been a common practice to exclude social housing tenants from the arenas in which their welfare is planned and administered. As both the tenant representatives and the staff emphasized there has been an environment of distrust between the tenants and the housing company. Tenants seldom trust the formal institutions and structures as supportive partners in achieving a higher quality of living.

In addition to formal channels to express concerns or exert influence over a decision or a plan, tenant representatives show interest in pursuing informal and unofficial ways to address their concerns. For those that I interviewed their preferred strategy to influence decisions is through informal networks within the power structure or through informal negotiations with managers and other decision-makers. As I pointed out earlier, there are tenant representatives who are eager to “find out where to push the button so that TCHC moves,” “to find where the money is at TCHC,” or, “to find out how to negotiate to get more resources.” These respondents deliberately engage themselves in learning projects to equip themselves with effective strategies to find out how to achieve such goals. These are learning projects with no curriculum nor an instructor attached, however the learning, although informal, is intentional.

The majority of the respondents highlighted their desire to familiarize themselves with the new TCHC and its new rules and regulations; they saw this kind of knowledge as a tool to help them in their struggles to find the appropriate channels, as they put it, “to fix their homes”. Familiarity with the new TCHC was seen as a way to play their roles more
effectively and enhance their strategies in dealing with both CHU councils and management. For tenant representatives, strategizing is a continuous process of exploring the various dimensions of a decision-making structure, a policy or a program within the TCHC and the wider community. This form of active learning is both intentional and conscious and the knowledge gained informs the strategies they use to voice their concerns, influence decisions, or change undesired circumstances.

Learning through struggle

Tenant representatives engage in a great many interactions including negotiations with the management and other representatives at the council. Struggling with different stakeholders constitutes an important domain in which informal learning occurs. There are struggles between tenant representatives and the management over a decision or a priority, there are conflicts over scarce resources among tenant representatives, there are problems in mobilizing the general tenant population for a cause and there are difficulties in coordinating partnerships in a CHU. In this section, I provide two examples of major informal learning gained through struggle.

First, more pragmatic and active tenant representatives come forward with exhaustive knowledge about their locale, its associated problems, and, often, with proposals and solutions in hand. Facing challenges like insufficient and limited resources and the lengthy processes of decision-making at the council can chip away their enthusiasm to continue on in their roles. Two primary responses to this problem came out in the interviews. One was pursuing informal channels to find a solution, while the other was pursuing formal structures to achieve goal; some tenant representatives decided to bypass the formal process and look for personal pipelines to the management, while others stayed on and struggled for their
agenda through the transparent channel of the councils. For the latter group, I can present significant informal learning. For example, a participant that I have categorized as a guardian representative described his experience of trying to speed up the process by increasing the efficiency of council meetings and to help escape from the exhausting negotiations within the council. In his experience, the best way to do this was to promote a cooperative and “friendly culture” by developing “mutual respect” among representatives, which, for him, could be achieved through acknowledging and recognizing each other’s needs and respecting each other’s opinions. One has to “listen very well by eyes, ears, mind and heart,” he emphasized. By the same logic, he learned not to say "you are wrong" but to say "I disagree." As is illustrated by this example, this tenant representative had no prior intention of testing the importance of values like "mutual respect"; his purpose was, rather, to speed up the process of decision-making at council. However, following these experiences, he has learned the utility of applying such values in pursuing one’s interest in a democratic setting. This is one example of the conscious but unintended learning that has occurred through struggle for the tenant representatives. This kind of informal learning is more subtle than the previous category and helps to internalize values.

Second, although none of the respondents suggested dismantling the TPS, a considerable number said that they do not have real decision-making power and they are solely engaged in allocating small pockets of money for minor projects. As they struggle to attain higher levels of engagement and authority, tenant representatives indicated that they have learned strategies to increase the effectiveness of the TSP. For example, one of the respondents explains that it is through the representatives’ own professional conduct at the
TPS that they could secure a bigger say in the decision-making procedures at their CHU and beyond:

Oh well if the tenants really had the power that they [TCHC] are saying, we could do something... but we don’t have the power, they have the power, right? … 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…If we professionally handle the participatory budgeting, we can ask for more.

What this quote implies is that in order to be effective in securing a major role in decision-making, tenant representatives must learn to perform more professionally, otherwise they cannot gain the trust of the TCHC. The above two examples are evidences of informal learning through struggle. In one case, learning through struggle resulted in changing attitudes towards respecting democratic values for one of the respondent; in another case, learning through struggle advanced one respondent’s critical learning in relation to decision-making structures within TPS.

Learning by doing and observing

Tenants acquired and developed many of their skills as representatives 'on the job'; learning while doing the job. Earlier, I mentioned that tenant representatives reported learning to organize, chair, facilitate and even report on council meetings by simply observing and then doing it themselves. Staff also noted that tenant representatives have become skilful in managing council meetings. Those who have been involved in proposal development and proposal review at various committees expressed that their experience has been helpful in learning new skills; those who have made presentations to councils also emphasized their learning of interpersonal skills.

Activities such as leading and reporting council meetings, organizing and facilitating council meetings, writing and reviewing proposals, and making presentations require that
tenant representatives upgrade their knowledge and skills to perform such tasks properly, which is mostly acquired and learned through doing and experimentation. Tenant representatives are either assigned or voluntarily choose to do specific tasks as part of their duties. They intentionally and consciously attempt to learn the required skills through observation at council meetings as well as non-formal instruction from staff or more experienced peers at the TPS. Membership in specialized committees demands that the representatives have additional skills and knowledge of a specific area (i.e. proposal review, program evaluation, and communication technology).

From the highlights of the interviews, shown in the previous sections, I confirm that learning by doing is significant in acquiring the basic skills needed to carry out the primary responsibilities of tenant representatives, which is to hold and facilitate meetings. However, from the interviews I can also argue that the degree of learning of such applied knowledge and skills depends on the level of engagement and the desire to learn.

Learning through engagement and socialization

Social engagement also affects tenants’ perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour in an often unnoticeable fashion. This is referred to as tacit learning, that is, it cannot be easily articulated and is therefore challenging to document. Tenant representatives have neither intended to learn nor have they consciously realized that they have learned. Yet as I mentioned in the introduction, this unconscious learning is often the most significant aspect of informal education. Tacit learning often occurs in an interactive environment within a somewhat defined framework, like that of the TPS. Tenant representatives in their interviews referred to their awareness of others’ needs and realities as a result of their participation as representatives. In addition, the staff pointed to the positive changes in tenants’ attitudes
towards people from other cultures. Throughout the interviews tenant representatives referred to their increased involvement in helping tenants with whom they had never previously communicated, including other representatives from other buildings and CHUs. All of these experiences illustrate that the social spaces of interaction created through the TPS lead to educative effects. The TPS provides the following spaces of interaction that potentially fosters tacit learning:

- The election process encompassing nomination meetings, campaign activities, all-candidates meetings and interactions on election days;
- Tenant councils, in which tenant representatives interact and engage in decision-making and planning in the presence of other tenants, staff and management;
- Informal socialization associated with tenant council activities;
- Tenants’ informal sessions in which representatives get together occasionally on their own initiative to tour around the neighbourhood and discuss local concerns as well as to enhance their knowledge of other buildings or communities;
- Tenant forums during which representatives from all over the city get together, attend workshops, exchange ideas and socialize; and
- One-on-one interactions with authorities and other stakeholders.

The above list highlights spaces in which socialization and interaction amongst representatives could impact tenants’ perception of the world around them and consequently affect their value systems.

Another domain of significant tacit learning is through the interactions among tenant representatives from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. Throughout my own observations I have seen councils where tenant representatives from various religious
backgrounds work together cooperatively, which is rarely the case in their lives outside of the TPS. Due to the fact that this tacit learning is most often unconscious, I cannot conclude from the interviewing process that this learning experience has transformed their attitude towards people of other religions; rather, I argue that they are now more aware of each other’s needs and realities, which, in turn, could help develop mutual understanding and help build collaborative environments within their communities.

In council meetings, tenant representatives’ interactions follow a pre-set behavioural code of conduct, common to public meetings. It is an enforced obedience of democratic values, which aims to keep council functioning smoothly and guarantees the rights of individual tenant representatives. The code of conduct is primarily to control the meeting and is not intended to educate representatives on democratic principles. Just as legislation mandating anti-racism or anti-sexism does not necessarily induce citizens to become genuinely tolerant anti-racists and believers in sexual diversity; the TPS framework may not directly educate tenants on diversity, tolerance and acceptance of other tenants as “equal counterparts”. It can, however, promote such values through providing spaces in which the opportunities for informal learning and internalization of such values can increase.

Tenant representative attendance at council meetings is a continuous exercise in respecting such explicit democratic values and also subtly facilitates the internalization of those values. Tenants’ exposure to other cultures, in their lives and outside of the TPS, is generally limited to a few cultural festivals; and as I found through the interviews, tenant representatives do not have many other forums to openly discuss and learn about relevant issues like diversity and multiculturalism. Thus, the TPS constitutes a rare opportunity for tenant representatives to interact and familiarize themselves with the realities of other
people’s lives and cultures. This potentially enhances their understanding of the others and creates bonding relationships among them all.

6.5. Discussion: Informal Learning and Civic Capacity

In the previous sections I articulated the informal learning and its immediate consequences on the representatives; in sum, as a result of their participation, tenant representatives have (informally) learned to become:

1. More aware of the limitations involved in the working of their CHU (e.g. financial resources, bureaucratic delays);
2. More aware of the rules and regulation pertinent to nuts and bolts of TCHC;
3. More knowledgeable of their own community and beyond;
4. More connected to the general tenant population (community) and the stakeholders;

This set of informal learning, I argue, does have the following consequences on the community management structure of the TPS:

1. Building better working relationships amongst the staff and the tenant representatives;
2. Increased collaboration and mutual understanding between the tenant representatives and the CHU management;
3. Increased mutual respect amongst tenant representatives;
4. More efficient and more effective CHU council work;
5. More self-directed initiatives by tenant representatives;
6. More desire and curiosity to learn more about and engage more in the community;

Based on my discussion above, here I conclude that informal learning has four levels of impact on tenant representatives: it helps to enhance individuals’ knowledge, develop individuals’ social and political skills, improve individuals’ attitude towards self, community and polity and finally further individuals’ social engagement and practice (Fig 6.1).

**Fig. 6.1: A Summary of Tenants' Informal Learning**
With an understanding of tenant representatives’ informal learning, it is time to reflect on informal learning and its civic effects on participants. By doing so, in this section I intend to address one major research question of this study. The discussion of the informal learning provides insight into what the perceived civic effects of participation are. In addition, in this section I will also examine the findings through the literature; such examination of results is important for it confirms many of the arguments raised in Chapter 3.

In the previous sections, we came to an understanding of the informal learning of tenants’ representatives. According to their responses to the interview I summarize the effects of their learning into three distinctive categories: communicative, political and civic effects.

The findings clearly illustrate the tenant representatives’ informal learning as pertained to social, interpersonal and communicative skills. These are personal effects that help develop individual’s social character. From the responses I can enlist the communicative effects as improved perception of self: enhancement of tenant representatives’ own concept of self, as many of the respondents clarified that their participation has given them a feeling of satisfaction while some expressed their increased self-confidence as a direct result of their participation (Schugurensky, 2003; Peterson et al, 2002; Chambers, 1997); empathy; it was evident that participation has helped broadened tenant representatives’ understanding and awareness of other tenants’ and tenant representatives’ problems, concerns, viewpoints and living realities.

Participation has even developed compassionate behaviour of some respondents towards tenants from different ethnic backgrounds. This was a result of tenant representatives working together in CHU council meetings and other collective initiatives at CHU or TCHC
levels. CHU Work and community-related interactions evidently help build empathy amongst the participants; developing relationships, making friendships and forming networks are also part of the communicative effects of participation. Respondents emphasized the importance of new relationships amongst the tenant population to further the goals of the community; some specifically referred to their new relationships with representatives from other CHUs that benefit them in the annual participatory budgeting exercises, when each CHU requires supporting votes from representatives of other CHUs; the other effect that impacts the representatives’ communication is their newly gained critical awareness of TCHC and life in social housing; respondents cited their awareness of TCHC, its resources on the one hand and the complexities of tenants’ problems on the other. They are now better equipped with the understanding of community issues and TCHC’s role in alleviating the challenges. More specifically the interconnectedness nature of social and political issues of social housing governance has become more evident for the respondents; professional enhancement is a salient effect of participation.

