Local Community Organizing and Change: Altering Policy in the Housing and Community Development System in Kansas City

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a detailed case study of a local group of citizens organizing to hold governmental and nongovernmental organizations accountable for improving housing and communities in Kansas City, MO. The case study draws on a review of organizational archival documents (i.e., organizational attendance records and internal reports); public documents from local, state, and federal agencies; media coverage; and a series of qualitative interviews with participants. The case provides an example of successful local community action. Yet, it also highlights many of the challenges that organizing groups face in making lasting community change. Change is constant and ongoing. Citizens' groups must therefore not only mobilize but also achieve a sustainable and politically viable presence to continually exert pressure. This is particularly true because citizen actions on behalf of community interests often provoke reactions from special interests and other defenders of the status quo. Case study methods represent a critical tool for documenting and understanding important community phenomena in a more holistic way. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: citizen participation; systems change; community organizing; community development; power

INTRODUCTION

This article presents a case study of a community organizing group working to alter the system of housing and community development in a midsized US city. The case study involves the group Communities Creating Opportunity (CCO) in Kansas City, MO. CCO conducts community organizing through a federation of 25 local faith-based institutions. It is an affiliate of the PICO National Network[1] and has been involved in improving the

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quality of life for residents in numerous domains. This case study describes efforts to facil-itate community development and encourage the production of affordable housing in Kansas City neighborhoods for a decade. Notable achievements by CCO include the dismantling and rebuilding of the branch of local government that implements housing and community development. Our primary goal in this case study was to assess the degree to which a local community organizing group can be understood to impact community out-comes. An additional goal is to describe the local efforts of one community organizing group working to affect community-level impact against a backdrop of neoliberalism. Finally, our goal is to employ the richness of the case study method to illuminate how social power is exercised within the contexts and intricacies of complex community change dynamics. Drawing on a series of interviews with organizing participants; a review of orga-nizational archival documents; rates of participation by the organizing group; reviews of public documents of public agencies at local, state, and federal levels; and news coverage, this case seeks to illuminate the community impacts tied to an organizing group within the broader context of a US city in the era of neoliberal politics and globalization.

KANSAS CITY CASE STUDY

On the evening of 15 June 2004, 450 Kansas City, Missouri, residents crowded the sanctu-ary of St. Therese Little Flower Catholic Church in the Blue Hills neighborhood.[2] Kay Barnes, the Mayor of Kansas City, was specifically invited to attend the public meeting, along with other local public officials. The meeting was not sponsored by the city or by a member-ship organization such as the Chamber of Commerce; it was convened by a group of orga-nized citizens. The organization, CCO, introduced itself as a community organizing group representing the families composing over 20 faith-based institutions. For many in attendance, the organization needed no introduction because it had been active in local and state politics for nearly 30 years. Members of CCO, everyday Kansas City residents—not experts or housing professionals—took center stage to explain that the city had housing problems.

The purpose of this large meeting was for those involved in the organizing effort to directly engage the public, and the leadership of their local government, on the issues of housing and community development, which had surfaced during their organizing process. In the words of one CCO leader, "The housing issue in the city was the number one [issue] because of all the vacant lots, the blighted areas, the absentee landlords, the vacant lots that are in land trusts and don't get taken care of."[3]

Participants informed those assembled that the organized residents had five goals. The members of CCO were dedicated to (i) an accountable city government, (ii) a working program for the repair of homes, (iii) a way to hold absentee landlords accountable, (iv) protection from predatory mortgage lenders, and (v) a focus on building communities—not just homes. This set of goals, members explained, was in disharmony with the actions of the Kansas City Department of Housing and Community Development. The group went on to point out that $18 million in funds flow annually through the city housing agency in a haphazard, yet nontransparent way. New infill homes were sometimes unoccupied because

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[2]Like many inner city US neighborhoods, Blue Hills in Kansas City, MO, is a neighborhood that experienced dis-investment, blight, and increasing racial segregation for decades (see Gotham, 2000).
[3]Quotes are from a series of interviews conducted 2001–2005 as part of the Skipper Initiative for Community Organizing. Analysis of qualitative data for this chapter was performed using DevonThink Pro, Edition 1.5.2.

they were being placed in neighborhoods with abandoned houses or outdated infrastructure. A member of CCO addressed the crowd, "Without addressing the broader need of communities in a comprehensive manner, the construction of new infill housing in older neighborhoods does not make sense" (Horsley, 2004a, p. B1).

