

A Qualitative Analysis of an Age Friendly Community Initiative

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In this article, Alex Quintero discusses an age-friendly community initiative in Tallahassee, Florida where, although the planning process allowed information to be gathered efficiently, inclusion of a wider public was prevented by the narrow approach, lack of resources, centralized decision-making, and strategic selection of stakeholders. The author concludes by noting that existing partnerships can be used to broaden citizen involvement and ensure inclusive foundations for age-friendly initiatives to become solidified in the political, economic, and built environment.

Seniors, defined as people age 65 and older, are 14.9% of the total US population: a segment that grew by 1.6 million between 2014 and 2017 (US Census, 2017). As minority subgroups grow, the older adult population is also projected to become more diverse. These demographic trends have serious implications for the lives of Americans and their needs in the community.

In order to accommodate the changing needs of a diverse senior population, associations, like AARP, have shifted their focus onto community-based services (J.J. Lee, 1991 as cited in Wacker & Roberto, 2013; p. 18). AARP responded to the changing needs of their constituency, seniors who want to “age in place” (Vasunilashorn, et. al., 2012), by starting the Age-Friendly Communities Network, in 2012. A community is age-friendly when it enables seniors to reside in familiar places and engage in community life (Scharlach, Lehning & Wolf, 2012). The AARP network grew to 195 participating communities by 2017 (AARP, 2017).

For Age-Friendly Communities (AFC) to effectively serve the growing needs of seniors, they must be planned with stakeholder input, which can then be integrated into resulting policies and infrastructure improvements. Given that seniors will become increasingly diverse in the coming years, it is imperative that community members from different social, economic, and ethnic groups and with varying physical and cognitive ability are represented in the planning process. In this article, I aim to provide a qualitative analysis of the planning process used in one Age-Friendly Community initiative in Tallahassee, Florida. Using this case study, I sought to understand the complex process by which diverse stakeholders with diverse goals and resources are assembled as participants in a community-based AFC initiative. I attended stakeholder meetings where I observed the planning process and solicited interviews from ten key-participants. I was able to provide an in-depth analysis

of this relatively new initiative, which contributes to the existing literature on the age-friendly communities approaches (Lehning, Scharlach, & Dal Santo, 2009; Scharlach, Lehning & Wolf, 2012). Aging scholars have also advocated for researchers to evaluate local initiatives (pilot programs) to inform policy, practices, and funding streams (Ball & Lawler, 2014). My findings contribute to this directive from researchers, focusing in particular on a planning perspective.

In the next section, I describe the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities and the steps a community must take to join. I then outline planning strategies as a framework for interpreting the planning process in Tallahassee and describe the method. The main contribution of this article consists of a description of the planning process in Tallahassee, including a review of stakeholders and the challenges and opportunities identified by key-participants. I conclude with a discussion of planning implications.

AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

AARP is a member-based social welfare organization, known as a 501 (c) 4. They are bound by federal regulations to operate not for profit and promote social welfare (Cigler, 2015; pg. 140). AARP aggressively lobbies the federal government and sub-state entities for policy and programs that benefit their constituency, people age 50 and over. In 2015, AARP spent more than \$7.5 million on lobbying (Center for Responsive Politics, 2015).

In 2012, AARP launched their Livable Communities initiative, which is the umbrella project for the Network of Age-friendly Communities (see Figure 1). The Network supports the World Health Organization's eight domains of livability: Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion, Civic Participation and Employment, Communication and Information, and Community and

Health Services (AARP, 2015). Communities enroll in a five-step process to become a part of the AARP Network:

Step 1. Getting Started (determining whether the community is ready to begin the process and submitting application, letter of commitment, and an image of the community to AARP).

Step 2. Planning (collecting baseline information and creating an Action Plan).

Step 3. Implementation.

Step 4. Evaluation.

Step 5. Connecting (with other communities).

AARP supports initiatives with web-based educational tools and information sharing and advocacy through staff or volunteers.

This case study is based on Tallahassee's involvement in Step 2, the Planning stage. Stakeholders in the initiative were developing the Action Plan. In Step 1 of the process, AARP surveyed their Tallahassee members and produced a summary report that identified three priority focus areas: Housing, Transportation, and Health and Wellness (AARP, 2016). Step 2 is an important time to analyze the planning process because the Action Plan defines tasks for subsequent stages, especially Step 3, Implementation. Consequently, the input gathered during Step 2 will elicit policies and infrastructural improvements.