As both staff and tenant representatives pointed out, being part of the TPS and its formal decision-making structure had effected the professional behaviour of representatives within the CHU councils. The personal and communicative effect of participation as enlisted here is aligned with Cooke’s (2000) argument that participation is primarily a personal education and Pateman’s (1970) argument that participation helps develop democratic characters within a democracy.

The other category is contingent to political effects of participation. Enhanced knowledge of political institutions and local governance and increased sense of political efficacy are the primary effects of informal learning in this category. Through their
participation at the TPS, tenant representatives have been exposed to more or less accurate political knowledge, political procedures and political authorities. As was presented, tenant representatives have become more aware of the power structure of TCHC, procedures within the City Council and have even personally contacted their political representatives at the three levels of government. The interviews clarified that respondents had significantly increased their knowledge about the way in which TCHCH and other related sectors govern social housing in the Greater Toronto Area.

Increased awareness of political realities has, for some, ameliorated their attitude towards TCHC as a state organization. Feeling that one can impact, once remote, political decisions helps enhance political efficacy amongst the participants. Staff pointed out that they have observed increased ownership of the local projects at which tenant representatives had a say. Through the participatory budgeting tenant representatives had been able to bring about major capital projects and improvements for their community. For them, this has been the first time ever that they had participated in capital expenditure management at any level of governance.

The third and last category is the civic effects of informal learning. It is a combination of the above two categories. This is the most cited effects of participation in literature (Putnam, 2000; Schugurensky, 2003; Battistoni, 1997; Campbell, 2006; Barber, 1984; Mansbridge, 1999). In the previous section I presented evidence from interviews that overall improvement in communicative skills helps and encourages tenant representatives to further their civic commitments in their immediate communities and beyond. Tenant representatives pointed out that they feel more engaged in and more committed to their community, as they seek solutions to local problems more than before. They are now more alert about and look
for issues in the community; they feel, somewhat responsible and in charge of the community. Coupled to this enhanced commitment is a set of skills in communication and facilitation. Both tenant representatives and staff referred to communication and facilitation skills as two major skills that participants develop through the course of their involvement at the TPS. Public speaking, speaking one’s mind, presentation skills, engagement in debates and discussions, better listening and articulation skills, skills in organizing and managing council meetings; these are all the evident effects that help build civic capacity within the participants.

From this, I wrap up this section with two sets of concluding arguments. First, participating in the TPS is a significant opportunity for tenant representatives to engage in multiple learning situations. These experiences, shared with me through interviews with tenant representatives, illustrate a kind of civic learning that benefits the individual, the TPS and the community as a whole. Learning, in this situation has been both an expectation and a cumulative outcome of the tenant representative’s engagement as it informs their role as tenant representatives in their CHUs and in society at large.

Second, informal learning is, itself, a consequence of tenants’ participation; tenants’ informal learning, as was shown to me through the interviews, is embedded in tenants’ real experiences being involved in the TPS. In other words, tenants’ learning impacts their strategies for participation and their participation influences their learning. It is a mutually dependent process in which the consequences of learning shape further action and their action dictates their further learning.
6.6. Conclusion

Included in the wide range of motivations discussed in the previous chapter, tenant representatives described that participating in the management of their communities has been a learning opportunity for them. This empirical work has been done to determine the informal learning of those who participate in the management of their communities and to recognize how participation affects the individual representatives. In this Chapter I sought to understand the perceptions of tenant representatives on what happens as a result of their participation.

My goal was to assess the learning effects of participation beyond the boundaries of TCHC. I found that informal learning is a significant outcome of the tenant representatives’ involvement in the TPS. Tenant representatives’ reflection on the processes and the events within the system of tenant participation has been a method of acquiring critical knowledge about the authority and the decision-making structure at the TCHC.

I also found that, through their participation, tenant representatives further explored themselves and learned about others; this results in positive changes in self-esteem and respect to others, as well it helps build trust and reciprocity among tenant representatives. Self-directed learning projects were also identified as keys for developing necessary and effective skills to increase their chances of addressing their goals.

In sum, informal learning in the context of the TPS allows tenant representatives acquire the instrumental knowledge and the civic capacity that consequently allow them to become more active citizens and better advocates for their communities.
Chapter 7: Uncovering Challenges

7.1. Introduction: Tenant Participation System As a Terrain of Contested Beliefs

In Chapter 5, I suggested that a major motivation for tenant representatives to participate at the TPS is derived from their desire to influence decisions to make positive changes to their housing conditions. The evidence arising from the interviews strongly suggests that tenants’ self-directed learning projects have been instrumental in helping them to be active participants in the management of their housing communities. This, I argue, reflects the tenants’ passion to partake in their general welfare decision-making processes. In the previous chapter I concluded that the TPS, at least partially, guarantees this right of participation and helps to connect one of the most marginalized populations to mainstream local political power. In addition, I also discussed that the TPS helps tenants develop self-esteem and political competencies. This personal development in turn results in an increase in tenants’ political efficacy and encourages their further and deeper engagement in the affairs of their communities and beyond. This reciprocity reveals a complex relationship between the act of participation and the participating agents. Participation could potentially inspire and encourage participants to continue and increase the scope of their participation. On the other hand, participants, through their practice of participation, give meaning to the working definition of the term in each given context.

In this chapter I will examine the ways in which the participatory structure and the participating agents interact. I aim to explore the mutual dynamics that exists between the structure of participation and the participating agents. Why agents? Since my early days of engagement with this research I realized that there exists a multiplicity of perceptions, assumptions and expectations of tenant participation among the stakeholders. Tenants, tenant
representatives, staff and managers, all come to understand “tenant participation” in their own way. Here I would like to explore the diversity of ideas and examine how this diversity impacts the conduct of participation. I am also interested in further exploring the practicing structure of participation for these regulating guidelines determine the experiences and learning of the tenant participants and ultimately impacts participants’ motivation and informs their strategy for further engagement or disengagement.

There is a dynamic relationship between structure and agents. The structure evidently imposes norms and regulations; while tenants’ subjective experiences with those regulations affect how they perceive their role as the representatives. The representatives’ perception of their role constructs their practice of participation, which impacts how power circulates and thus, comes to reshape the perceived norms and regulations in operation. Revealing this implicit mutual interface has helped me identify a number of challenges within the practice of TPS. A discussion of the issues that these challenges raise and some consideration of how they can be addressed could help us better understand this phenomenon, thus better plan to scaling up or replicating such practices in this or other settings.

In this regard, I found two significant yet unnoticed challenges that became apparent from my extensive observations and my interviews with tenant representatives and the staff. First, I found that participants’ perception of what participation means and the format of that participation in this specific context presents what I have come to name the communicative problematique. This is primarily the result of the stakeholders’ unexamined perception and understanding of the concept of tenant participation that has helped to shape and reflect the characteristics of the participatory spaces and practices at the TCHC. Second, I found that the
procedures that develop the structure of TPS, namely the competitive elections and the CHU councils, host what I have come to name the procedural problematique.

7.2. Communicative Problematique: Diverse Perspectives, Multiple Experiences and the Lack of Communicative Reconciliation

Toronto Community Housing Corporation, TCHC, is more than just housing (TCHC, 2006, p.3); in Chapter 2, it was discussed that the TCHC aims to change the face and culture of social housing in Toronto (TCHC, 2003). Since its inception, the TCHC has emphasized its commitment to creating healthy communities in which tenants have a sense of social inclusion. The commitment to quality communities, along with the commitment to quality housing and services have been highlighted throughout the TCHC’s annual Business Plans (TCHC, 2003; TCHC, 2004; TCHC, 2006). Specified in the annual Business Plans are fair and equitable treatment of tenants and the respect for the human rights and dignity of all members of the community. Found in the TCHC’s mission statement is a focus on enhancing community resiliency.

To accomplish this TCHC management has incorporated tenant participation and developed community-based management plans to guide the practice of housing governance. In Chapter 5, I argued that the TPS is an effective element in narrowing the gap between the social housing management and the tenants. It is through this strategic focus that the TCHC is building a housing management structure that draws on the experiences of tenants, as well as the expertise of the staff. This suggests an enormous shift in values, roles and responsibilities of conventional public service management; rather than control by bureaucrat and expert elites, this calls for community-based management plans and tenant participation
to be essential parts of the governance structure of the TCHC. In so doing, TCHC managers and staff are expected to lead facilitative roles in developing partnerships with tenants and other community stakeholders. The shift to tenant involvement and community building mirrors an unfolding trend in public administration (Nalbandian, 1999). Nalbandian (1999, p.188) discusses this emerging trend in local governance; he indicates that political sensitivity, responsiveness to community values, and social equity are appending to already working values of managerial efficiency and formal accountability within the practice of local governance; he argues that this significant change is making a complex array of roles and responsibilities, “anchoring professionalism in local governance” (Table, 7.1).

In this section, I reflect on how TCHC staff and managers describe how they understand the incorporating of community participation into housing governance and examine their understanding of the process in relation to the expectations of tenant representatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Citizen engagement  
- Build and maintain a sense of community and value of public life | - Facilitate partnerships  
- Build bridges  
- Create community intersections  
- Transparent policy-making | - Community representation  
- Social equity  
- Individual rights |

Table 7.1: Emerging professionalism in Local Government (Nalbandian 2002 & 2005)

The TPS has been incorporated to build and maintain a sense of community and to engender a cooperative spirit among the tenants and the staff and management to co-formulate solutions in order to tackle local housing problems (Chapter 2). Although these are goals reiterated by the TCHC in various ways, it is misleading to assume that a clear consensus exists on what these goals indicate and the means by which these goals are to be attained. As one of the managers clarified the TPS was “so undefined; tenants got it and
defined it how they wanted to”. The common denominator of respondents’ perception of the process is that tenants or their representatives are somewhat permitted to be part of the management decisions for their housing communities, and that this idea has been materialized through the formation of CHU councils and the assignment of an annual parallel process of participatory budgeting to facilitate tenants’ engagement.

It was in early stages of the research that I realized this problem; the lack of common understanding of the concept of TPS among the participants creates varying kinds and degrees of contested and unmanageable expectations, which negatively and severely affect the outcome of TPS. I should emphasize that how diverse and, in some cases, divergent and incompatible, the common understandings and perceptions of the process are. For example TPS is perceived as an empowerment and liberating tool for tenants by some, while for others it is solely perceived as a management strategy to channel, and sometimes abort, the tenants’ complaining voice. It is fair to argue that this stark dis-census evidently impacts the conduct of participation.

The TCHC’s proposal for the participatory community housing governance creates requirements of the staff and management in trying to accommodate participatory involvement. It is expected that the staff and management translate the ideas generated through their collaboration with the tenant representatives into reality. However, I observed that the management and staff’s understanding of the process, as the facilitators of this process, significantly impacts how they collaborate with the tenant representatives.

The tenant representatives, staff and management, each develops unspoken expectations of what tenant participation should look like. These undocumented expectations involved the roles tenant representatives should play and how the participatory process
should be structured. In this section, I will build an argument that there is a disconnect between these various perceptions of participation and the actual participatory structure. I refer to this challenge as the “Communicative Problématique,” since it derives from a conflict between existing perceptions among the participating agents. Due to the fact that these perceptions are ever present, yet never interrogated I argue that these assumptions hinder effective processes of collaboration. In the following section, I further dig into and elaborate on these main points of divergence and disagreement.

**Frontline Staff**

One major challenge, that was evident in my observations of the TPS, is the attitude of the frontline staff towards the participation system and the tenant representatives as eligible partners in decision-making for the affairs of the communities they work in. "There is a lack of common understanding and clarity of the concepts among the CHU people," explained a legal advisor working with tenants. Throughout my observations I realized that the frontline staff is often unwilling to be part of the TPS and other such TCHC-sponsored community-based initiatives; they are not eager to working alongside the tenants. Rather, they prefer to stay in their formal roles and perform their bureaucratic duties. In a meeting where a recently assigned CHU manager was proposing some changes in the ways frontline staff should function and interact with tenant clients, one of the staff members suddenly complained that "these are all changes and changes, we don't like it." This abrupt reaction was a show of resistance to suggested changes in the ways frontline staff interact with the tenants. More importantly, this comment shows a desire by staff to stay distant from the people and communities they are meant to serve; this is further elaborated by the following
comments made by three CHU managers in relation to the involvement of frontline staff in tenants-centred initiatives:

They [frontline staff] do not want to be involved in the community planning meetings, [they] are unwilling to confront with tenant rep[resentative]s.

We have this problem here, the un-preparedness of staff to do participation, I do not know how to build the capacity in them to understand and feel that this is a better way. Do not be afraid of the conflicts [with tenants].