Members of CCO also used this public event to make specific policy proposals, such as establishing a $5 million fund for minor home repair, targeting neighborhoods where the existing housing stock was strained. This proposed fund would be an expansion to the existing $1 million allocated to minor home repairs. Mayor Kay Barnes was given the opportunity to respond to the concerns raised by the group. She expressed confidence in the city manager, Wayne Cauthen, who was in the process of hiring a new housing director. Cauthen was also in attendance and was given a chance to speak to the crowd. He said that he hoped to have a new housing director hired in a few months and promised to appoint a housing task force. He acknowledged that the city's housing department needed to become more publicly responsive.

Only several weeks after this CCO action, the city manager made a much bigger announcement. The existing staff of Kansas City's Housing and Community Development Department were to be reassigned to other city departments—fundamentally altering the structure of a major department within the city's government. The city manager explained that he had come to the conclusion that the decisions of the department were too often being driven by outside interests and that the department should be rebuilt from the ground up. The city manager did not mention the names of specific outside interests in his speech. The implication, though, was that organizations like the Housing and Economic Development Financial Corporation (HEDFC), which had been exposed for squandering public money, were going to be cut out of decision making on the flow of public funds. A joint audit by the city and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had exposed the inadequacy of the monitoring of housing and community development funds flowing through HEDFC.

The HEDFC project that had captured the most public attention centered on the cost of renovating two small houses in a working class neighborhood for a cost that exceeded 20 times the assessed value of those properties. Later, in 2006, HEDFC would be used as a case study in the ineffective use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding in the testimony of the inspector general of the US HUD to committees of the US Senate. The 2004 audit of the city's housing programs had criticized the lack of monitoring of subrecipients like HEDFC. These nonprofit subrecipients received funding through the HOME and CDBG programs and other funding streams administered by Kansas City's Housing and Community Development Department. Yet, they were often not required to demonstrate their qualifications to perform the work—and were not required to report the specifics of their expenditures to the public. The former directors of the department had habitually deflected criticisms of these monitoring failures by pointing to accomplishments, such as the total number of housing units that had been produced over several years. However, these numbers were relatively meaningless without context or details, and some in the city government and the press had been pushing for greater transparency ("Audit Confirms Serious Problems," 2001). By the time of CCO's 2004 Housing Action, the public, the press, and the members of the city council had known about irregularities and problems within the Housing and Community Development Department for years. Yet, the problems had persisted, in some part due to the difficulties of ousting

entrenched bureaucrats and tackling structural arrangements within government (Abouhalkah, 2005).

The fact that the 2004 CCO public action was held only 2 weeks preceding the city manager's announcement that there was to be a restructuring of the Housing and Community Development Department is no coincidence. The action of the organizing group helped to provide the necessary pressure to create change in the structure of the local government. One CCO leader explained, "We had this window of opportunity with a new city manager, and there have been a series of audits, but there was a new audit that was being released in June. So it was kind of this confluence of events." When the city manager broke up the Housing Department, he said, "We're breaking it out to rebuild it" (Horsley, 2004b, p. A1). In response to the government shakeup, a CCO organizer is quoted in the same article. "I'm less concerned about structure than results," says the organizer. Although recognizing the accomplishment that the structural changes represented, the organizer's quote reflects the fact that the problems would remain until the services to low- and moderate-income residents of Kansas City were improved. This position is reflective of the pragmatic nonpartisan stance that CCO maintains in public dealings.