The Framework: Planning Approaches

Planning processes mix technical assessments, public involvement, administration of resources, and politics. Planning processes also involve various stakeholders, ranging from elected

officials to professional and technical experts, and the general public. Stakeholders are defined as people who affect or are affected by a project. Some stakeholders both affect and are affected by projects. Planning processes can be regulated by laws and policies (i.e., zoning adjustments) or be voluntary unregulated initiatives (i.e., the AFC initiative).

As Brooks (2002) discusses, planning approaches differ according to the locus of decision-making and whether the mode of decision-making is rational or non-rational. Decision-making can be centralized, in which case few people or a single agency make top-down decisions, or decentralized, in which decision making power is diffuse and held by many individuals or multiple organizations. Rational decision-making is defined as a scientific, data-driven process whereas non-rational decision-making is driven by public participation, politics, and policy.

Miles (2015) expanded Brooks (2002) typology to include multiple types of citizen involvement (see Figure 1). She also elaborated on decision-making modes, noting that a decision can be made rationally, incrementally, through consensus, or based on a legal strategy. An expanded typology is important because it emphasizes the importance of assessing stakeholder involvement and decision-making approaches. The expanded typology of planning strategies can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of different planning initiatives for achieving their goals. For instance, planning strategies with decentralized decision-making that empower a broad collection of different types of stakeholders are more likely to better represent the needs of a diverse public. Conversely, when a few important stakeholders make decisions, they are likely to represent fewer perspectives in the final decision (Figure 2).

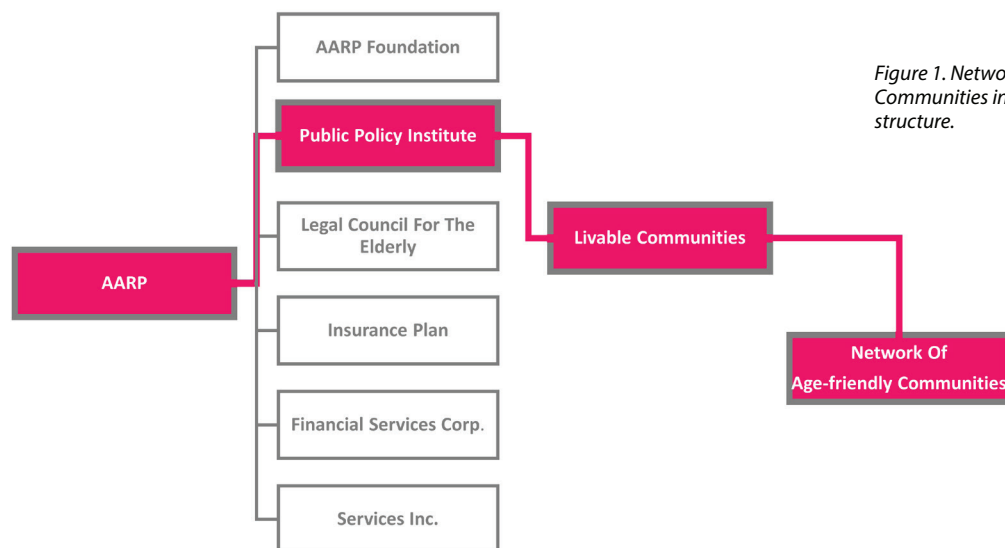


Figure 1. Network of Age-friendly Communities in relation to AARP structure.

Recruitment and Data Collection

To analyze the planning process of the Tallahassee AFC initiative, I made observations during stakeholder meetings and interviewed ten key-participants (defined below). I conducted all interviews after IRB approval from the FSU Human Subjects Committee.

Observations

The Senior Center organized one Introductory Meeting and six program days (two for each of the three priority areas). Senior Center staff, LifeLong Learning seniors, key-participants, and an intern from a local university attended.

Each Program Day was five hours long, during which several experts from organizations relevant to the day's topic (i.e., a realtor on a housing program day) presented on a topic selected by The Director of the Center (i.e., the senior housing market in Tallahassee). Three program days included field trips to relevant agencies (i.e. the transportation authority on a transportation day). The group took the trip together on a city-owned bus, rented for the occasion, and spent one to two hours at the destinations. The Director solicited input from participants at the end of each day. A staff person from the Senior Center took handwritten notes of the discussion.

I observed at the Introductory Meeting and four of the six program days where I took notes about attendees, their interactions, and the topics discussed. I used observations

to understand stakeholder input and to contextualize the interview materials.