It [the problem of staff] is definitely a huge challenge, it is part of the resistant; they are the front… one of my staff [who was unwilling to accept participation as a principle] are on leave so I am happy now… It is lots of stress, [it is] a huge issue.

Throughout my observations and interviews I have noted numerous times that staff has refused to spend time with tenant representatives. For example, in one CHU, I observed that frontline staff refused to have business lunch with tenant representatives arguing that it is the "housing staff lunch" not that of the tenants. The CHU managers I interviewed are frustrated with the lack of desire by the frontline staff to participate in the TPS related activities. “Somehow they [frontline staff] are disparate for the whole thing,” said a CHU manager. Or “it is hard to communicate [to the frontline staff] what it is that we want to achieve here,” explained another manager. In a regular working day at one of the CHU offices, at my presence, a couple of staff was talking about TCHC’s emphasis on community; one of them, a frontline staff, said “community stuff is bullshit, keep their buildings clean and safer, they [tenants] are happy.”

The following remarks by managers also highlight this problem and call for an urgent strategy to alleviate these disempowering attitudes:

At our community festival, I encouraged staff to participate in the festival; all the 5 staff just stood there, only watched the tenants and did not participate in any activity… [In another occasion], I was at a super’s office. A tenant knocked. The super opened the door realizing that he is a tenant, closed the
door... Staff treats the tenants with no decency... And even they complain when we have tenants in the management of the buildings! I should say that 90% of the frontline [staff] simply do not get why we have TPS. [The staff believes that] all we are doing is giving power to bunch of lazy good for nothings to control them. They do not see the value in it [the TPS].

What is common among the staff is that they say “you keep cutting back, cutting back and then giving money to tenants to make decisions for. Or staff have discussed [amongst themselves] that tenants have not been able to manage their life very well that is why some of them find their lives in the social housing and now they have to manage 9 million dollars!

It seems challenging to convince the staff to treat tenants as equal partners or even accept their presence in the CHU decision-making domain. The assumption held by the frontline staff, as was clarified through my observations and interviews with managers and tenant representatives, is that tenants are incapable of effective participation and that inviting them to partake in the CHU budgeting is a waste of time and money; this attitude clearly impedes the growth of a participatory culture within collaborative initiatives with tenants. What the above quotes illustrate in the words of respondents is that the frontline staff generally does not believe in partnerships with tenants.

The staff has witnessed massive budget cuts as the result of decentralization and amalgamation of social housing provision in Toronto. In an informal conversation with one of the TCHC’s program managers, she explained that staff has always been instructed on efficient utilization of resources, results-based performance measurement and professional expertise for program planning and budget allocation. Specifically in this era of fiscal imbalances, the application of these indicators seems even more essential. She further added that, in relation to the participatory budgeting exercise, the staff often feels that the TCHC assigns the presumably incapable and inexperienced tenants to participate in housing expenditure management.
It is fair to argue that frontline staff is not generally aware of the rationale of participation and refer to the TPS as another, and perhaps unnecessary, burden. “Staff thought it was silly or was giving them extra work,” explained a manager. There are others who refer to it as the rhetoric of the day, or even another imposed item from the TCHC’s higher authorities that they have to find ways to accommodate. In fact the implementation of the TPS was initially sketched and planned for by the TCHC higher authorities and the tenant leaders, no representation of frontline staff was present in the process. I suspect that this lack of inclusion is also another reason why there is an unenthusiastic attitude towards the TPS among the frontline staff.

There are also other issues related to the social service environment in which staff interacts with the tenants in unequal terms. The staff are used to a relationship where they intrude upon tenants’ lives to scrutinize their expenses, determine their rents, and demand the arrears. In this zero-sum power relationship, the TPS calls for power sharing between the absolute power-holder, the staff, and the powerless tenants. The tenants are not accustomed to possessing the power to determine their welfare, and neither the tenants nor the staff is accustomed to working as partners. One of the highly engaged tenant representatives with no hesitation nor doubt, in the interview, referred to frontline staff as “wicked”, she explained that the only times they spend time in this community are “when they are giving notices to people”. As this and the following remarks by CHU managers highlight, this problem clearly creates tension:

You have to say people whose job is to monitor them [the tenants] to let them have a say; staff would say: What! These are the people who I watch everyday, now you are telling me that I cannot tell them what to do. The challenge is huge in the context of society as well as the housing and the social service delivery. This is not just a project; this is a life change… It is like having homeless people have a say in determining what food they want to
have or what type of programs they prefer to have, you would have the same problem with the homelessness sector staff.

The problem [with frontline staff] is attitude and perception. Behind the counter they hold power and there is no power on the other side of the counter. They don’t get it, I have discussion about it; they don’t get it... they don’t care and they’re rude, they’re racist. Every day I have a complaint. They work hard, but it is their attitude.

We house low-income populations; there are many challenges. These are not happy days when people [frontline staff and tenants] interact; working with poor people is synonymous to dictating to them.

Disconnectedness of staff with the realities of tenants’ lives and the common stigma associated with living in social housing create a disempowering attitude towards the tenants. A tenant representative, who brought up this issue to her CHU council, explained that many tenants are unhappy with the way that the frontline staff treats them. “They make inappropriate comments to tenants,” she said. This tenant representative further suggested, “what is most important is a sort of mutual understanding between tenant rep[resentative]s and the staff”. Another tenant representative described that,

When they [frontline staff] stay long in a position, the familiarity goes and tenants would say I would not go there to the office because s/he never treats me well, and as soon as that tenant goes to the office, the tension is there. No good morning, no how are you? They passed this, long ago. Staff has fights over who is going to answer the counter, because they know there is somebody; how that person feels... The majority of tenant reps are anti staff too.

She also pointed out that tenants do not officially make a complaint about staff members for fear of getting rejected and being denied services.

The question of staff is indeed an important one. They are in constant contact with the tenant population for the very tangible matters of their lives. Such harsh and seemingly impenetrable perceptions of tenants call for a focused agenda to ameliorate this reality. The importance of this change is paramount, if staff members do not join in promoting and
accommodating the participatory process and do not integrate these systemic changes into their practice, the chances that many local initiatives will fail are deemed to be high.

If staff doesn’t buy it [the idea of TP], then it doesn’t matter even if tenants buy it. There could be voluntary or involuntary sabotage the whole way. You have to put as much if not more effort for your staff than you do it for tenants.

Up to this point, I have highlighted the problematic attitude of staff towards the participation of tenants in the affairs of the community; but has the participatory process been inspirational to any of the staff? From my interviews there was discussion of a change in attitude among those staff members at the head office who were directly engaged in developmental stages of this participatory process. “It has created more interactions and a mutual respect between tenants and staff [at the head office],” explained a program manager. Like tenant representatives who expressed change in their perception and attitude towards each other and the TCHC as the result of their participation (Chapter 6); by the same token, it can be argued that the pessimism and infidelity among the staff could change to optimism and belief in TPS as the result of their education and participation. "The fence between the staff and the tenant representatives is being eliminated… it has also created more interactions and a mutual respect between the participating tenants and staff," explained a manager in response to the condition of trust between the tenant representatives and the staff at the head office. The following quotes by program managers at the head office well depict potential positive changes in staff attitude towards tenant participation.

I think the relationship between the staff and the tenant reps are improving, at the beginning it was a front to them, it was another master and they really pushed back. It was just as difficult to get the staff know what it was all about as it was to get the tenants to know what it is all about. It is improving; some staff tries to go out of their way to listen to them [tenants].

There are three staff working with me on this, at first they did not believe in having meetings with tenants, they did not think that it would work but now
after some months they say let’s have this consulted with tenants. They learned that there is nothing to fear and it is even easier this way.

At the beginning it was skepticism and doubt, staff thought it was silly and giving them extra work, it is now creating more interactions and a mutual respect between the tenants and the staff.

Throughout the initial process of developing a model of tenant participation, tenant leaders and the staff at the head office worked in close collaboration. Since then, they have been working together in various committee settings and it is this personal contact between the two parties that has helped enormously in the development of trust and a cooperative spirit among the tenant leaders and the TCHC’s head office staff, as these two quotes by tenant representatives explain:

The most amazing thing happened that we were directly working with staff, staff from head office who had never worked with tenants before and to see the change that happened in staff and even in the tenants the whole trust thing and the whole respect thing was a huge positive. 99% of the staff were open to us to say that how impressed they were and even some of them said things like "you blew my mind”,” said an active tenant.

I have trust towards TCHC because I know many of these people [head office staff] for a long time… For example, I have been in working groups and committees with them. The way people at TCHC head office treat us is very good and positive. Before, you would have phoned and died before you get a person to respond. Now even they apologize if they get back to us late! This is not the case for CHU staff at all; they talk down on people [emphasized by the interviewee]. The CEO has given me a hug but CHU staff believes that they are the second coming of God.

In this section I tried to explain that under common circumstances the frontline staff has not been actively part of changing the environment, change has therefore fallen to the managers and the community development staff who must bear the responsibility and engage in facilitating the creation of converging paths to political openness and accessibility of the management structure to the community. In addition, the managers and community development staff are also responsible for making sure that there is also administrative
viability. It is thus necessary to examine the ways in which managers and community development staff perceive the TPS at the CHU level and beyond, which is the focus of the following section.

Management Team

In the previous section, I described the staff perception of the TPS and highlighted their problematic attitude towards both tenants and the TPS. In this section, I will discuss that the commitment to participation on behalf of the management takes various shapes and forms.

The TPS is generally perceived as a process through which tenants are made aware of the TCHC’s programs and are consulted on the TCHC’s policies, as well as being permitted to participate in some priority setting exercises at their CHU. In so doing, the TCHC has set no restrictions on the degree of participation. Therefore, the quality of participation depends on the quality of interaction and collaboration among the tenant representatives, the staff and the management at any given CHU. In other words, it has been the TCHC that developed a participatory space, which facilitated and regulated the presence of tenant representatives in the CHU councils and has defined a citywide practice of participatory budgeting to ensure tenants’ participation. Yet, how this participatory process was to be implemented has largely been left to the discretion of the CHU management.

There seems to be four prevalent perceptions driving the participatory agenda (see Fig 7.1.) at the management level. First and foremost, the CHU managers, and the head office coordinators emphasized the benefit of TPS was that it provides a ground for information sharing between the tenants and the management (as articulated in the following four quotes by the managers). It is believed to be a win-win situation since both parties gain
useful information from this process. The tenant representatives inform the staff of the existing problems and the staff informs them of the policies and programs. In this way the TPS is widely believed to be an information sharing exercise coupled with instances of consultation processes as programmed by the management or asked for by the representatives.

I think it (TPS) works out to be a win-win situation both for myself as a manager and the tenants. In that they are made aware of some of the practices and policies that we are working under, otherwise they would not [have been];

The staff informs the tenant reps of the stuff and the reps also inform the management of the repair and maintenance needs and community development needs….CHU manager discusses his/her budget with the tenant reps and asks the residents to participate in the planning and priority settings. It is information sharing;

They [the tenant representatives] represent the tenants in the buildings and they have to bring issues, building issues to staff… Then we understand what are the issues more important to tenants, and then we are able to deliver on that. It’s a feedback mechanism;

We have to inform the residents of issues and our plans; like that we are changing the kitchen counters or even safety issues like someone is running down the street. We need to let people know.

Second of four perceptions of the TPS, is that it provides an opportunity for tenants to take some degree of ownership over their place of residence, which in turn serves three main goals. These goals include: reducing the housing expenditures, increasing community safety and enhancing policy efficiency. This perception is based on the idea that if tenants have pride in their communities, they will care more about their residential environment, as these four managers clarify:

The whole idea is that they take some ownership on the buildings. If they take more ownership in the buildings, then perhaps, our expenditure decreases, because if they do not care where they live, it tends to be more expensive to operate.
Being proud in your community has a dollar effect later on. Because you maintain your building and your area definitely better than someone who does not care. In longer term it is cheaper to maintain such communities, because there is less painting and less garbage collection.

Tenants are the primary users, so they have to be involved in shaping the decisions. It is win-win. If tenants are involved, the ownership increases, better stewardship, better care. They take better care; it is less cost to me. It is nicer place to live when people care.

I inherited a very unhealthy building. It is now very healthy, because there are so many people involved in it; there is much less complaints now.

Thirdly, the TPS is perceived as an accountability framework. Here the TCHC is seen to make the CHU management be accountable to the needs of the tenants and those of the communities they serve. Below are quotes by managers that highlight this idea:

The whole idea of resident involvement in decision-making is to make sure TCHC is accountable;

This is making sure that we are accountable for what we do;

Participation is the inherent piece of governance in TCHC now. It is clear that it has enhanced accountability. There are things that tenants are responsible for and there are things that we as the managers are accountable for tenants. It is one form to explore, improve, and discuss that accountability.