Organizing processes like the one carried out by CCO do not only impact local political discourses and the distribution of resources—they also have an impact on individual participants. Reflecting on the experience of the research, planning, and the final execution of the housing action, one CCO leader remarked, "I thought—I'm like, oh this is it. This is powerful. This is how it works. This is how you change things." The organizing model that CCO and other local federations in the PICO Network employ prioritizes both building relationships between individuals who participate as well as empowering individuals – through relationships – to understand and operate with power.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN A NEOLIBERAL CONTEXT

Approaches to community organizing and community development have been greatly influenced over some period of time by the broader processes in the global economy (DeFilippis, Fisher, & Shragge, 2006; Geoghegan & Powell, 2008). Neoliberal policies of deregulation, displacement of the poor, dismantling of the welfare state, and, generally, submission of all aspects of life to market solutions can be understood as privatizing risk for individuals and families while socializing risk for corporations and capital. Against this backdrop, approaches to community development have arced substantially in a conservative direction (DeFilippis, 2008). Many local efforts have not fully engaged, analytically or practically, the influence of global economic forces on local community processes. In fact, scholars have noted the response by community development efforts in our conservative political era toward conservative forms of community work, such as consensus, collaborative, and community building approaches to the exclusion of challenging injustice (DeFilippis, 2008; DeFilippis et al., 2006).

Community development, then, is challenged both by a need for an analysis of the way that globalizing processes are affecting local communities, as well as a need to identify effective approaches for local action juxtaposed to the scale of globalization processes. This case study of CCO is not a solution to this challenge, but this can be viewed as an example of an organization pushing back against processes that have characterized the

neoliberal era in a local urban context. Specifically, this case study describes a local orga-nization putting pressure on state officials to intervene in a set of housing policies for the benefit of low- and moderate-income people and communities.

CASE STUDY METHODS FOR DOCUMENTING THE EXERCISE OF SOCIAL POWER

Communities Creating Opportunity's local actions and their results, particularly in the context of neoliberal processes, make a compelling story. Yet, for social scientists, and particularly social and community psychologists, it is difficult to adequately measure community-level processes like the organizing case described for a number of reasons. Methodologically, a particular community change process is an *N* of 1—the capacity to draw even the mildest of causal inferences is severely constrained. Moreover, community dynamics are particularly turbulent, with many forces at play simultaneously. Hence, it is exceedingly difficult to tease out the influence of any variable or set of variables against a backdrop of fluid forces. When community organizing is successful, the measurable impacts are often muted because there are many other organizations, businesses, institu-tions, and interest groups working in ways counter to such progressive efforts. With regard to the community organizing work on housing policy reform described here,[4] several news-paper articles described organizations that were resisting systemic housing reform because they were so advantaged by the status quo. For example, HEDFC allowed private devel-opers not to repay federal loans, and city, state, and federal money was distributed first to HEDFC and through them on to a diverse set of organizations in a patronage system based on political connections rather than on work quality or housing needs (Mansur, 2005).

Community-level processes are also difficult to measure adequately because community organizations, like CCO, frequently are not explicitly linked to the outcomes they directly or indirectly shape. Particularly when an organization like CCO sustains an agenda for multiple years, the organization's long-term, sustained focus and perseverance often elude the shorter term perspectives of outside parties, who may tend to understand the world in terms of less complex processes and more immediate results. Media coverage, elected officials, business interests, and public perceptions can overlook the continuity of many organizing actions, and thus the influence, through incremental steps, that add up to social power working as a causal process in altering community outcomes. As these impacts are diluted and disregarded, our measurement of them is correspondingly impaired.

To address these and other measurement difficulties, case study methods are a power-fully effective antidote. Utilizing diverse methods, case studies provide a capacity to draw on rich data sources capable of capturing the very dynamism that makes studying commu-nity phenomena extremely difficult. Case studies often employ both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches to measurement, providing something of a multidimensional encapsulation of community complexity. Case studies also allow a range of scale, whether geographic or population based, which enables perspective not always easily gained. Case studies are therefore a uniquely important, if often underappreciated, tool for studying social and community phenomena.

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[4]The organizing efforts described here took place prior to the 2008 mortgage crisis.