Interviews

I recruited participants I knew to be involved in the AFC initiative and then followed a snowball sampling technique. I also recruited participants during program days. I introduced myself to key-participants after their presentations and then followed-up by email to request interviews. People who presented at the meetings were identified as "key-participants."

I conducted nine interviews with ten key-participants during the stakeholder input period. All interviews followed a semi-structured format based on a pre-written interview guide. Eight of the nine interviews were conducted in person at various locations in the community and one interview was conducted by phone due to the interviewee's location outside of Tallahassee. All interviewees were given the opportunity to select the interview location. Interview time ranged from twenty-six minutes to an hour and twenty-three minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. Interviewees were informed that the purpose and the goals of my study were independent of those of the initiative. A detailed timeline of the initiative, including my observations, interviews, and the Action Plan process is shown in Figure 3.

Analysis

I transcribed interviews line-by-line in individual documents

		Locus of Planning					
		Centralized			Decentralized		
type of citizen engagement		no formal relationship	informing/consulting	partnership, delegated	mediated empowerment	socio-political empowerment	political empowerment
Mode of Planning	Pragmatic Rational: alternatives and strategies considered as fully as possible by technical experts; they determine public interest; scientific criteria used in decision making						
	Incremental: alternatives and strategies compared and evaluated in successive increments, piecemeal; practical, opportunistic, works within political constraints.		★				
	Mediation, negotiation, dispute resolution, consensus-building: addresses power inequalities.						
	Political or legal strategy						

Figure 2. The case study shown within the Expanded Typology of Planning Approaches matrix (Miles, 2015).

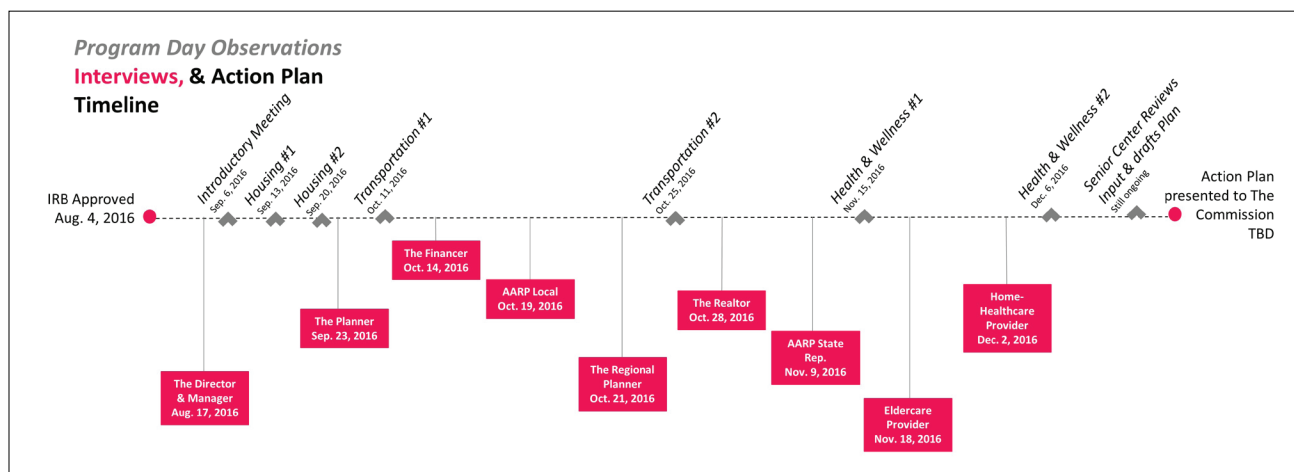


Figure 3. Timeline including interviews, observations and Action Plan development process.

and then read the interview transcripts for a general understanding of the context and the scope of the responses. I then applied three coding methods: attribute coding, holistic coding, and then finally, pattern coding (Saldana, 2015). Attribute codes denote the descriptive information like the fieldwork setting or participant characteristics (attribute codes; pg. 73). I used attribute codes to develop descriptive names for the interview participants related to the interviewees' professional capacities: giving each a pseudonym that reflected their profession (Table 1). Then, I coded passages from the transcripts with holistic codes. Holistic codes are used to collect qualitative data together into topics (holistic codes; pg. 167). In most cases, as in with this one, this method is used to lay the groundwork for more detailed coding. For example, I asked interviewees to tell me about what they hoped to see from the initiative. In doing so, they expressed concern that it was possible the Action Plan would not be implemented. The holistic code for these data was "uncertainty about outcomes." I then used pattern coding to identify relationships among the holistic codes, such as "the importance of politicians' personal goals" from the data (pattern codes; g. 236).