Part of the perception that the TPS serves as an accountability framework involved how managers and tenants perceive of each other. While some managers see tenant representatives as the “loyal opposition to the CHU manager”, or “the party in opposition”, others see them as part of the CHU management team, thus their role is rather to collaborate with the management and be accountable to the general tenant population. One CHU manager explains it this way, “we should clarify that as a tenant rep[resentative], you are part of the TCHC you cannot continue bashing, fighting against us.”
The fourth perception is that the TPS provides a learning opportunity for the tenant representatives to practice formal decision-making and community planning, which otherwise they would not have the opportunity for (this was discussed in details in Chapters 5 and 6). Thus, it is believed that the TPS contributes to tenants’ education, providing an opportunity for tenant representatives to gain interpersonal and managerial skills: “They get to exercise some decision-making ability around spending money”; “residents get experiences, like [learning] how to sit on the board and how to manage a session”, explained a manager.

I should note that not all of the managers highlighted all of these four justifications. Each manager expressed one or two dimensions as they saw fit, and the most emphasized point was perception one - expanded opportunities for information sharing among tenants, staff and the management, and with this an enhanced feeling of ownership among the tenants. In Fig 7.1, I summarize an elaborated framework of TPS as perceived, understood and rationalized by the manager respondents combined. Information sharing provides the main benefit of the TPS. Other cited attributes include a) creating the feeling of ownership amongst the tenant population, which helps reduce housing expenditure, enhance community safety and policy efficiency; b) Enhancing accountability through developing collaborative partnerships with tenants, which consequently builds trust amongst the tenant population; c) providing capacity building opportunities to engender local leadership within communities.
According to this diagram, the higher the rate of information sharing between the tenants and the management, which results in a stronger partnership between the two, the higher the feeling of ownership and inclusiveness among the tenants. It is believed that higher rate of information sharing develops into more relevant and appropriate housing services being delivered to the actual needs of the tenants, which results in more tenant satisfaction (increased accountability to the tenants), and stronger partnerships, with enhanced feeling of ownership by the community. And tenants’ learning, through the TPS, enhances the quality of communication and information sharing, thus creates more effective partnerships.

Figure 7.1. A Framework of TPS as perceived and rationalized by Managers
Managers’ Perceptions vs. Tenant Representatives’ Expectations of the TPS

In this section, I discuss a group of challenges I found hindering the establishment and sustenance of collaborative and partnership structures with tenants. These challenges persist for one specific reason and that is tenant representatives are not perceived as partners in decision-making. As illustrated in Figure 7.1, the predominant view of the TPS is information sharing. This act of information sharing is a two-way exercise where tenant representatives bring the concerns of the community to the CHU council for the management to respond to, and the management informs the representatives of the new policies and programs in order to get their approval and suggestions. In this exercise, tenant representatives are perceived as communicative partners of the management.

As the management’s extension to the community, they are expected to solely provide proposals and express their opinions and objections; tenant representatives are not perceived as the decision-makers; and this causes tenant representatives, especially more active and engaged ones, to shy away from the process. One of the tenant representatives described that since he became a tenant representative, he was asked to take information from the tenants to the management and vice versa. Now, after three years, he has become frustrated with the lack of opportunity to insert actual influence over the decisions; nonetheless, he emphasized the importance of “continuing on and fighting to improve things.”

Below are quotes from managers I interviewed that better clarify this point:

They have the skewed idea that they are the decision-makers but they are not. They are the opposition, they are supposed to scrutinize, give suggestions, protest. They are not making decisions on the operations of the company… They can recommend stuff for the maintenance and repair and then I look into it, if it does work, ok;

It should be clear that although we are partnering if you do something that we do not agree with it, we would slap you in the face;
Some [tenant representatives] were very eager and they thought they had all
the power to make any decisions. But they got quite a shock that no, that is
staff responsibility not yours. One example is just the use of space, some of
the tenant reps thought they can decide who uses what space in the buildings.

It always depends on what we need from tenants not what they want form us.

The above comments speak to the fact that the TPS is formally perceived as being
limited to an information sharing exercise. Where as the decision-making authority still rests
on the management, and this creates tension for tasks like setting the agenda, finalizing
decisions and so forth. This is evidently incompatible with TCHC’s own Community
Management Plan. The following quotes clearly indicate that some tenant representatives are
not content with their limited role as community liaisons:

We do not make decisions; we make proposals. Each tenant representative is
supposed to propose what benefits the tenants of his or her building and other
projects that benefit others as well… We can always express our concern.

People believe our job is to do what the management conveys… TPS is being
called, that is why some activist tenants work out of this circle.

[I am] frustrated with the process; management has the final say but still [I]
feel it is better than not having a say at all

This perspective that you help us but we do the job; perceiving the tenant
representatives solely as information sharing tools and communicative mediums rather than
genuine partners in decision-making has some negative consequences. On several occasions I
have observed that CHU councils have been the place of emotionally charged exchanges
where concerned and angry tenant representatives repeatedly complained about the lack of
action on behalf of the management, especially when tenant representatives have done their
part by collecting the required information and informing the management of the specific
problems of their buildings.
This problem is rooted in another issue which I found affecting the managers’ approach and attitude towards TPS, and that is the lack of financial and human resource for daily activities of the CHU, which often holds back the managers to meet the expectations of the tenant representatives.

As the following quote clarifies, the lack of financial resources to address tenants’ urgent needs discourage genuine participation on behalf of the tenant representatives:

This participatory democracy thing is fine but this f...ing building is torn apart. They want the building fixed as do I. Fix the building and let’s maintain the building to a standard then we can move forward [with the TPS], [and] that is not going to happen because we do not have the money. Now, then, the idea is: let’s share the issues and get some ownership here. So we are in a catch 22. It is sort of a buy in. I have heard it more than once that this is only a type of manipulation.

Nevertheless, this respondent suggested that the TPS is not “a complete waste of time”, TCHC should continue with the TPS, since it is nascent, he argued, and it continues to grow. There is also a tacit and twisted assumption about TPS as a human resource pool. Tapping into tenant representatives, as available human resources, would help TCHC in its day-to-day business. One manager clearly referred to this:

With smaller budgets tenants-involvement could make business sense, it is easier to pass along decisions and it is also to get buy-in. when you do not have enough money and staff you should know how to use the volunteer sector.

Earlier, it was discussed that the advent of TCHC is the result of a major decentralization scheme, transferring the social housing provision and management to the municipal level. In pursuit of establishing a management structure that could bear the requirements of a CHU, managers face the persistent challenges of budget restraints and short-staffing. Managers share these burdens with tenant representatives as the ears of the
community. Through the medium of CHU councils, the managers engaged the tenant representatives in approving and then delivering the TCHC's new policies to the general tenant population. The following quotes help to explicate the experiences of some tenant representatives resulting from the dominant perception of the TPS as an information sharing exercise. The following quotes suggest that CHU managers, deliberately or unintentionally, invite the participation of the tenant representatives in only what they realized appropriate.

- **TPS as downloading of staff responsibilities:**

  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 something for our work, please?"

  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.

  This 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.

- **TPS as a buy-in strategy:**

  For the first three years, the agenda was coming from the head office, there were all these policies that they wanted to approve and all these structures had to be set up. I understand that there was this new organization and I understand that they had to do this. But frankly for myself, you know, there was no education going on there have been so much business going on that there was no chance for education… For example: in the fist CMP, they were going to recover 5 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 5 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... 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, you know we were supposed to go back and report this to the tenants in our buildings. We get the blame for their policy. I told to the other tenant reps that I am personally not a shell for the corporation more especially when I do not agree with a policy. I am not here to enforce corporate policy. I am the tenant representative.

It is supposed to be tenant driven, but it’s not [been] so.
At CHU meetings, [there is] very little space, they bring their own agenda which is another thing I don’t consider [that] tenant participation because they have their own stuff that they want to deal with first and then there is a little point in the agenda for [all the other] eleven tenant representatives and then if you have something to bring, you bring it there.

In our PB exercise, [the CHU manager] told us what we had to do and pushed [his/her] agenda. I went to the head office and realized this that it is the tenant reps who should lead the process not the CHU manager… The CHU manager even said [s/he] would veto us “I am the manager”, [s/he said].

Even though some CHU managers promote participation but they support and prefer to get the participation for what they like. How about if a tenant rep disagrees with them, is there support for participation even if they do not agree?

[The CHU manager] gave us five pieces of paper stapled together to choose which idea you think was better, he already made plans but to choose which idea was better, you had to choose between the five layouts.

What the above comments suggest are the lack of opportunities for the representatives’ input and an overwhelming attention to the policies addressing the interests of the management and the TCHC. The immediate negative consequence of this has been dispiriting activist tenant representatives; as one of the managers indicated: “The best tenants are the ones who leave and we will be left with those who are resistant to change and want to keep their community homogenous”.

The last important comment I should include in this section is that CHU managers often complain that it is hard to communicate what it is that they want to achieve through these participatory meetings with the tenants. The experience of holding participatory
exercises to discuss the issues, needs and priorities of the CHUs have often led to raising the
expectations of tenant representatives, as this manager argued,

It is important that how we manage the process because we tend to, I guess, raise expectation levels, strictly because it becomes a communicative process, but it is hard to communicate well.

Almost every participatory session I attended, began as a brainstorming exercise to list all the problems in the community followed by categorizing them into groups and then prioritizing the groups via various modes of voting. This was done in order for CHU management and the TCHC to channel the resources and funding towards the most urgent priorities of the community as indicated by the tenant representatives and other participating stakeholders. The participation of tenant representatives in such meetings raised expectations that all the proposed items would eventually be resolved and that their job was to simply rank the priorities. Discussing and investigating all the needs of the community has one important implication and that is sooner or later TCHC would tackle all these problems. It was not clearly discussed that this was not the point of this exercise and that the fact remains that there are still overwhelming needs at the building and community level with too few resources to address them all. A CHU manager warns against the idea of expecting too much from participation where resources are tragically limited:

All the tenants are struggling because there are very limited resources, there is collaboration in the planning process but we have to be realistic too. There is opportunity for creativity and innovation for collaboration but there are no enough resources. In fairness there is no much to collaborate, and there is a danger of raising people’s expectation.

Discussion

The TCHC aims to institutionalize a community-centered management plan through the TPS. This move is based on a value system that respects and includes tenant involvement
in the process of housing management. As the following quote by one of the program managers at the head office clearly highlights, the TPS is based on a process that is value-laden and without which the TCHC would have been simply reduced to a simple landlord.

Tenant involvement is the cornerstone of this corporation. I don’t think that there could be any other way. If this corporation was only a landlord, we wouldn’t be useful to the City. Anyone can manage buildings, but helping people to be proud in their communities is what we aim to do,” said a manager.

It is through the TPS that the TCHC intends to integrate local politics and community into the realm of administration and bureaucracy. With this come new roles and responsibilities for the staff, the management and the tenants. In this setting success is dependent on “bridging the gaps along the dimensions connecting the culture of professional management with the culture of citizen engagement and participation” (Nalbandian, 2005, p.311). Connecting responsibilities is an effort to recognize how public management embeds public values and acknowledges the role government can play in building communities and strengthening democracies. Nalbandian (1999) argues that at a time when the value of government is being questioned, it is government’s new roles in building communities and enabling local democracy that can strengthen the legitimacy of professional government staff in the eyes of the citizenry. Thus it is fair to recognize the vital role the frontline staff should play in connecting tenants to the administrative machinery. The staff’s acknowledgement of new roles, combined with their commitment and responsibility to those roles are essential for the effective transformation of local government into a more transparent and civically engaged structure.

Nonetheless, it became evident that on many occasions the TCHC staff is not committed to their new roles and responsibilities of a participatory governance structure. Due
to the fact that the conduct of the staff significantly affects the overall relationship between the TCHC and the tenants, I examined my observations and interviews to explore why there was a reluctant acceptance of TPS. Although situations are different from CHU to CHU, the following can be summarized from my observations and interviews:

- Staff is not generally aware of what their should-be new roles;
- Staff is neither convinced nor thoroughly educated on the reasons justifying their new roles;
- Staff does not trust tenants as effective partners in community management;
- Staff is unwilling to accept change to bear more social and facilitative roles and responsibilities, because they feel more secure in their isolated domain of bureaucratic duties.