We employ a diverse set of data sources to more fully illuminate the processes of organizing for power, but with the primary aim to document whether the power exercised impacted community outcomes. In this case study, we are examining data to understand whether CCO can be reasonably understood to have influenced the housing policy changes in Kansas City. First, a look at media representations of CCO's role and impact in the Kansas City community is explored. For example, an article in 1999 asserts (Kelly, 1999)

> Arguably, no non-government agency has changed the face of Kansas City more—and received less credit for it—than the PICO [Network] and CCO….[CCO claimed] that the hard work of continuing pressure for systemic changes to solve the root problems within communities doesn't attract media attention. "The bigger story is more complex and more subtle,"…."If you have to make things simplistic, how can you look at these systemic issues?"

This article goes on to describe the work CCO was beginning with the St. Matthew congregation in Kansas City's Ruskin neighborhood:

> Communities Creating Opportunity is now beginning to spread to the inner suburbs of southeastern Kansas City, which today are facing the same problems that plagued inner city neighborhoods a generation ago—a mass exodus of longtime residents, a glut of housing on the market resulting in plunging property values, and an increase in crime.

This description of the organizing work at St. Matthew and the Ruskin neighborhood from 1999 documents the organizing efforts existing at that time. Next is a quote from a CCO report to a funder about their work, taken from October 2000:

> The renovation of a single house may not seem very grand outside of Hickman Mills, but it stirred a great deal of excitement in the St. Matthews' parish community. At St. Matthews' instigation, Kansas City, Missouri is utilizing federal HOPE III money to purchase and rehab houses in Ruskin Heights. Once the rehabbed houses are sold, the proceeds will go back into a revolving fund to rehab additional houses. Contractors have been hired to do the major rehab, but St. Matthew CCO leaders have organized to handle most minor jobs themselves. Based on the contractor's estimates, we have saved about $3,000 on the cost of the rehab (on a $35,000 house). The savings can either go into enhancements or else can lower the market price for the house, whichever is more advantageous in selling to a prospective home-buyer. Our first venture in housing rehab is a success. Now, we want the city to purchase additional properties and to work more closely with the community in rebuilding the neighborhood.

> We are attempting to develop a strategy that remains integrally tied to the faith commitments of the church as well as the faith-based community organizing process. This means we cannot simply turn the problem over to technical experts to solve. Instead, people in the St. Matthew's parish community have to understand their own housing market and participate in developing solutions.

As advances in the organizing process are made, the inherent power dynamics in community change efforts emerge; organizational documents within the second year of housing efforts at St. Matthew begin to reveal these dynamics of power. Specifically, problems with the city housing department—the local governmental partnering agency that was critical to making a revolving loan fund work to rehab homes and rebuild the Ruskin community—emerge in this funder report from 2002:

> Kansas City purchased three Ruskin houses for rehab, and committed to contracting out 10 more for private developers to rehab, but has done nothing since December to follow up on any of these commitments. The properties purchased are overgrown now with weeds and fallen tree limbs from a January ice storm. City officials have not responded to phone calls from St. Matthew leaders. In addition, Kansas City cut its free paint program from this year's budget, undermining St. Matthew's plans for a Community Cleanup and Minor Home Repair campaign

this summer. St. Matthew's parishioners are not relying on the City to fix their community. They have worked very hard to improve their own community. All they are asking is that the City be a reliable partner in that work. At their June Local Organizing Committee meeting, St. Matthew's leaders decided that they will need to hold city officials accountable publicly; however it is clear from one-to-one conversations that many people in the area have given up. "We knew the City wouldn't follow through" "What do you expect? Our neighborhood always gets overlooked!"

The above quote documents a sense of defeatism and hopelessness emerging for St. Matthew leaders. That feeling of hopelessness was fed by unresponsiveness in the director of Housing and Community Development over a 2-year period. It is important to realize that organizing groups often acknowledge explicitly the tools and mechanisms employed by local institutions to disempower citizen input. Often, these mechanisms are passive-aggressive behaviors, particularly in public venues, but can be quite aggressive and demeaning acts when interacting with individuals or small groups. Examples of passive behaviors experienced by CCO leaders from public officials include refusing to return phone calls or approaching one leader with the offer to work with that leader's congregation while explaining they did not have the resources to work with other congregations in CCO. Examples of demeaning acts experienced by CCO leaders from public officials include singling out one Latino man in a small group and asking how long he had "lived here" or shouting at a small group and asserting that they did not know how government worked and were "wasting our (elected officials') time." Institutions often exercise their power not by challenging organizing groups but by waiting them out. Verbally agreeing to community requests and then not following through is simply a way for those with power to counteract the efforts of less powerful groups. It is important to acknowledge that these mechanisms are effective tools for undermining and suppressing civic engagement in public life. These strategies by institutional actors are often employed when the targets are underprivileged by race or gender or class.

