Part Two

Developing Empowerment Practice in the Context of Community Planning

Introduction

The second part of the book applies the theory that was developed in the first part to a particular professional activity—community planning. Community planning as a context makes it possible to examine the mutual influences of empowerment processes and professional intervention upon one another, without limiting the discussion to the bounds of a single discipline. In this way it is possible to make connections among several disciplines and to develop shared knowledge about empowerment for them. This part of the book will point to problems common to professional disciplines that are engaged in the planning of social solutions, without creating the false impression that empowerment or disempowerment are connected to a single discipline exclusively.

Having decided to choose community planning for the contextual discussion, I had to grapple with a number of difficulties. I had to redefine community planning in order to connect it with the various professions each of which engages in it separately. I also discovered that community planning had gone out of favor—mainly because urban planners who had engaged in it had wearied of the participation of residents which had been forced upon them in the framework of this method. On the other hand, I enjoyed a personal advantage, for I was able to feel at home inside a practice that is connected with my own profession, which is community work. Beyond that, in Israel, in contrast to Holland and the United States, there is no feeling of burnout in the sphere of residents' participation in planning. Community planning has proved itself in a holistic planning of neighborhoods, and in the encouraging of residents to act for themselves in nationwide projects such as the Urban Renewal Project, and it is definitely likely to make achievements in contemporary programs such as regional development of the Negev and the Galilee, for example. Community planning in Israel constitutes a kind of

check and balance mechanism for the national and municipal planning system, by dint of its focus on the local arena.

Community planning, then, has a potential to influence individuals and communities. It is practiced by professionals from a variety of disciplines, and through it, it is possible develop an understanding of empowerment, and to promote empowering practice among those involved in social processes.

Although the empowering change is meant to have a favorable effect on individuals as well, this book focuses not on the personal change, but on the community change. It is important to remember that exclusive focus on individual change almost always entails some blaming of the individual for his situation, and a placing of the onus of the change on him alone. Hence, empowering practice uses individual change methods together with community interventions, and never separately from the latter. In this part of the book special emphasis will be placed on the need for a change in professionals' attitudes and methods of working for social change. Since the conditions and the circumstances which produce powerlessness are social, and disempowerment occurs by means of social solutions and the practices customary in the frameworks of these solutions, the target for change is these practices and not the people who suffer from them. Our assumption is that in this way the situation of powerless men and women will be improved in the fairest and most thorough way.

In principle, the empowerment process need not begin in local planning processes. It may also stem from social policy and from the decision making level in social institutions. However, the reality proves that for the time being such a development route is no more than a wish. Social policy, in most of its manifestations, is still a source of disempowering practices. This book deals with how people overcome the disempowering influence of social policy. The experienced route of empowerment processes is an encounter with a disempowering solution, and a resolute and somewhat subversive effort by local activists to solve social problems that stem from it (Boyte, 1984; Feldman & Stall, 1994). I am interested in pointing to the important, even critical, role played by empowering professionals in these change efforts. It is they who know how to systematically link community empowerment with individual empowerment, and thus to facilitate both processes, and also to mediate between local structures and social policy and institutions and thus to enable the empowerment process to continue.

The fourth chapter – Community Planning – deals with practice in this field, and redefines it, both through an analysis of the approaches of a number of disciplines that engage in planning and in the community, and through a presentation of various styles of community planning.

The fifth chapter – Individual Empowerment Processes in the Context of Community Planning – begins with a presentation of the group context in which individual empowerment processes occur; it goes on to analyze the mutual empowering connection created between the individual and the environment, and then analyzes the signs of the realization of empowerment in the individuals involved in community planning processes.

The sixth chapter – Community Empowerment Processes in the Context of Community Planning – presents the stages of the community empowerment process. This chapter discusses organization as a central tool in the creation of a community and in the encouragement of community empowerment. After this, several issues are discussed: the issue of conflict and its inevitable place in the empowerment and planning processes in the community; the issue of outcomes—how can we evaluate what is a product of community empowerment?; the community empowerment of minorities and of women, two populations whose needs in the domain of community planning are great, yet not enough attention is devoted to them in the urban planning context (Churchman, 1990b).

The seventh chapter – Community Empowerment as an Empowering Professional Practice – discusses the planers themselves, as promoters of the empowerment of individuals and communities, and as a population which itself is in need of empowerment. On the basis of the stages of empowerment that were developed in the previous chapter, this chapter presents a conceptual model of stages of empowerment-enhancing professional intervention. The purpose of the model is to answer some methodical questions on the many subjects included in this complex chapter. The discussion of each of the intervention stages focuses on the intervention methods and the questions specific to that stage in the practice of encouraging empowerment.