As I discussed in the previous Chapter there has been consequences in which few staff (especially those at the head office) were engaged in participatory exercises with tenants. In these situations, staff members often demonstrate increased enthusiasm to re-engage in participatory processes to perform their responsibilities of bridging between the administrative and recently assumed community-building duties.

As far as the management is concerned, there are two general perceptions; one is that tenant representatives are their communicative partners, and that the tenant representatives are the party in opposition. From this it can be seen that neither management nor staff recognize tenant representatives as legitimate partners in decision-making for their communities. The TPS is understood as an act of initiating and maintaining a dialogue, along with sharing information between the management and the tenant population. As long as both parties are engaged in a formal dialogue through the channel of the councils, the TPS is perceived to be in good standing. Within this trend, tension is created when tenant representatives aim for a solid position as equal partners in decision-making or when their
comments and concerns, although invited, are not taken seriously. Disregarding the tenant representatives’ suggestions seriously disheartens active representatives from further participation through the formal channels of the TPS. This leads to the representatives preferring to work outside of the TPS and within their developing informal networks. By not providing actual decision-making authority to more active tenant representatives, the TPS seems to be unable to fully embrace socially activist tenants and accommodate within its working framework their desire for social activism.

It became evident that managers’ perception of tenant representatives as their extensions to the communities they manage becomes problematic. Solely working as the messengers, tenant representatives soon lose trust in the TPS, which has been promoted as a genuine collaborative partnership between the management and the tenant population.

Despite all the above challenges I discussed above, neither tenant representatives nor management argued against the idea of tenant participation nor the chances it has provided; both managers and tenant representatives agree that tenant participation provides unique opportunities. However, it is the managers’ facilitation and practice of TPS that ultimately influences and shapes the CHU management structure; in other words, as one of the tenant representative put it “the good and the devil are in the working details”. The same tenant representative argued that the decision-making authority rests at the command of the management. This, as she alarmed, contradicts the accountability framework promoted throughout the TCHC’s Community Management Plan (TCHC, 2003):

I told our CHUM and HPO that I know that you are overloaded and I understand it totally, but as far as the tenants are concerned, that is too bad, your job is also to work with us and if it is too much, you should complain to the head office not short changing us. I told them privately that they have two responsibilities; one was corporate responsibility and according to CMP they
had the responsibility to the tenants too, it was in the CMP and I was to hold their feet to the fire.

Once more, I would like to emphasize that the community management at the TCHC is not equivalent to property management alone; it encompasses community development elements as well. Property management, according to the TCHC, is incorporated within the culture of tenant engagement and participation. The relationship structures created through interactions in dynamic, shared and reciprocal roles, to which, I have argued, the management ought to be accountable. In this collaborative housing management practice, the CHU managers and other senior staff are not only accountable to the TCHC mandated policy outcomes, but also to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the relationships and collaborative structures they engender and support.

7.3. Procedural Problematique

Prior to describing what I mean as the procedural problematique in the practice of the TPS, I need to refer to choice and participation as the two key concepts in the literature of public service management. Choice is the signifier of customer service approach that is rooted in the New Public Management (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), while participation symbolizes citizen-centred approach, which calls for citizens, not customers, to engage and steer the delivery of public services (Denhardt, 2003).

With exhaustive waiting lists, enormous financial constraints and a lack of political will amongst the layers of government to provide affordable housing, any debate on the role of choice in relation to social housing management seems at best irrelevant and out of context. However, the current decentralization agenda, from the provincial and federal government to the municipal level, engenders a notion of participation that is at the forefront
of New Public Service (Denhardt, 2003). In this section, my analysis is focused on the notion of participation and the morphology of its practice at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

Through the establishment of TCHC, a form of governance was chosen that decentralized the decision-making authority and provided a model of tenant representation. The social housing portfolio of the Greater Toronto Area was divided into twenty-seven Community Housing Units (CHUs), each run by one CHU manager who is in charge of the staffing and the overall supervision of the daily conduct of the CHU. In each CHU, a council comprised of tenant representatives was created to formally accommodate the Tenant Participation System. The councilors meet regularly with the management to set priorities, allocate resources and solve problems at the CHU level. Initially, this structure was sketched out through a collaborative exercise by the TCHC staff and a group of tenants. In 2003 and 2006, Toronto Community Housing held its first and second elections. Tenants in buildings and complexes all across the city had the opportunity to vote and elect a member(s) to represent their interests and needs on their CHU council. At the moment, TCHC’s 164,000 tenants are represented by 390 elected tenants in 27 CHU councils.

Earlier I presented the format of tenant participation at the TCHC (Chapter 2) and discussed tenants’ motivations (Chapter 5) for and their learning (Chapter 6) through their engagement at the TPS. Then, in the previous section I presented one significant challenge, which I referred to as the communicative problematique that, I argued, significantly affects the scope of tenant participation within the CHU management. Here in this section, I critically reflect on the structure and format of TPS and discuss the ways in which the structure affects the overall culture of tenant participation; in so doing, I present another host
of challenges, which I refer to as the procedural problematique that, I will argue, work to
demobilize the entropy and dynamics of tenant participation. Here I should point out that
although the TCHC recognizes and nurtures informal tenant participation and a good number
of inclusive and participatory initiatives have arisen informally, it is the formal and official
system of tenant participation, TPS, that is the subject of my analysis in this section.

TPS: Blanket Policy and Layered Representation

As I described earlier, THC authorities developed a representation structure as the
main format of tenant participation. TCHC decided to channel tenant participation into a
format of CHU councils, comprising of tenant representatives. Throughout my interviews
and observations, I found two reasons explaining why TCHC chose to do so. I understood
that local and neighbourhood-based councils are perceived by TCHC management as already
tested and widely accepted models in political decision-making structures, which are
believed to be feasible, easily manageable and replicable. In addition the geography and
constituency, in this model of representation, are well defined which helps delineate who can
participate, especially in a large geographical region such as the Greater Toronto Area. In
addition, the adoption of a geographically-defined representative model reflects the earlier
findings in the previous section that the TPS is, first and foremost, perceived to be an
information sharing exercise that can be structured through the participation of the
representatives of the tenant population.

In each CHU, the TPS begins with a competitive election to elect tenant
representatives, and the TPS is, then, heavily dependent on the participation of those elected
representatives. The result of founding the TPS simply on a representation model I argue is
riddled with problems. I argue that this mode of tenant participation helps to fragment the
community, leaves the power in the hands of a few and creates extremely challenging councils to work with. Thus, the outcome based on this model is unlikely to advance the cause for a more vibrant and engaged communities.

**The Problematic Nature of Tenant Election**

Tenant election is the starting point for the TPS materializing tenant participation into the format of a CHU council. Prior to the elections, each CHU manager dedicates time and resources to heighten the level of tenants’ presence in both the pre-election processes of community meetings and candidate nomination, as well as on the election day. Brochures and posters are distributed to inform the tenants of the opportunities available for them to have a say in the making and shaping of the CHU decision-making processes through the TPS. All-candidates community meetings are held so that the candidates could discuss their vision and priorities. In short, the CHU management attempts to mobilize the community to take part in the election through any possible venues and by any feasible means. This has been the case for the first two elections in 2003 and 2006, which I have personally observed.

The fact that community participation is initially tied to a competitive election has some significant negative consequences. For example, in one community fifteen candidates were competing for five positions, throughout the pre-election meetings these fifteen tenants, covering almost all the major ethnic backgrounds of tenants living in this CHU, collaboratively engaged in analyzing local needs and community affairs. However, the election process privileged five of them, all but one from one religious and geographical background, over others. Soon after, the initiated collaboration amongst them all ceased to exist. The CHU manager, who intended to maintain the collaborative environment, invited all the candidates to a TCHC-wide tenant representative forum; only the five winning candidates
showed up. In this case, I personally observed how the enthusiasm, energy and wisdom of a
group of diverse members of the community were dismissed simply due to the structural
design of the TPS. Another example, in a building where most residents are originally from
one country, the sense of community was reported to be seriously in jeopardy when two
candidates from two different lingual backgrounds were competing for the one council
position.

Although, the process of tenant election is a positive factor for inviting passionate
tenant candidates and mobilizing the community for the election day, it tends to fragment the
community along ethnic and other lines of cleavage. The following three quotes by managers
indicate this problem:

Depending on the community, competition for election can fragment the
community;

It seems that people only had this contest, because they did not like the person
not because of the greater good of the community… It was strategic initiative
to get together against one another;

We had some fragmentation in the community as a result of election; we had
backslapping and rumor mongering.

I should add that elections are generally perceived as instruments to assign legitimate
decision-making power to a group of representatives. Formal elections do not imply
participation, collaboration and partnership, rather they signify competition, control and
power over others. Assigning elections as the major component and as a means of convening
the TPS seems to promote competition by reinforcing the social imbalances and reproducing
relationships of unequal power-sharing in the communities. Ethnic, religious, gender and
regional identity divisions are likely to be found within individual CHU councils. As one of the managers explained TCHC has rather focused on quantitative aspects of the participation:

We rushed too much in getting results and not understanding the underline motives. There was over focus on how many elections and how many acclamations and the number of candidates.

In addition, it is naïve to assume that local communities are the natural home of democratic values. The competitive election process allows for this perception and endorses an uncritical process to lead and shape the development of the housing communities and CHU councils. In Chapter 5, I described the tenants’ motivations, there, I argued that the election had become a vehicle for some tenants to drive their personal agenda, which might or might not be in line with the community-based paradigm of the TCHC. For example some tenants perceive this role as a way to (re) gain social status within their community, while others seek to establish personal links to the management.

The election of tenant representatives and the working of tenant councils are conducted in geographically defined communities. Each CHU is home to one tenant council and the tenants living in one CHU are seen as members of one community. In more dense neighbourhoods, like downtown CHUs, the CHUs are geographically smaller and often are comprised of attached buildings and complexes. However, in other CHUs, there are buildings that are 10 km apart and there has been no association among the tenants prior to the establishment of the TPS.

While in some CHUs tenant representatives feel that they are, somewhat, part of a same community, in others, it is the management’s job to hold the group together as one community. I have observed council meetings where the CHU manager repeatedly reminded the representatives that they were part of one CHU and one community to maintain respectful
collaboration. This idea of being members of one community with common concerns has become consciously and forcefully instilled into the councils. Due to the tacit notion of homogeneity associated with the concept of community, I have observed that the structure of participation has denied differences and avoid the differences to be debated at the council. In simple words, as this manager explained, “we want them to feel part of a community in this grid that TCHC manufactured”.

Lack of a Participatory Culture in the CHU Councils

Followed by a competitive election, the CHU councils, comprised of tenant representatives, begin to work. The competitive nature of the elections also affects the working of the councils; and in this competitive struggle, the powerful personalities tend to dominate and strategize to maximize their benefit from their participation at the council.

CHU councils are generally described as forums dominated by power struggles and driven by stronger personalities. With no exception, all the respondents reported on this challenging nature of the CHU councils. “CHU Councils are difficult, in every council I had this was always the case that there were one or two stronger persons who dominate the council,” explained a manager. Or as this other manager described stronger personalities tend to take over, “then the rest of them start to feel disenfranchised, they [stronger personalities] do intimidate others, put others down and lead the council to emotional outburst, even [they] shout at the CHU staff.”

For those tenants who come up, there was an issue of power and control, who wants to run that group... It was a tenant group but it was not participatory and was not what we meant, they did not want to let other people in. It was a big challenge;

Sometimes the tenant council feels that they are the ones that make the decisions and they say that we do not like this grant. Why are you doing this
for seniors? People’s prejudices and biases come into play in these meetings. I can say the meetings are dysfunctional.

In one of the communities, the tenant representative who had been elected with the most number of votes believed that he should have the strongest say in the council. His argument was that since the tenants in his building nominated him for his knowledge of “the importance of the things that had to be done” he should now be the person in charge. In the same CHU, a tenant representative who received $1000 to organize a community event postponed the event to a date closer to the coming tenant election and used the occasion for his campaign.

Another subtle yet important observation I made was that tenant representatives do generally tend to associate themselves with the TCHC more often than with the general tenant population. This is evident in their indifferent attitude towards communicating with other tenants and their dispirited response to tenants calling for attention to their individual problems, as this active tenant told me in an informal conversation:

The people who are involved in it, are tenant reps not the tenants… all of a sudden the tenant reps think that they are the employees… There is no real info sharing [between the representatives and the tenants].