It is against this backdrop of political struggle—the struggle between CCO as a working class, largely minority organization, and the institutional authority of the housing department—that CCO's organizing work should be understood. Based on data from sign-in sheets at organizing activities, on 22 July 2002, 13 leaders from St. Matthew CCO met with their two city council members and the city's director of Housing and Community Development to detail the many promises and lack of follow through on the part of the city regarding commitments to facilitate the housing work of St. Matthew in the Ruskin neighborhood. At that meeting, these CCO leaders gave the city 3 months to follow through on their commitments. The city, again, pledged to follow through. Three months later, on 28 October 2002, members of the St. Matthew congregation from CCO held a public meeting with the city's director of Housing and Community Development, an event attended by over 100 residents and described in an extensive newspaper article (Witcher, 2002):

Young [a CCO citizen leader], along with many neighbors in Ruskin Heights, has spent years fighting to keep the neighborhood from sliding downhill as absentee landlords took over rental houses and pawnshops replaced hardware stores. As members of CCO affiliated with St. Matthew Apostle Church, Young and his neighbors have learned how to show up in force at city meetings and demand that slow-moving bureaucrats get off their butts....

[CCO] knew that federal money had been sitting around at City Hall for three years, set aside for rehabbing rundown houses in Ruskin Heights. City staffers had promised that every year, they would use the money to fix up at least three houses, then sell the properties to responsible

homeowners. The program might have begun lifting up the entire neighborhood—had it been working. So far, though, the city had refurbished and resold only one house.. . .

. . .residents of Ruskin Heights and Blue Hills packed the council chambers for one of the Housing and Community Development Committee's weekly meetings. They wanted to know what was going on.. . .Several neighborhood leaders, including Bahner, then stepped up to the microphone to criticize Barrett [Director of the Housing and Community Development Department]. When Barrett did speak, he agreed that the Hope III promise in Ruskin Heights had been poorly realized. "I have to agree with the residents. It wasn't a very good or expedient process."

At the end of the meeting, Mayor Barnes, who also serves on the committee, told the attendees, "We have to continue to work much harder at being responsive to the e-mails, the telephone calls and so on . . . I don't care what an individual or department or an agency has to do to beef up their responsiveness."

It was clear that her words, as well, were directed at Barrett.

As a result of the continued delays, Young and other members of the St. Matthew Church Community Organization are calling for a meeting with Barrett's superiors in the city manager's office to "ask that problems be noted in Stan [Barrett]'s personnel file," Young says. "If problems don't improve, we'll ask for Stan's dismissal."

At that 28 October meeting, the director of Housing and Community Development claimed that his department had purchased and rehabbed six houses in the Ruskin neighborhood. Based on CCO organizational documents, congregational leaders believed this statement to be an outright lie. As follow-up to that October meeting, CCO leaders engaged local media to document this public lie about his agency's work. From a funding report at the end of 2002, CCO writes

In November, KCTV-Channel 4 aired a tour of the houses which Mr. Barrett had announced had been rehabbed. In addition, a local news weekly, *The Pitch*, did an in-depth article on Mr. Barrett's office, centering on the broken promises in the Ruskin Neighborhood. Mayor Kay Barnes called Mr. Barrett to a meeting of the Mayor's Advisory Task Force on Housing to explain why his office was unable to complete the work it had promised in the Ruskin Neighborhoods. St. Matthew's leaders gave testimony.

This fairly fine-grained documentation demonstrates one small chapter in the organizing effort undertaken by one congregation working on the issue of housing. There is a substantial amount of additional evidence from newspapers, organizational reports, and participatory data to demonstrate CCO's central role in moving the mayor, the city manager, the city council, and other entities to address housing more seriously and to more fundamentally redress the mechanisms of government with regard to housing and housing policy. Moreover, this central role of CCO unfolded over the course of a significant amount of time, and unfolded in sustained, incremental ways.