Results

Through an analysis of my interview data, I developed a set of themes that describe how this particular community organized its AFC initiative. In the sections that follow, I explain the following four themes:

- The Senior Center's Centralized Leadership Approach and the Decision-making Role of The City Commission
- The Informational Role of the Key-participants
- Lacking Financial Resources
- The Importance of Politicians' Personal Goals

The Senior Center's Centralized Leadership Approach and the Decision-making Role of The City Commission

The City Commission directed the Senior Center to draft the Action Plan (see Figure 2). In response, the Center used a centralized approach to develop the draft: they assembled and used the 3L (community stakeholder group) and the key-participants (experts) to inform an Action Plan. The Plan would be submitted to the commission for approval.

Respondent ID	Agency Type	Attributed Pseudonym
1a	The Senior Center	The Director
1b	The Senior Center	The Manager
2	City-county planning department	The Planner
3	Non-profit affordable housing financing company	The Financer
4	AARP city office	Local AARP
5	Metropolitan planning agency	The Regional Planner
6	National real estate franchise	The Realtor
7	AARP state office	State AARP Representative
8	Elder Affairs of Florida	Eldercare Provider
9	Private senior home healthcare agency	Home-Healthcare Provider

Table 1. The pseudonyms attributed to the key-participants interviewed.

The Senior Center selected a stakeholder group, which, according to the Center, would be representative of all seniors in the community. All of the members of the group, however, were seniors from the LifeLong Learning program (3L). The 3L is a group that meets regularly and actively participates in the Senior Center events and activities.

Residents of Tallahassee age 55 and over can join the 3L program to become involved in the community. The 3L program aims to give seniors an understanding of the cultural, political, safety, legal/justice, educational, and health/human services climate of the community. Tuition payments are required. There are, however, a few scholarships available for seniors who wish to participate but need financial support. People must have time available in order to participate: to graduate from the program, seniors take part in three months of activities at the Senior Center, local businesses, and government services organizations. The program empowers seniors to remain engaged in their communities and to become effective advocates.

The Senior Center staff expected 3L seniors to learn about the AARP Network and use their 3L training to make the information pertinent to Tallahassee. For example, at the Introductory Meeting, The Director said: "This is an international network and because we're part of it we have access to a lot of resources. We really need you to do the research. Go on the website. Bring your research to the program days (Introductory Meeting, 9/6/2016)." 3L seniors brought local knowledge to the initiative (shown by their completion of the 3L Program) and expressed their personal concerns (shown by their self-selection into the program day(s) that interested them). In this sense, the 3L participants fit within the definition of a stakeholder who affects and is affected by a project.

It is important to note that the majority of seniors in the community are not 3L. It is also important that The Manager of the Senior Center heads the 3L and, therefore, knew the group personally. Thus, although the 3L may have been an efficient way to enroll stakeholders, it was not necessarily exhaustive or representative of the resident stakeholders in Tallahassee.

The Senior Center also defined and invited experts to participate in the project and provide expert knowledge to inform the Action Plan. They selected experts from local industries related to the three priorities identified in the AARP survey, such as real estate, planning, and healthcare services providers. They are an active center that both supports and is supported by their community. They also leveraged their existing partnerships with individuals.

All of the interviewees viewed the Senior Center as the leading

organization; in particular, they cited The Director and The Manager as the main leaders. This is because The Director and Manager informed most of the participants about the initiative (as described below, the exceptions were The Planner and the Local and State AARP Representatives) and invited them to participate. For instance, The Financer said: "I was invited by the Senior Center... because of my prior work around senior housing with her [The Director] and, in the past, with ...Florida Department of Elder Affairs. I was involved with the Communities for a Lifetime program (Interview, 10/14/16)." Thus, he identified that there were past projects through which he built relationships with The Director and was subsequently invited to participate.

The Manager of the Senior Center also invited some key-participants from a group of experts who had previously spoken for the 3L. For instance, The Regional Planner explained that he had previously spoken about transportation planning topics to the 3L. As with The Financer, and with many of the other participants, The Regional Planner was also invited based on his previous work with the Senior Center. Consequently, because of the Senior Center's leadership role, it appeared many of the participants were identified and became involved through existing professional networks.