The fact that the tenant representatives are elected by the tenants puts them in a position to be recognized as legitimate representatives and references in their CHUS. I have observed that tenant representatives argue that they should be the references of the community and inquires should be rather referred to them not to the tenants: “do not go to them [tenants], come to me [their representative]”, replied a tenant representative to a manager when was asked about a proposal. One of the managers explain

I say [to the tenant representatives that] this is the expectation that you go back to the tenants, [but] it rarely happens. I call for a [general tenant]
meeting and they [tenant representatives] piggy back for the meeting; they do not take the initiative to do it themselves.

Another significant point I make here is that tenant representatives do not tend to collaborate for a common cause; as one of the managers explain:

No collective action pursued by tenant reps at all. It was only individual initiatives that we supported.

Although there have been several cases of collaboration between tenants and individual tenant representatives or even among the representatives in various TCHC-wide committees, but no CHU manager that I interviewed reported any collective endeavor by the tenant representatives as a group of tenants living in one CHU and working in the same council. This is a reflection of my earlier argument that the TPS is not perceived as a collaborative practice, but rather it is perceived as an information sharing exercise between the individual representatives and the management. The following quotes by the tenant representatives clearly support this argument.

Tenant meetings are the time to have access to the manager and tell … [the CHU manager] 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 twenty-four hour notice so I told the CHU manager;

Council does not talk to each other much but mostly focused on engagement with manager;

Nothing collectively done with other tenant reps, but with the help of the Health Promotion Officer and partnership with community organizations we organized a community information session that other tenant reps also attended. I cannot say that Tenant council is very active… Once the manager is there, it gets frustrating, people wants to talk to him and get answers and arguing, rather than moving along and getting things done.

There are many more examples indicating that CHU councils have become less and less relevant in mobilizing the community and initiating collective endeavours. From my
extensive hours of observations of the CHU councils, I can also add that the councils tend to become voting and venting sessions, as this quote by a tenant representative also confirms: “Tenant council does not have much discussion about issues but we do vote on a lot of things”.

There are other structural challenges associated with the tenant council and how the TCHC assigns them to operate. However, a detailed analysis of these issues is beyond the scope of this chapter. The final procedural problem I discuss in this section deals with the lack of appropriate capacity building programs for tenant representatives; the TCHC’s training programs did not seem to illuminate the big picture of the TPS for the tenant representatives, as this quote by one of the managers highlights:

We have given quite a lot of material to the tenant reps in terms of their roles and responsibilities but I don’t think every tenant rep still understands it.

I have attended several of the workshops that TCHC organized to train the tenant representatives. These have been lecture style 30-45 min power-point presentations to inform the tenants of some general policies and procedures at the TCHC. As two of the managers argued, the training is neither hands-on nor in line with adult education practices.

We do not do very good training. And for us a good training is to show a power point presentation… I do not think that we have a clear plan about capacity building… TCHC staff does not see this as a critical focus and really push it;

We have given tenant council a lot of responsibility… but there has not been the same amount of training.

In one of the general tenant forums, when a tenant representative was asked to explain a participatory process, she referred to a flipchart, a marker and a pack of dots, explaining that as a community facilitator one should write down the needs of the community
and ask the tenants to put their dots by the items they believe are the most important to their community. In addition to raising expectations, holding such routine planning sessions, tacitly shapes the tenants’ perception of the nature and the conduct of community-based participatory practices. This and other such examples demonstrate that there are tenant representatives who understand the participatory processes simply as group ranking exercises; where individual representatives, who are believed to possess the knowledge required, list the needs and the problems of their communities followed by prioritizing them via voting.

In this section, I tried to uncover some of the prominent challenges, referred to as the procedural problematique. Procedural problematique refers to the systemic problems found within the assigned procedures, hindering an effective institutionalization of participation into the culture and practice of community housing governance. The challenges I referred to were associated with the tenant election and CHU councils as the main projections of the TPS. In short, by studying competitive elections and CHU councils within the time-frame of this research, I argue that these designated procedures potentially tend to

- limit the scope of participation to the CHU councils;
- help provide and legitimize a forum for those who seek exclusive control over the agenda;
- raise hard-to-address expectations; and
- fragment the communities along various lines of cleavage.

Therefore, causing tenants’ enthusiasm fade for further engagement through the formal channels of the TPS.
7.4. Conclusion

In this Chapter, I deconstructed the mutual dynamics that exist between the structure of participation and the participating agents. Early on, I emphasized that although the TPS has been defined by the TCHC, it is wrong to assume that it can be objectively or technically practiced based on the TCHC’s blueprint. I demonstrated that the staff and management have diverse perspectives and multiple experiences with regard to the concept of participatory action. Coupled with these various perspectives is the lack of deliberation on the participatory process, which create a host of challenges that I referred to as the communicative problematique. In other words, it has been the staff’s unexamined perception and understanding of the concept of participation that has helped (both negatively and positively) to shape and reflect the characteristics of the participatory spaces and practices at the TCHC. To put it rather blunt, the simple question of “what it is that we want to achieve through TPS?” has not been sufficiently discussed and planned for by the TCHC management and staff members responsible for its practice. Consequently, TPS was molded in rather confusing format for the tenant representatives.

Next, I demonstrated that the formal system of participation, a format chosen to institutionalize the practice of participation at the TCHC communities, designated a structure that host another set of challenges in harnessing, sustaining and advocating for progressive community engagement and development. The TPS, as I suggested in this Chapter, tends to bureaucratize participation and thus renders it prone to such faults as slowing the pace of innovation, stratifying the communities into hierarchical structures and reinforcing existing power imbalances within the social fabric of the communities. I would like to conclude this
Chapter with a quote by one of the program managers that brilliantly suggests an alternative path for institutionalizing participation.

For more quality participation we do not need more institutionalized system. Where is the fluidity of having things happen without bylaws and refs and systems? What we need to do is to harness the fluidity of what being involved and empowered, and participation is all about that. Let people organically focus on what people are interested in and have passion for, even angry passionate. Do not drag them for things that are not interesting for them.
Chapter 8: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

In the previous chapters, the research core centred on understanding the dynamics of participation and learning at the Tenant Participation System. In order to address this, I first identified the motivations of tenant representatives for their participation and secondly I explored, catalogued and analyzed the tenant representatives’ informal learning processes, finally I determined two clusters of challenges, which I found impeding the growth of a participatory culture in TCHC community governance. In this final chapter, I provide a summary of findings and conclude the discussion by placing the TPS within the framework of grand theories of democracy. In the last section I present recommendations for future research and practice.

8.1. Summary and Conclusions

In this study I tried to integrate concepts across various disciplines in social sciences. The multi-disciplinary nature of the research provides a sophisticated understanding of the complexities associated with a presumably simple notion of “tenant participation” in the management of their communities. By examining the interactions between the tenants, staff and the structure of participation, this research broadens our understanding of the challenges within the practice of participation that hinders the participatory dynamism. And in the following section, through a reflective exercise, filtering this micro-practice of community participation through four grand theories of democracy, this research brings down Ivory-Tower philosophical debates on democracy into real life.

As a conclusion, I discuss the ways in which this research builds on and extends the literature regarding the motivational factors and learning of community members through
involvement in community and local governance practices. As was discussed (Chapters 5 and 6) a majority of the findings are congruent with the theoretical assumptions about the effects of participation on citizens. By applying qualitative methods, this study depicts an alternative location for tenant engagement thus extends what is known about civic engagement in the context of social housing communities and the effects of engagement on those tenants who are involved.

By investigating why tenants join the TPS, this research extends our understanding of why people become civically engaged. In this study I outline some connections between motivations, activities and informal learning of tenant representatives within a project where they participate in the decision-making on issues that affect their communities. As has been noted in the literature, people are motivated to participate for a variety of reasons, the most common being that they see a real need or potential for change in their community. However, in contrast to past research, tenant representatives also got engaged out of a desire to learn – to learn more about their community, the TCHC, and local political procedures. Motivation also often came from a history of community involvement and activism, as well as encouragement by other tenants or staff. In analyzing tenants’ motivations I concluded that there were three conditions making participation happen. One was the desire to influence authority over decisions affecting their housing conditions; second was the idea that participation has important benefits for the participant; third was a sense of qualification, in other words, there was a feeling that they are more qualified than other tenants thus they chose to step forward and represent their communities. For those who stayed on for the second term, I found two additional explanations. Those tenant representatives whose reasons to participate were accommodated extended their commitment. In other words, those
participants who have been engaged in conventions and cooperation or competition with other representatives chose to stay on board for the second term.

These combinations of motivations also reflect the diverse definitions of volunteering (see Chapter 5; Cnaan et al., 1996): each participant had varying amounts of volition (from choosing to participate on their own to being encouraged or pressured by others) and intended beneficiaries (from personal benefits to contributing to the community to supporting future generations).

This study also contributes to the literature on civic engagement by further expanding the conceptualization of informal learning and incorporating it in the context of civic and citizenship learning. The existing literature on civic engagement focuses on how groups of people come together to plan and act in response to the problems their communities face (Campbell, 2006, p. 147), however, in this research the focus is on individuals and the reciprocal relationships between individual citizens and their civic participation. Informal learning through the Tenant Participation System emerged into several themes. Learning related to increased self-confidence and overcoming fear of authority helped to radically transform the traditional tenant-management relationship into “be[ing] part of the change we would like to see.” This in turn helped foster learning within and beyond the housing community, in the areas of communication, collaboration, leadership and political efficacy. An increased understanding of the needs within one’s own community was connected to one’s understanding of the needs of other CHUs, and an increased understanding of how change happens at each level. In addition, the skills learned through the participatory process also resulted in increased managerial efficiency – a self-looping process whereby the participatory project improves through time and through the very act of participation. I also
discussed that learning, in this case, occurred not only through observation and engagement but also through struggle. The TPS was found to be a space in which informal learning occurs through both cooperation and competition; regardless it allows participants develop self-esteem and civic capacity to further their engagement within or beyond their communities.

This research also captures a wide range of participatory effects, a summary of those effects include:

- Increased awareness of decision-making structure of social housing governance in the Greater Toronto Area;
- Increased awareness of local political structure;
- Increased awareness of the complexities surrounding the problematic issues of social housing management.
- Increased interest in and knowledge about local/community problems;
- Improved awareness of and respect for other tenants’ perspectives;
- Newly developed relationships with other tenants, tenant representatives, CHU staff, TCHC authorities and local politicians;
- Improved sense of political efficacy;
- Improved interpersonal, communicative, organizational and civic skills;
- Strengthened commitment to further community and political action.

The themes of motivations and informal learning are not isolated instances, but rather interact in dynamic ways that may increase participatory citizenship. The learning reported by tenant representatives supports the argument posed by many democratic theorists that participation in local governance encourages citizenship learning and promotes better democracy by providing people with the very tools they need to participate (Denhardt &

Through volunteering as representatives, tenants developed knowledge, skills and attitudes that support the participatory mode of citizenship. This includes increased knowledge of how governance structures function, as well as increased communication and negotiation skills. This enabled the tenant representatives to act more effectively inside the TCHC and even in wider political arenas such as municipal politics. Tenant representatives also reported increased confidence in themselves and their ability to impact decisions. Together these factors suggest that the political efficacy of tenants was increased through their activities as tenant representatives. Tenants also reported increased connections to and knowledge about their communities and the people who comprised them.

The learning reported by tenants helps to encourage smoother functioning of the Tenant Participation System and the overall management structure of the organization itself. Overall the learning reviewed in this study provides evidence to support the claim that the act of participation enhances democratic processes as participants learn needed skills, knowledge and behaviour through the practice of decision-making.

In the previous chapter, I presented two groups of challenges as were recorded through my observations and reported by tenant representatives and staff. First, I articulated that neither staff and management nor tenants engaged in a discussion on the purpose of participation. Therefore, the unexamined understanding of participation has, at least in some cases, molded confusing forms of practices that complicate the process and eventually hinder the growth of participatory culture within the organization. Second I provided evidence on the challenges that the chosen format of participation fosters; conceiving community
participation through holding competitive elections and the problematic nature of CHU
councils, in which power struggles dominate the process both challenge the conversion of the
hierarchical paradigm of property management into a collaborative and horizontal approach
to property management as a tool for community development.

Before closing the argument, I assume another task and that is to theoretically
examine the TPS, as a practice of democracy, vis-à-vis grand theories of democracy. In other
words, I believe establishing a dialogue between the TPS and democratic theories provides a
learning opportunity through which both the TPS and the underpinning theories of
democracy would be further explored and deeper understood.