Throughout 2003, the St. Matthew and Ruskin neighborhood group continued to work on plans to redevelop and bolster their neighborhood. One effort was focused on researching the funding mechanisms for housing and rehabilitation, including city, state, and federal funding, as well as sources of private investment in Kansas City. In these research meetings, the St. Matthew organization began to be joined by other CCO congregations confronting housing issues. Research meetings were held with the Economic Development Corporation, the HEDFC, both of Missouri's US Senators, the Home Builders Association of Kansas City, boards of local homes associations, the city auditor, director of the Federal

National Mortgage Association for Kansas City, several community development corporations, and numerous city officials.

These research efforts revealed for CCO leaders a level of dysfunction and corruption in housing that they deemed unacceptable. Much of what CCO discovered about the housing and rehabilitation funding mechanisms had actually been known by the government and local media for some time, particularly through a series of audits of the housing department. Based on the magnitude of the corruption and the problems that they were finding, leaders at CCO decided that they needed to push for major change in the housing and community development system in Kansas City. To make that change, leaders began planning for a large public meeting to pressure public officials to make such a change, and they planned to hold this public meeting in mid-2004. In late November of 2003, the city removed the director of Housing and Community Development. Although CCO concurred with this change in leadership, it was CCO's position that the removed agency director had only been part of the problem and that a mere personnel change was not the whole solution; CCO was intent on altering the system of housing in Kansas City. As stated in a funding report from late 2003, after almost a year of complex research about the system of housing in Kansas City,

> We believe the time is ripe to change the way Kansas City does housing. After an initial meeting with the City Manager in early December, CCO has begun planning toward a major action in May that would produce a platform on housing. We would negotiate the platform with the City Manager in advance, but then utilize the public action to produce the political support that will allow the City Manager to make the changes necessary in City Hall.

Communities Creating Opportunity's organizing efforts to put pressure on changing the housing system are also demonstrated through the level of media coverage generated by their work on housing policy in Kansas City. Fourteen newspaper stories were documented from 2004, with headlines such as "Group calls for housing reforms," "Solid housing policy should follow shake-up," and "Housing accountability." Most, but not all, of the above articles mention CCO specifically, but all articles related directly to CCO's organizing push to fundamentally alter the housing and community development system in Kansas City. The most direct reference is contained in an article about CCO's major public push for changes (Horsley, 2004a):

> More than 400 people packed the sanctuary of St. Therese Little Flower Catholic Church on Tuesday night to demand reforms to Kansas City's housing program. Saying they were fed up with bureaucratic inefficiency and indifference, participants at the meeting called on city officials to start spending the $18 million in annual housing dollars in a wiser, more strategic way. The meeting was sponsored by CCO, a group of 22 congregations serving neighborhoods south of the Missouri River . . . . The group's five goals are ensuring accountable city government, creating a minor home repair program that works, building communities instead of just new houses, holding absentee landlords accountable and protecting families from predatory mortgage lenders.

To assess CCO's impact on community outcomes, we considered that the policy changes may have resulted from forces other than CCO, or CCO's impact may have been peripheral to other forces. We look to multiple data sources to attempt to address these questions. Importantly, no other for-profit or nonprofit is identified in these 14 stories from 2004 as advocating for these housing policy changes. Close scrutiny of newspaper accounts documents a responsiveness to the issues CCO brought forward and supports the impact of CCO in advancing their perspective, as exemplified in an article from 1 July (Horsley, 2004b):

In a major shake-up, Kansas City Manager Wayne Cauthen eliminated the housing department Wednesday, saying that it had suffered too long from weak leadership and haphazard spending...Cauthen said he had concluded that the Housing and Community Development Department was often controlled by outside special interests, that housing services were fragmented and that there was no comprehensive approach for building and selling houses.

This reference to the influence of "special interests" and the lack of a "comprehensive approach" represents evidence in support of CCO's impact as these represent concerns identified and repeated in CCO's organizing efforts on housing starting in 1999, and demands explicitly emphasized at the 14 June meeting pushing for change. The article continues,

Numerous critics charged that the money spent didn't result in much new or rebuilt housing.... Just two weeks ago, more than 400 people packed a church sanctuary to demand that Cauthen and Mayor Kay Barnes support reforms in city housing....Director of [CCO], which sponsored that meeting, said Wednesday that Cauthen's announcement was a start.