One exception to this tendency for people to have learned of the project based on previous professional relationships was The Planner, who first learned about the program from an online AARP publication welcoming the City into the Network of Age-Friendly Communities. The Planner described her entrance into the program like this:

"I first heard about it last April 2016, I think I was just looking at some of the publications online. I stumbled across the Age-Friendly Community designation, and it was at that point that I realized [Tallahassee] was one of these communities. I thought it was a good process... I connected with another planner to get in touch with [The Director] ... [The Director] had asked my boss's boss to participate, and I was interested in it, and when we figured out that my boss's boss was a common person, someone she'd ask to participate, [The Director] was happy to have me participate" (Interview, 9/23/16).

Even though The Planner had sought out the project of her volition, she was formally invited to participate by The Director. The Planner expressed that others would not have the same opportunity. Concerned about the narrow scope of stakeholder engagement, she explained that limited representation was possibly an outcome of the Senior Center using established professional networks for identifying and inviting stakeholders and key-participants into the initiative, or in her words, "decid-

ing who's at the small table." She said:

"[Another city planner] wants to be [involved] but [The Director] is the one deciding who's at the table. That's my only concern. For example, I didn't notice any colored people at the meeting. And that's not what our older population looks like, here at this point, it's just not. The table is very small. It's only the [3L] grads. It also seems very real estate heavy. I'm worried that there needs to be more diversity. But she's called on the [3L] grads because she wants to get through the process. They're moving quickly. It's a readily available group. They're willing and able to serve and she knows it. So I see why organizing is much easier. We have a much different population, for example, on the South Side of Tallahassee. People with less resources have to work longer into their retirement and don't have the time to be involved. Not to answer the [AARP] survey and not to get involved" (Interview, 9/23/16).

The Eldercare Provider echoed the concerns. He thought the processes only included select members of the community and that this narrow focus limited the possibilities of the initiative. Reflecting on his experience, he said: "I would love to see a bunch of people in the room [at the program days] listening and able to explain to them [the key-participants] what [it is that] they need and how difficult it is for them to get it" (Interview, 11/28/16). He felt that the program days failed to live up to these expectations.

In addition to The Planner, the other two participants who did not learn of the initiative from the Senior Center but were invited by The Director or The Manager were the Local and the State AARP Representatives. These two stakeholders knew about the initiative prior to becoming involved. As with the other interviewees, AARP Representatives identified The Director as the leader.

The Senior Center was able to collaborate with existing community partners from disciplines across the three priority domains: Housing, Transportation, and Health and Wellness. On the Housing Program Day, they invited realtors, an affordable housing financing company, developers, and planners. On the Transportation Program Day, they took stakeholders on a guided tour to the transportation authority offices, a bus tour throughout the city, and invited a regional transportation planner, a land use planner, and an Uber representative. Lastly, on the Health and Wellness Program Day, the Senior Center brought in home healthcare providers, the City's wellness coordinator, physicians, and representatives from local hospitals and faculty from the local university, and they took stakeholders on a guided tour of the new VA Hospital.

In summary, the Senior Center was the leader of the initiative and had the decision-making power regarding community stakeholder and expert inclusion. This is important because, even though decision-making power shifted to the commission once the input was collected and submitted to them in the form of an Action Plan, the Senior Center's role in defining who participated and who provided input granted their agency significant influence over the trajectory of the project. The Director and The Manager at the Senior Center engaged key-participants who they knew to be involved in senior affairs or with whom they had previously worked. However, The Planner and the Eldercare Provider believed this resulted in a limited, less-diverse group that was not representative of seniors in Tallahassee.

It is also important to recognize that there were other avenues through which stakeholders could learn about the initiative, as demonstrated by The Planner and AARP staff. However, these three people were able to participate because the matter was closely related to their career and expertise: not necessarily because they were people whom the AFC initiative was designed to serve.

The Informational Role of Key-participants

All key-participants were invited by the Senior Center to inform and consult with the 3L, contributing to the Action Plan development phase. They shared relevant information from each of their industries: the participants brought printed materials, PowerPoint presentations with informational links, their business cards with contact information, and information on their current projects. Additionally, they explained technical terms to the stakeholders and offered ways that their particular agency might get involved. For example, during the housing program day, The Planner was asked by The Director to explain a comprehensive plan.