8.2. TPS: A Close Encounter of a Theoretical Kind

Although the notion of democracy has widespread support, there is no consensus as to
the institutions it requires. Each theory of democracy prescribes an institutional arrangement
(i.e. regular and competitive elections) to protect its fundamental values (i.e. individual rights
and public accountability) (Fung, 2007). In other words, each school selects an institutional
arrangement as the means to achieve its goal — protecting the values from which it derives
(Fung, 2007). In this section, I bring four theories of democracy to meet the practice of tenant
participation system in order to examine the findings and implications of my research
through various lenses of democratic thought. This situated analysis of the micro-practice of
democracy will serve to practically enlighten the democratic values embedded in the
proposed grand theories of democracy, which, in turn, guide the institutional arrangements
each requires. As values are demonstrated by institutions and their practices, the examination
of a contemporary case of democratic practice at the micro-level will enlighten the general value-frameworks of the four theories of democracy I've chosen to explore.

This kind of reasoning is what Freire refers to as praxis, a kind of reflection on action to enrich the theory for further action. Or as Richardson (1994 & 2002) more recently explains, working backwards from practice is a form of practical reasoning; a rational and dynamic deliberation on our common affairs with the aim of perpetually determining our ends. In nutshell, I am working on the assumption that any conception of democracy aims to justify its own public institutions based on its own definition of democratic values. As a result, reflecting on a specific democratic institution can function to guide or even transform the democratic conception from which it originates. In this section, I will apply a process of practical reasoning to analyze a specific institutional arrangement and outcome in context, so as to contribute to the debate on the values embedded in contemporary democratic theories.

Thin Democracy

The prominent thinkers on this front are Joseph Schumpeter (1942) and, more recently, William Riker (1982). For Riker, democracy is more desirable than other systems of government because it protects the private liberties of citizens while keeping political leaders accountable to its citizens. Advocates for thin democracy prescribe regular competitive elections as the central institution of democratic government. Through these elections, citizens have the opportunity to unseat leaders who violate their rights in a way or another. This approach confirms the artificial nature of political authority. As Kateb (1981, p. 357) puts it: “when its fate is joined to the workings of the electoral system, political authority is demystified.”
Riker is in strong disagreement with popular norms of democratic decision-making, which are more demanding than those proposed by thin democracy. For him, ideas such as self-government through popular participation and the notion of the common good are impossible to achieve. Schumpeter (1987), Riker’s intellectual father, goes even further to argue that most citizens are not sufficiently informed about public affairs and that they have no coherent views on most socio-political issues. Even if citizens were better informed, Riker, persuaded by social choice theory, argues that under general conditions there is no unique way to combine the preferences of many individuals into a single aggregated choice (Riker, 1982, p. 235):

The outcomes of voting are not necessarily fair and true amalgamations of voters’ values… and that the majorities that make outcomes are themselves in flux.

As a result, he concludes that concepts like “self-government” and “common good” do not rationally make sense nor do they work. Consequently, Riker does not believe that elections serve the function of enabling citizens to rule themselves by selecting the leaders or policies that directly represent their interests. Elections solely give the "right to rule" to the victorious party until the next election. Kateb (1981) defends this argument, adding that elections realize the value of public accountability by providing regular occasions for leaders to explain their decisions to citizens and for citizens to endorse or sanction leaders based on these accounts.

According to scholars advocating thin democracy, political equality (as opposed to self-government) is achieved when everyone has an equal right to stand for office and to vote. In addition, by allowing the electorate to unseat rulers who violate liberties, liberty itself is protected. So, without demanding too much time, energy, or commitment from
citizens, or expecting too much beyond their putatively limited capacities, liberty and political equality are conserved while leaving citizens ample room for their individual pursuits.

**Polyarchal Democracy**

Unlike thin democrats, who believe that citizens aren't able to identify their collective interest and act on their own interests in a coherent fashion, polyarchists, here represented by Robert Dahl, believe that citizens do have political interests and that these individuals' interests can be combined. In Dahl's ideal of democracy, the interests, opinions, and judgments of citizens determine the content of laws and public policies. Dahl seems to be aware of the reasons behind Riker's skepticism about the problems of achieving a social choice, but he goes beyond Riker to argue that government is more democratic when the content of laws and policies is closer to the position of the median voter (Dahl, 1989). Dahl refers to polyarchy as:

> A set of institutions and procedures ensuring that effective political decision-makers are chosen in free and fair elections, under conditions in which citizens have access to diverse sources of independent information, can express their political opinions freely and can organize and join parties and other organizations without fear of government retaliation,” (Coppedge, 2007, p. 1)

Dahl (1985) believes that individuals are generally the best judges of their own interests. Therefore, laws and policies that derive from the views of citizens are more likely to serve them well. According to Dahl, every individual is the best judge of his/her own interest and each person’s interest must count equally in determining law and public policy. Consequently, every citizen should have an equal opportunity to participate effectively and
exercise influence over political decisions. Although Dahl expresses a strong commitment to political equality, he questions the feasibility of developing coherent political positions that accurately reflect everybody’s interests in the complex societies of today (Dahl, 1989). Given this, he reframes his commitment to political equality by arguing that citizens should have equal opportunities to develop “enlightened understandings” about their political choices and preferences (Dahl, 1985). "Reason" for him is the process of reaching an "enlightened understanding". In “A Preface to Economic Democracy” (1985), he argues that the process of democratic governance should derive laws from citizens in order to advance public welfare. His main concern, however, seems to be the feasibility of an actual polyarchy within the complex logic of contemporary bureaucracy (Dahl, 1989).

According to these values, desirable institutions are those that create a government that is responsive to the interests and political views of citizens by producing laws and policies that are the aggregate of such interests and political views. In this way, it is not the governing elites who determine the interests of citizens and the common good, on the contrary, the common good is embedded in the processes of collective democratic decision-making that promote citizen interests. Like thin democracy, polyarchy takes as its starting point free and fair competitive elections and equal rights to hold political office, both of which, presumably, ensure that every individual is heard equally in the process of governance. Polyarchy, however, in Dahl’s view, must foster supplementary institutions to enable people to reach an "enlightened understanding". To achieve this he argues that sufficient resources should be provided and secured to enable the expression of diverse opinions from a variety of sources through the strong presence of associations and media. Information from all sources should also be made available to inform the opinion-
shaping/making processes. The presence of a dynamic civil society sector might satisfy Dahl’s imperative to ensure adequate citizen participation in the political matters of society.

In his latest article, however, Dahl (2005) has taken a more cynical stand and has distanced his definition of polyarchy from the existing workings of democracy in America; he argues that for a governance system to be called a polyarchal democracy, it has to encompass the following six democratic institutions (p. 197):

1. Elected representation;
2. Free, fair and frequent elections;
3. Freedom of expression;
4. Alternative and independent sources of information;
5. Independent associations;
6. Inclusive citizenship.

For Dahl (2005: 197), solidly established contemporary democracies, judged against this set of democratic criteria, display major shortcomings, at least in maintaining institutions of inclusive citizenship:

In many countries, the task is to achieve democratization up to the level of polyarchal democracy. But the challenge to citizens in the older democracies is to discover how they might achieve a level of democratization beyond polyarchal democracy (Dahl, 2005, p. 197).

**Deliberative Democracy**

For deliberative democrats, the notion of self-governance is more demanding than that of Dahl's. While they believe that policies and laws should be derived from citizens' opinions and political views, they also argue that government actions should be in line with the wishes of each individual citizen. For Schumpeter, this proposition is absurd and even irrational. For Dahl, it is unnecessarily demanding in the context of our contemporary world.
Gutmann (1996) and other deliberative democrats argue that deliberative democracy can meet this standard by setting laws and policies. The deliberative idea of democracy (collective political power) is primarily based on the "ideal of political justification", which is itself based on the concept of "free public reasoning among equals". As a result, the exercise of deliberative democracy requires deliberative institutions that provide "favorable conditions for participation, association and expression" in order to "facilitate free discussion among equals." (Cohen, 1996:; p. 99 & Gutmann, 1996, p. 344)

Self-government, in this sense, is a kind of ruling founded on public reasoning. This results in a government that is both politically justified as it reflects the interests of the citizenry and publicly accountable. For public reasoning to be realized, adherence to such values as "individual autonomy" and "political equality" should be secured. This means that everyone's autonomy is respected and that all individuals enjoy equal opportunities to take part in the exchange process (public reasoning) that results in laws and policies. Other basic principles from both thin democracy and polyarchy such as private liberty are, of course, necessary for deliberative democrats, in order to ensure that individuals autonomously propose and judge political views during the process of public reasoning (Cohen, 1996). This process of public reasoning applies to policy making as well as implementing and monitoring of policy programs (Richardson, 2002).

In deliberative democracy, people's views and interests do change through the process of self-governance, as ideas collide through the interactive process of public reasoning. The exposure to new information and to the values and political views of others facilitates change in individuals' perceptions, attitudes, behaviors and even social actions. This notion of "continuous view (re)formation” in the sphere of public reasoning is what distinguishes
deliberative democrats from Dahl's view of polyarchy. In polyarchal terms, opinions and values are assumed to be constant and given. In deliberative democracy, the assumption of the potential to transform values and goals suggests the feasibility of achieving consensus (or at least reducing disagreement) on laws and policies that have been generated through the practice of deliberative politics. Habermasian notions of "communicative rationality" and the development of “inter-subjectivity” help to theoretically explain this convergence of diverse value systems and the process of consensus-making among diverse individuals and groups.

Richardson (2002, p.179-241) advocates for public institutions to "mirror" the ideal of public reasoning. These institutions can serve to forge significant compromises and convert vague values into coherent and practical ones. For deliberative democrats, genuine public reasoning is a process through which vague and abstract goals, in the context of a specific problem, are converted to specific and coherent action plans. In polyarchy, as I mentioned earlier, Dahl suggests that elections and legislatures are the means to select the needs of the median voter as the aggregate of the citizens' preferences. In the deliberative concept of democracy, legislatures are grounds for further public reasoning to achieve higher levels of mutual understanding so as to achieve even broader agreements among the citizenry. This social exercise of elaborate public reasoning helps to forge compromises among individuals whose values are constantly being (re)defined through the process. In addition, it serves to translate visions into practical objectives.

It should also be noted that this is a deliberative process for which evaluative indicators are formed through further deliberation by citizenry. This precludes the application of fixed and pre-set technical formulas to examine outcomes. As a result, the laws and
policies generated through deliberation are not necessarily those of the median voter (prior to the deliberation) as is advocated by Dahl (Fung, 2006).

**Strong Democracy**

Strong democracy (Barber, 1984), as its strongest advocate, Benjamin Barber, argues, resolves conflict through a process of deliberative self-legislation that transforms “private individuals into free citizens and ... private interests into public goods.” Barber accepts elements from other theories including self-governance, political equality and the deliberative value of public reasoning. He then goes further to argue that citizens must participate directly "not necessarily at every level and in every instance, but frequently enough and in particular when basic policies are being decided and when significant power is being deployed" in a deliberative process of exchange of arguments on various laws and policies (Barber, 1984, p.150-162). This notion of frequent participation, according to Barber, illuminates reasoning, transforms conflict into cooperation, maintains respect and endorsement by stakeholders, and achieves higher outcomes from the perspective of each individual/group. Due to the presence of all parties at politically justified processes of deliberation, the policy outcomes, as Gutmann (1996) also argues, are valued by all. The process of deliberation is believed by Barber to be a transformative and enlightening praxis in the sense that, while recognizing their own needs, individuals come to understand the needs and perspective of others. This deliberative process helps broaden citizens' interests and is instrumental in the creation of common goals and provisional and flexible solutions to public problems (Barber, 1984, p. 118 &168).
To accommodate Barber's form of democracy, extensive institutional reforms are required to create structures so as to enable citizens to directly participate in issues of public concern. First, to enable face-to-face discussions on local and national issues, a comprehensive national system of local assemblies in every urban and rural area must be created. These deliberative fora allow citizens to see each other's perspectives and appreciate disagreements, which in turn help them transform their own ideas/interests. Second, in order to broaden the perspective beyond the local level, citizens should engage in cross-regional dialogues on national issues through the application of information and communication technologies. Third, once citizens have been through the deliberative and enlightening process of public reasoning at both the local and national levels to decide on national public concerns, a national referendum initiative should be put in place to complete the process of actual decision-making. Other venues could also be explored to foster informal participation, but these three structures are essential for a strong form of democracy to be consolidated at both local and national levels (Barber, 1984, p. 267-298).