This excerpt refers to "numerous critics," suggesting that groups in addition to CCO were active and influential in altering housing policy. Again, no newspaper article in 2004 mentions any other for-profit or nonprofit group working for these policy changes, although the city auditor is identified as supporting change in housing policy in Kansas City. Although that 1 July article explicitly mentions CCO in relation to the elimination of the housing department, by November, articles reporting on housing policy changes no longer directly mentioned the role of CCO when reporting on changes in the housing system. Nevertheless, the key policy changes advocated by CCO are reflected in what is documented. CCO's insistence on systemic change and coordination across diverse housing services is possible to interpret in the following excerpt from a November 2004 article (Mansur, 2004):

"We're trying to bring some efficiency to the system," Cauthen said, "something more than just a shotgun approach." Kansas City's housing program has been under fire for being a fragmented and inefficient bureaucracy that produces too little housing and wastes too much money.

The goal of this case study was to determine whether the community organizing group studied was able to alter housing policies within Kansas City. Although some newspaper articles made a direct linkage between housing system changes in Kansas City and the organizing efforts of CCO, this linkage is not apparent in every article, and this linkage faded over time. One method to test the policy impact of CCO is by examining the case study longitudinally.

Communities Creating Opportunity's major intervention to alter housing policy was their public action on 15 June 2004. Two weeks after that event, the city manager eliminated the city's Department of Housing and Community Development. On 11 August 2004, the city auditor and the inspector general of HUD issued a joint audit that found Kansas City's housing programs lacking and made 13 recommendations, of which 11 were included in CCO's demands from their 15 June action.

Closer scrutiny of the 11 August 2004 audit developed by HUD and the city auditor finds this statement:

The City needs to change its system to improve its ability to address housing needs. A number of studies in recent years—including our previous joint audits—have made recommendations to improve the City's processes for administering housing funds and HEDFC's internal processes. However, serious problems remain. We believe that the problems are systemic and cannot be solved without addressing the system as a whole. The City should redesign its structure to simplify administration, reduce administrative costs, and improve performance and accountability.

The auditing report does mirror CCO's push for systemic change. That alignment is consistent with, but does not necessarily clarify that CCO did influence the auditor's report. In fact, the auditor's report suggests that previous auditor reports, while not clearly calling for systemic change, recommended "to improve the City's processes" in housing program implementation. The CCO public meeting pressuring for a platform of specific changes was held on 15 June, and the auditor's report was released on 11 August—a length of time that might reasonably link the influence of CCO's work on the auditor's work. Finally, these two entities, CCO and the city auditor, were not simply isolated actors; in fact, CCO held two research meetings with the auditor in the year and a half leading up to their 15 June 2004 public meeting. So, some level of mutual influence likely exists between CCO and the auditor. Finally, the auditor's 2004 report makes clear that in a series of three reports (reports in 2000, 2001, and 2004), the auditor called for changes in Kansas City's housing department. This raises the possibility that it was the auditor that may have been key in influencing Kansas City's major policy change. However, the timing of actual policy changes supports CCO's influence. Although the auditor recommended changes in 2000 and 2001, the 2004 report—released 6 weeks after the initial major systemic change in Kansas City's housing department—states that the 2000 and 2001 auditor recommendations were not adopted. In contrast, CCO held several meetings with the housing department (as well as the mayor, city manager, and city council members) requesting different changes, programs, and policy recommendations since 1999. CCO's only demand for an overhaul of the housing system was in June 2004, and the major change was made 2 weeks later. The juxtaposition of the auditor's versus CCO's relative influence in affecting housing policy change in Kansas City strongly supports CCO's impact.

One final test of influence was conducted by examining newspaper articles for other organizations and constituencies that may have worked to influence housing policy. Published articles revealed only one entity other than CCO—the city auditor. Newspaper articles do reference constituencies resisting housing policy changes, but other than CCO and the auditor, no other groups are identified in newspaper reporting as advocating for a systemic change.