The Financer, Eldercare Provider, Home-Healthcare Provider, The Regional Planner, and The Realtor, all similarly explained in interviews that their purpose was sharing information, giving an overview of the available resources, and answering questions. The Planner explained her role on the program day, saying: "We can offer information because the ideas of a work plan need to come from those most affected by it" (Interview, 9/23/16).

All of the stakeholders presented information and were consulted about solutions and their opinions after the presentations during a question and answer period. With the Senior Center as the leader and the commission as the decision-making authority, key-participants were given the role of information providers for the Action Plan development. They participated as representatives of their agencies and

inserted their technical knowledge into the AFC initiative. 3L seniors were given the opportunity to engage in discussion with all of the meeting participants.

Lacking Financial Resources

All of the key-participants, including The Director and The Manager, said that they had made no budgetary allocations for the AFC initiative. The Director and The Manager hoped to satisfy the Action Plan development phase with existing resources drawn from their community partnerships, absorbing the costs with their existing operating budget. All of the key-participants identified money as a constraint.

According to The Director, the Senior Center could only provide staff time and travel money (to attend the AARP Livable Communities conference in Chicago, IL). It became apparent that the staff at the Senior Center was strained by the additional work. For instance, The Manager described the project as “another full-time job.” When asked about available resources, The Director and the staff shared the following exchange: “[Resources include] primarily staff time and I guess travel [to the AARP Livable Communities conference]. Our department will pay for most of the travel. So it’s a lot of time. Staff time.” The Director went on to explain that she did not hire additional staff for the project, giving The Manager cause to exclaim: “That’s why we have circles under our eyes” (The Manager, Interview, 8/17/16).

Similarly, The Planner explained: “We don’t have resources. We have staff. We have so many demands, from the city and the county; we don’t have the ability to commit a lot of resources. At this point, we can give information (i.e., parking inventory) and staff time. That’s what we have. We don’t have [the] monetary ability, funding, and no grants” (Interview, 9/23/16). Thus, the Senior Center, The Planner, and most of the other stakeholders needed to use other resources as a substitute for financial capital. In place of financial resources, the Senior Center hoped to use partnerships: “I will say: what we’re good at is working with other city departments. Pulling experts from other departments (Interview, 8/17/16).”

While key-participants did not have financial resources to use directly on the initiative, some expressed optimism about the possibility of including Action Plan items in existing projects. For example, The Planner thought some parts of the Action Plan could be included in the comprehensive plan. She said:

When there are priorities [for the AFC project], [the planning department’s involvement] will depend on what ... [the priorities] are. If they have a request to look into incorporating parts of this [Action Plan] through the comprehensive plan reform efforts we’d have to bring it up to the commission

to make the decision on whether that’s something we [the planning department] can do. If they were good ideas, we’d have the support of our leadership (Interview, 9/13/16).

Additionally, The Regional Planner suggested that (if the Senior Center was interested) the Action Plan could include projects from his agency’s Prioritized Project List (PPL). During his presentation, The Regional Planner showed the 3L seniors examples of transportation projects on the PPL that if implemented, would benefit people of all ages. For instance, he shared information about a proposed mid-block crossing between one of the city’s most popular parks and the shopping center located across the street. The mid-block crossing would calm traffic and allow pedestrians of all ages and abilities to safely and comfortably walk across. PPLs include transportation projects that have been submitted by local jurisdictions for funding and implementation. Incorporating PPL projects into the Action Plan could be mutually beneficial for the agencies: the Regional Planning agency would gain support for the funding and implementation of their project and the Senior Center would help advance an age-friendly transportation improvement.

Finally, The Financer hoped that they would be able to work with the initiative through his company’s existing financing efforts if the commission approved a qualifying housing project. He suggested that (if the Senior Center was interested in it) they should add it to the Action Plan. The Financer believed that his company’s objectives supported AFC objectives.

Despite not having any financial resources for the Action Plan development, key-participants were optimistic about integrating action plan items into existing projects in their organizations. It is interesting to consider to what extent this integration may have lead to, or will lead to the initiative being re-directed to serve the needs of organizations in addition to, or at the expense of, community members. It is also important to consider how a lack of financial resources influences the project. On the one hand, fewer financial resources can limit who can and does get involved and how long input can be collected for. On the other hand, financial resources can put strains on the project by giving certain stakeholders—especially those who control the financial resources—more power over the decision-making process.