Towards a Meso Analysis

In this section, I will examine how each one of the above four approaches to democracy corresponds to the Tenant Participation System. In Chapter 2, I explained that the TCHC initiated the TPS for two main reasons. First, the City recommended that the TCHC integrate one form of tenant engagement in its practice of housing management. Second, the two preceding social housing companies both had some tradition of tenant engagement, making it necessary for the TCHC to develop one as well. The main inspiration, however, came from the successful practice of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil.
TCHC, participatory budgeting was among the initial catalysts for tenant participation even prior to the first tenant election and the creation of the Community Housing Unit councils in 2003. Since then, tenant engagement in housing expenditure management has been an integral part of the practice of the TPS at the TCHC. Annual PB sessions within and between CHUs have been an important part of the tenant councils’ responsibilities. In Chapter 3, I presented a brief review of the proposal of PB and its widely acknowledged application in Porto Alegre, Brazil, an analysis of which informs my theoretical review of the TPS and its institutional arrangements at the TCHC.

In contrast to the minimalists’ argument against popular governance and their perception that citizens’ preferences are unclear and logically non-deducible; the TCHC experience demonstrates that there are conditions under which citizens can reach consensus on issues regarding public expenditure based on participatory and defined criteria. Furthermore, such popular arrangements can render local authorities accountable to the decisions made through the participatory process. In light of this evidence, the minimalists' skepticism regarding the legibility and potential actualization of citizens’ desires is unjustifiable.

For Riker, competitive elections provide sufficient conditions for public accountability and governmental responsiveness. In reality, in the cases of TCHC and Porto Alegre, accountability has been effectively secured through the practice of the PB. Should this convince Riker to rethink his minimalist institutional format of a democratic government?

The achievements of PB are in partial agreement with Dahl’s conception of polyarchal democracy. The practice of PB in the TCHC and Porto Alegre is a form of direct
participation that serves to enhance governmental responsiveness in large urban centres. Participation at this scale is beyond Dahl’s conception of polyarchy, representing possibilities of participation, which had not been previously exercised. Having said that, I believe the success of PB would not be sufficient to persuade Dahl to adjust his underlying democratic values. In both Porto Alegre and the TCHC, through a process of direct participation, citizens’ preferences are aggregated into a formal budget. The process at the TCHC begins in individual buildings and, then, as the budget takes shape, the process scales up to the CHUs. Finally, there is an annual City-wide forum to determine the expenditure priorities. It is definitely a process of aggregation of tenants’ needs and preferences. At the building level, there are elements of deliberation and discussion on the merits of various projects to enhance the health of community. However, I have personally observed that tenants often assert their interests and preferences without any substantial deliberation and public reasoning, and little attention is paid to what they may have in common. In this way, the process resembles an aggregative bargaining for tenants’ needs and preferences. This practice of non-deliberative (or in some cases quasi-deliberative) aggregation of tenants’ needs subsides Gutmann’s and Barber’s deliberative standard of democracy.

Through participatory budgeting, tenants discuss public infrastructure choices—a community centre versus a playground, for example. The scope of reasoning revolves around the extent to which such choices satisfy preferences and advance the community welfare as a whole. As a result, it seems that public reasoning and deliberation over the CHU budget for public infrastructure investment decisions is more of an aggregation exercise as opposed to a participatory consensus building exercise. Here, at least in quite a few instances, the quality of deliberation is reduced to reasonable procedures of aggregation. Consequently, in the case
of the TPS at the TCHC, I must conclude that theories of deliberative and strong democracy are not substantially supported over Dahl’s aggregative one.

In other circumstances at the TCHC, I have observed unintended consequences. For example, in some neighbourhoods where participation is relatively high, so many people show up in meetings that decision-making processes become unmanageable and many can only listen and observe rather than express and engage (this is often the case for non-English speakers and youth). In other meetings, too few participate to make the decisions competently that reflect a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Under these circumstances, my observations do not help to confirm the conception of strong democracy. The system could work better, however, if a reasonable number of tenants, formed in small groups, took a deeper interest and learned the complexity of property management choices. Their role could be as communicators and they could serve as focal points for community members who tend not to participate actively or communicate their needs and wants. As I also explained in the previous chapter, the format of community representation at the TCHC is not what strong democrats would suggest.

In this context and in light of these observations, Barber might be convinced to search for other institutional arrangements that better maintain his prior democratic commitments, such as self-government and participation. He may come to think that small groups of citizens focusing on public problems in a sustained way, rather than larger groups deliberating about decisions in a less intense/engaged way, can constitute better institutional choices for realizing participatory democracy. If enough small groups are formed around specific issues to permit every interested citizen to participate in some decisions, his commitment to values in strong democracy can still be sustained.
Barber's theory of strong democracy stipulates the participation of all citizens in direct deliberation and favours large assemblies over small groups. In my experience with the TPS even in the context of large assemblies, although participation of all tenants is invited and encouraged, it is often a small number of tenant representatives who end up deliberating on local issues. Should we recognize that small, designated groups of committed tenant representatives can better represent the interests and views of those who do not participate directly; may Barber lessen his objection to representation?

In light of the above, when conclusions from empirical facts and observations make it clear that the prescription of “everyone should participate in direct deliberation” fails to advance the values of “self-government” and “participation”, Barber may either rethink the democratic values he advocates or at least propose alternative institutional arrangements that might better realize those same values.

The success of Participatory Budgeting at Porto Alegre might lead Riker (and definitely Schumpeter), Dahl, Gutmann and Barber to agree on this institutional arrangement, in so far as PB enhances government accountability through transparent public reasoning. The cost associated to its practice is justified on the grounds that it reduces corruption (Fung, 2007). In the context of Canada, where government is more transparent and under constant scrutiny by opposition parties and the media and elections can produce responsive decisions, Riker, definitely Schumpeter and perhaps Dahl (might) argue that such participation is not necessary and no such extra cost to implement participatory processes needs to be paid. However, the findings of this research provide evidence to support stronger forms of democracy on several other grounds.
First, one relevant outcome of this research is the understanding of the tenants’ desire to exercise what they perceive as their right to exert influence on the policies affecting their housing welfare (Chapters 5). It is the provision of the TPS and its attendant structures that facilitate and guarantee the individual rights of the tenants. The findings clearly indicate that tenant representatives direct self-learning projects to acquire the knowledge and develop the skills required to exercise their perceived rights.

Second, advocates for stronger forms of democracy view direct participation as inherently valuable and strongly believe that direct citizen deliberation will produce better citizens than any representative system can. To conduct PB, tenants and tenant representatives are made to decide on important matters of local concern such as the provision of services and urban/housing infrastructure priorities. Community organizing and tenant information sessions are held and investments are made to create favourable conditions for the success of the practice of participation. It is through such arrangements that public reasoning takes place and wide and extensive deliberations help transform individual tenants into more informed members of their communities.

In Chapter 6, I discussed how informal learning shapes tenants’ awareness of community concerns, social justice and the workings of democracy. The hidden curriculum of the TPS provides unnoticed opportunities for individual tenants to experientially learn about such issues. In addition, it is within such spaces, that tenants’ experiences with power structures and socio-economic relations affect how they define their role vis-à-vis the community, the TPS and the TCHC. In this way, reasoned participation in community matters is decisive in forming and shaping tenant perception of and learning about the role of an active citizen. Consequently, promoting tenant engagement via the practice of deliberative
and participatory local decision-making schemes for the delivery of everyday housing services is also a means to nurture our local democracies. The findings of the research confirms the fact that participation provides informal learning opportunities for tenants to develop a sense of agency, a conscious capacity to impact policy decisions—which is important to an individual's sense of self-identity (Lister, 1997, p. 38). In addition, it provides informal opportunities for tenants to develop interpersonal and facilitation skills. The process also serves to inform tenants as to the workings of the TCHC and the needs of their neighbourhood, which helps them advocate effectively for their communities' interests. The research also reveals that the longer they are involved, the more collaborative they become in their pursuit of change, and the more aware they become of the wider political economy and its effects on the policies of the TCHC.

In sum, it can be argued that this type of organized participation fosters the development of political skills while increasing the confidence of individual tenants to pursue informed political action within and beyond their local communities. If direct citizen participation makes for a more democratic citizenry—which, in itself, is considered a democratic value agreed upon by all grand theories of democracy - then Riker, Schumpeter and Dahl must give way to advocates of deliberative and participatory democracy.

In this chapter, so far, I tried to illustrate how the consideration of institutional alternatives in one concrete case, the TPS, can create the possibility of a kind of agreement even among very different conceptions of democracy. To do so, I tried to establish a dialogue between an actual democratic institutional arrangement and four contemporary theories of democracy. I discussed the fact that the process of creating democratic institutions has always been value-laden, a process generated by the value systems embedded in grand
theories. However, here, inspired by Richardson (2002) and Fung (2007), I tried to establish a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice, deducing values from the practice of an existing democratic institution so as to contribute to the value systems underpinning contemporary theories of democracy. I would like to emphasize that reflection on the actual practices of democracy, in any given context, can inform the embedded value systems from which theories and social practices are developed, and this reciprocity needs to be sustained in order to maintain the relevance of democratic theories to our democratic commitments.

I should conclude this section by stating that the Tenant Participation System and the associated practice of participatory budgeting represent stronger forms and practices of democracy than those posited by most grand theories of democracy. In addition to enhancing transparency and government accountability, tenant participation

a) fosters the desire of individuals to exercise their right to take part in the creation of policies that affect their daily lives;

b) provides informal schools for the citizens of the peripheries to entertain their potential lifelong desire to learn and undertake personal development;

and

c) nurtures the development of organic intellectuals to represent and advocate for their marginalized communities in the making of public policies.

8.3. Recommendations for Research and Practice

There are many challenges involved in constructing a participatory process: it requires substantial investments of time and capital as well as restructuring of relationships and culture within an organization. Therefore it is important for proponents of participation
to have substantial outcomes that make these ‘costs’ worthwhile. There are a number of positive outcomes that proponents associate with participatory governance, such as, empowerment, an increase in transparency, an increase in fairness of decisions and an increase in acceptance of decisions. Learning is also a proven result of participation, another validation for expanding the boundaries of participation into public policy making and public service delivery. Research which focuses on the learning can help to strengthen the argument that these participatory spaces provide real learning opportunities, which can support democracy by enhancing democratic competencies among the citizenry. I should emphasize that the learning that occurs in participatory programs needs far more attention. This is both in terms of research on the learning as well as the designs and supports that could enhance learning in local governance structures.

This research bridges the gap between the literature on participation and the literature on learning, it provides a basis upon which future studies, investigating civic capacity and participatory democracy, can be built by developing an understanding of what the educative effects of participation mean to those who participate.

Since there has been no substantive previous research on the TCHC prior to this, this study was intended to be exploratory and serve as the foundation for future research on tenant engagement in social housing community management programs in Toronto and other major Canadian urban centres.

I hope that although this research focuses on one particular type of civic participation, this approach will be applied to examine other organizational and participatory contexts. This will help us lead to a comparative evaluation and analysis of motivations and learning of those who choose to get civically engaged. Such research also helps us determine whether a
correlation exists between the educative effects of participation and the place in which and the reason for which participation occurs. I would also strongly suggest future research comparing different systems and spaces of local participation in order to characterize the spaces in which learning and participation are better sustained and encouraged.

As for practice, there are two main suggestions. Now that participation is finding its way to all layers of community work and local governance. It is imperative to assess the preparedness of public servants for their new roles as communicators and social facilitators rather than blunt bureaucrats. In this case, a lack of understanding of the concept of participatory management amongst the staff was starkly evident. As I discussed in Chapter 7, alongside the implementation of such participatory programs there needs to be strategies for human resource development for such public domains of participatory action.

Second, strategies to implement participatory governance require flexibility and adaptability to the context in which it is being applied. Applying blanket policies over a large and diverse urban centre like Toronto simply diminishes the positive social outcomes attributed to the practice of participation. Each local unit, be it a neighbourhood or a smaller subsection, ought to develop its unique plan of participation appropriate to its locale; and for this to happen, programs need to allocate time and budget; this is what I would like to call the phase zero of a participatory governance plan.

Participation is not necessarily another layer of representation; blanket strategies, like assigning a tenant representative for every 250 units of residence, simply reduce the scope of participation to a yet another layer of competitive representation. Participation is a means to mobilize and organize the, often, neglected communities for common causes. This democratic practice requires some praxis: cycles of practice and reflection for it to gradually
develop its unique structure. Therefore, as my concluding remark I would strongly suggest that the best strategy to encourage and sustain participatory and collaborative local governance structures is a blank paper on which community members, public servants and policy makers through the suggested phase zero, ink the plan. Nevertheless, throughout the program cycle, an eraser might be handy.
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directors