CONCLUSION

Community organizing processes are multifaceted. When studying these processes, we tend to examine the indicators that our methods permit us to measure. For instance, previous studies, using qualitative and participatory methods, have examined empowerment in the context of community organizing (e.g., Speer & Hughey, 1995) and the relational processes these groups employ to build powerful organizations (Christens, 2010). These studies, then, have focused on intraorganizational and interpersonal dynamics. Other studies, using quantitative methods, have examined patterns of participation (Christens & Speer, 2011) and measured psychological changes among participants in community organizing (e.g., Christens, Speer, & Peterson, 2011; Gutierrez, 1995). It is rare, however, that empirical studies seek to rigorously address the question of systems change (Peirson, Boydell, Ferguson, & Ferris, 2011)—or extra-organizational—impacts of local community organizing. When they have (e.g., Glickman & Scally, 2008; Speer, Peterson, Zippay, & Christens, 2010), evidence has tended to be inconclusive, yielding only suggestions that local organizing campaigns are making some headway on important issues. This leaves

researchers and practitioners alike open to questions and criticisms regarding the effectiveness of these models for community change.

Changes in the systems that are important to life in communities are complex and constant. Furthermore, each instance of change occurs in a specific set of circumstances and contextual dynamics that can limit our ability to generalize from data across time and space. The strength of the case study method is that it provides an intensive, rather than extensive (Stoecker, 1991) insight into a process or outcome. In this instance, it has allowed us to use multiple, detailed sources of data to draw the conclusion that a community organizing initiative did, in fact, drive a substantial change in an important community system. We are unaware of a method that would allow a similar type of conclusion using a single quantitative or qualitative method.

This study does not, of course, indicate that every instance of local community organizing will result in altering local power dynamics and local systems for community improvement. Indeed, the Kansas City case was selected for this study because CCO provides an example of a strong, sophisticated, and well-established community organizing group. Many other local citizens' groups are not as vital. Even among groups with similar capacity, chance and timing play a role in determining community-level outcomes. Furthermore, this local organizing case takes place in a neoliberal context—a context presenting extreme challenges to local organizing. Although CCO was successful in impacting community-level policies by pressuring the local state to modify their policies of subcontracts to private firms and to reassert state control of housing policies within the Kansas City community, there are substantial limits to the power of CCO and other local groups in the context of globalization and the neoliberal policies advanced at local, national, and international scales.

The CCO case does, however, provide several conclusions that are important for community psychology theory and practice. First, local community organizing can, in certain instances, play a leading role in driving local systems change. Second, change takes time and sustained effort and is likely to provoke responses from defenders of the status quo. Citizens' groups working for community change, then, should work to develop the organizational capacities for adaptability and persistence that CCO demonstrated in this case. In addition, citizens' groups must be prepared to defend the ground that they gain through their actions. Over time, victories on particular issues can be reversed unless the group has the capacity to continue to hold decision makers accountable and react to new threats to community well-being.

In this sense, the real success of CCO and other effective groups of organized citizens does not hinge on the outcome of any particular battle on local policy or practice. Instead, the notable achievement is that there is a powerful and respected local group effectively advocating for local community interests—and that the group is composed of community members themselves. For every example, like this case study of effective local action, there may be at least one counterexample, in which more powerful interests in local communities rebuffed strategic actions by local citizens. However, as the CCO case demonstrates, observers of local politics sometimes miss the influence of community organizing groups. For instance, the pivotal role that CCO played in reshaping Kansas City's housing system was eventually dropped from the media narrative, as local political leaders touted their own roles in the changes that ensued. Although it is true that city leaders were the ones issuing the actual decisions that remade Kansas City's housing system, they were acting in the context of sustained

pressure that was being applied both directly by the citizen leadership of CCO, and indirectly through CCO's dealings with the media and other entities and actors, such as the auditor. The case study methodology, then, is capable of shedding light on an elusive category of questions regarding community change processes; that is, which processes are causing community-level changes to occur? In this example, data from the case study method support the critical role of community organizing in altering housing and community development policies in Kansas City.

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