The Importance of Politicians’ Personal Goals

The personal goals theme was an unforeseen theme that emerged in my conversations with key-participants. The participants raised the idea of “pet projects” when expressing uncertainty regarding the future of the initiative. “Pet project” is a colloquial term that refers to a goal pursued as a personal favorite, rather than because it is generally understood to be necessary or important. Which is to say, respondents were

worried that powerful decision-makers supported the initiative because it aligned with their personal goals and therefore it would lose support with representative turnover. For example, The Planner said: “The priorities that a previous commission has may not be the priority of another commission...AARP [does] not [have] so much clout with the commission. The commission follows their heart at this point. Commissioners have their own pet projects (Interview, 9/13/16).” The Planner felt uncertain as to how a change in commissioners would affect the future of the project because the commissioners are individual people who have their own objectives and desires.

The term “pet project” was used by all of the key-participants in describing the political climate and their expectations about Action Plan implementation. The idea that the AFC initiative would be part of a commissioner’s personal goals was taken to mean that it would receive support. However, key-participants expressed concerns regarding the sustainability of such a project, citing the frequent turnover in elected positions, such as those of the commissioners.

Discussion

In this case study of a single AFC initiative, I sought to understand the complex process by which diverse stakeholders with diverse goals and resources were assembled in order to have input in a community-aging initiative. This stage of an AFC initiative, the planning step, is the most important for understanding these processes because it is the only time where community members and experts are able to provide input. For this reason, the Planning step is the foundation on which the initiative is built: it will have significant implications on whose voices are heard, how these voices are incorporated into actionable projects, and, therefore, how successful the project will be for catering to the needs of the community. Therefore, this is a critical step for reflecting on the success of the AFC initiative.

The Planning Process in Tallahassee Florida

I used Miles’s (2015) Proposed Expanded Typology of Planning Approaches to define the planning process employed by the leaders of the AFC initiative. Determining how this project fits into a framework can be useful in future project evaluation or AFC initiatives comparisons.

At this phase, the project was centralized: decisions on stakeholder involvement and Action Plan content were made by the Senior Center. The typology also makes distinctions based on the type of citizen engagement that characterizes the planning process of interest. In this case, the type of citizen engagement was informational only, and stakeholder involvement was narrow including only strategically or

purposefully selected groups for consulting purposes (The City-County Planning Department, Elder Affairs of Florida, the LifeLong Learning program, etc.). Furthermore, this phase of the initiative was conducted using an incremental “mode of planning.” Incrementalist approaches consider alternatives and strategies in successive increments. The alternatives must be feasible within political and financial constraints (see Figure 2). For example, after the Senior Center created the Action Plan the commission would evaluate it. The commission had its own constraints; in this case, stakeholders expected pet projects to influence how the Action Plan was received.

This process is unique to Tallahassee. And although examples are featured on AARPs website, the Senior Center did not use any specific examples to guide their strategy. AARP provides an Action Plan format guide but does not require any particular leadership or strategic approaches; these choices are left to the initiative leaders and one purpose of joining “Network of Age-friendly Communities” is to eventually share strategies and outcomes with the other participating communities. AARP requires that the following information be included in every Action Plan:

1. Goals or outputs;
2. Activities related to each goal;
3. The target date for activity or goal completion;
4. The group or individual responsible for each activity;
5. Inputs of resources for completing the activity;
6. Performance indicators.

The Importance of Stakeholder Inclusion

The Senior Center led the narrow stakeholder inclusion process. They decided to limit participation to members of the 3L seniors and select community professionals (the key-stakeholders). The decision was based on their limited resources and on the convenience of existing relationships with that group of seniors and, in most cases, with the key-participants. The initiative was unfunded, and the Senior Center had to rely on partnerships to carry it out. By selectively including voices to provide input into the Action Plan, the Senior Center facilitated a dialogue around issues of community aging. However, the dialogue was limited to those who were eligible to participate or already in partnership with the Senior Center. This selective facilitation of dialogue is an important finding of the current study that has implications for future AFC initiatives. Creating a dialogue is critical to the production of influential information (Innes & Booher, 2010; pg. 153). Dialogue “builds understanding, embeds information in the context where it is to be used, and molds policy to the information, as well as information to the policy (pg. 153).” In creating the space for

a dialogue between stakeholders and key-participants, the Senior Center strategically selected community members and professionals who were known to be engaged in and to have expertise on, the matters of concern. Consequently, they felt they maximized their limited resources to engage in information production in order to assemble an Action Plan for the commission. However, this selective facilitation of dialogue also has important political ramifications for understanding the creation of AFCs.

Creating a Limited Dialogue

Planning theory might qualify this lack of inclusion as a limitation of the initiative. For instance, planning theorist, Dr. Susan Fainstein, instructs: “[p]rogressive social change results only from the exercise of power by those who previously have been excluded from power... participation is the vehicle through which that power asserts itself (Fainstein, 2010).” The general public was excluded from the planning process undertaken by the Senior Center and their selected participants. Public notices to solicit public involvement were not posted. There are no policies in place mandating public involvement in the creation of AFC initiatives, although it remains possible that a broader group would be invited to the early stages of the implementation phase. Given the use of a centralized approach and their exclusion from the early stages of the process, which informed the prioritization of next steps through the creation of an Action Plan, it is possible that the outcomes will privilege the status quo.

Strained Resources Limit Inclusion

One explanation for why there was a limited dialogue is that there were no monetary allocations for this project on behalf of any of the key-participants. The Senior Center had limited staff, staff time, and finances to carry out the stakeholder input phase. They did not make a budgetary allocation or hire additional staff or volunteers for it. They used existing staff and resources, including the 3L seniors as their stakeholder group, and thereby excluding other subsets of the population in the development of an Action Plan. However, one should be careful to explain limited inclusion as a result of strained resources on two accounts: First, limited resources should not become an excuse to justify limiting inclusion; second, in this case, many of the key-participants in this study were optimistic about their ability to draw on other resources as a substitute for financial resources. Consequently, perhaps the more important question to be asked in future studies, is what planning approach supports translating non-financial resources into strategies for broader stakeholder inclusion?

Takeaways for Planners

The role of the two planners involved in this initiative can be instructive in identifying how AFC initiatives affect planning and planning policy. It also provides examples of how planners can interact with and affect age-friendly initiatives. First, planners can engage with their constituency by forming relationships between agencies not traditionally or consistently included in the planning process. These experiences create a dialogue among citizens and planners and provide opportunities for mutual learning. Second, this case provides an example of how planners can include age-friendly perspectives into traditional areas of planning (i.e., comprehensive planning and long-range transportation planning) to address the needs of seniors while eliminating redundancy.

In this case study, planners were not given a decision-making role. However, planning literature suggests that planners are in a position to assume such political roles (Forrester 1989; Friedmann, 2008). In this case planners used their technical and expert knowledge to inform the knowledge production for The Action Plan and shape the agenda. They showed that AFC initiatives could affect planning and planning policy by presenting ways in which livable community goals can be integrated into planning documents, such as comprehensive plans. It is also important to note that both planners advised the Senior Center to include existing planning projects in their Action Plan. They also suggested it would be possible to integrate Action Plan items into plans or projects. They both maintained their technical or expert roles, however, as they acknowledged, the planners did not have the decision-making power to ensure that they were incorporated into the Plan.

The planning process determines who the decision makers are and how different stakeholders get involved; thus, planners who are able to identify the planning process of an initiative will be able to strategically insert themselves into an initiative or integrate an initiative into existing plans (as the planners did in this case study). Planning typologies help planners identify the planning process. Case studies like this one give in-depth details of how planning processes work so that planners can identify typologies in practice.

Conclusion

According to the planning approaches typology, the Senior Center enacted an incrementalist approach to the AFC project. This approach centralized decision-making and required the Senior Center to strategically select stakeholders. Consequently, this limited the inclusion of the general public. It also limited how stakeholder input was subjected to public decision-making. The benefits of using this approach include using existing

community partnerships as the foundation for an AFC project. For example, the Senior Center relied on an informed and engaged group of seniors in the LifeLong Learning Program, as well local experts to gather input efficiently. However, this approach had drawbacks: limiting the scope and inclusion of the broader community. In order to address these drawbacks, agencies, such as the Senior Center, could broaden the width of stakeholder involvement and achieve a more inclusionary process. In this study, obstacles to stakeholder involvement included limited funding as well as a reliance on existing partnerships. It is also important for future researchers to consider in greater detail how politicians' personal goals are the impetus for AFC initiatives.

Detailed analyses of how the planning process is implemented in developing Action Plans, as well as the obstacles to stakeholder involvement are important because Action Plans, such as the one analyzed in this case study, might be used as pilot programs to inform policy. Planners must ensure that these foundations are inclusive; broader stakeholder interests become solidified in the political, economic, and built infrastructure of Age-Friendly Communities.

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