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Meaningful and Inclusive Engagement: Are We There Yet? A Case Study of Scarborough Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) Participatory Processes

Kiana Côté

Working Paper No. 2021/11

September 2021



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**Meaningful and Inclusive Engagement:
Are We There Yet? A Case Study of Scarborough Neighbourhood
Improvement Areas (NIAs) Participatory Processes**

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ISSN: 1929-9915



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Abstract

While Western planning emphasizes the importance of genuine meaningful citizen participation, the conventional public meeting approach fails to truly engage with the public. Studies have revealed the limitations of this approach to engage and positively impact ethnic communities. However, research has been limited to investigating the inefficiency of the participatory framework from the experts' perspective. It has not addressed the issue of the lack of ethnic diversity in participatory processes nor have made concrete recommendations for policymakers. The purpose of this research is to explore the urban governance contradiction regarding the attainment of meaningful engagement. This goal is achieved through uncovering how ethnically diverse citizens engage with and are engaged by the municipal participatory framework to understand to what extent this approach meets their needs. The research is conducted through a case study of the eight Scarborough Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), which comprise an important share of diverse ethnic groups. This study reviews the NIAs' participatory process and policies and analyses the output of interviews with representatives of the Scarborough communities, representatives of neighbourhood agencies, and the City to examine participatory processes and uncover ethnic groups' perspectives concerning the municipal participatory approach.

Key Words: citizen participation, meaningful public engagement, citizen empowerment, ethnic communities, the City of Toronto participatory framework

This research is funded by the Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Migration and Integration, Dr. Anna Triandafyllidou. It is also funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

This research was supervised by Dr. Zhixi Zhuang who is an Associate Professor at Ryerson University in the Faculty of Community Services, School of Urban and Regional Planning.

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Introduction

The participatory approach in planning has been criticized for being ineffective in meaningfully engaging citizens for decades (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Crompton, 2017; Finney & Rishbeth, 2006; Tigan, 2005). Although public engagement is valued in political discourse and institutions emphasize its importance, both fail to promote a bottom-up approach that guarantees a genuinely meaningful experience for citizens. Research highlights that the traditional top-down approach to engagement typically lacks accountability mechanisms to ensure that the public's feedback will be considered (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; King et al., 1998) and reveals frequent lack of transparency toward citizens (Innes & Booher, 2004, p. 420; King et al., 1998; Messier, 2006). Moreover, studies point out that such processes generally include no requirement for a third agency to assess the success of engagement (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Crompton, 2017).

These findings have not translated into significant investment by the municipal, political, and administrative apparatus to revise the municipal participatory framework, which is generally based on the top-down public meeting approach (Arnstein, 1969; Brody, Godschalk, & Burby, 2001; Lane, 2006; Weymouth, & Hartz-Karp, 2019). One possible reason for the persistence of the disconnect is that research on the inefficiency of the current participatory framework is relatively limited. There is a scarcity of information on how to concretely achieve meaningful and inclusive engagement and when available, most data reflect the experts and decision makers' perspective; it does not acknowledge the question from the citizen's standpoint.

Furthermore, studies on engagement reveal that the limitations of this framework particularly affect ethnically diverse communities (Messier, 2006; Qadeer, 2016; Sandercock, 2003). Top-down models of citizen participation do not capture all cultural practices of engagement. This results in processes where all public interests are not represented (Crompton, 2017; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998). As cities are becoming increasingly diverse, the new reality of the multicultural city exacerbates the need for increased equity in engagement processes (Burayidi, 2015; Crompton, 2017; Sandercock, 2003; Zhuang, 2017). Planners are therefore now given the task to invite "everyone to the table as coequals in a learning process, and giving them the tools and resources they need to be successful" (Roberts, 2004, p. 338). However, they face important challenges on their way to achieving meaningful participation.

While there is no consensus on what 'meaningful engagement' means, for the scope of this paper, meaningful participation or meaningful engagement is used to describe engagement processes that are accessible, transparent, accountable, and provide empowerment opportunities (Callahan, 2007; Crompton, 2017; King et al., 1998). The failure to reach this form of engagement not only limits the achievement of societal equity objectives, but also the unlocking of the full potential of neighbourhoods and cities to innovate and foster sustainable initiatives (Healey, 1997; Zapata & Bates, 2015).

Research Objectives

The main purpose of this research is to explore the challenges and barriers that stand in the way of meaningful and inclusive engagement. This goal is achieved through investigating if the current municipal participatory approach is effective in meaningfully engaging the perspectives of ethnically diverse citizens.

The research question is: how do ethnically diverse citizens engage with and are engaged by the municipal participatory framework, and to what extent are their needs met by this approach? Through answering this question, the objectives are threefold: (1) to understand how ethnically diverse citizens are engaged by the municipal framework for citizen participation; (2) to determine these citizens' assessment of the municipal approach; and thirdly, (3) to compare their critiques to the municipal approach and literature on meaningful engagement.

To meet these objectives, this research relies on case study analysis. The case study chosen is the multicultural enclave of Scarborough in Toronto, and considers the perspectives of ethnically diverse citizens, neighbourhood agencies, and the City. This is done through (1) a literature review about meaningful participatory planning and the diversity and inclusivity of participatory processes, (2) a policy review of Scarborough's Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs)' participatory processes, (3) interviews with representatives of the Scarborough community, neighbourhood agencies, and the City, and (4) a qualitative content analysis to evaluate all information collected.

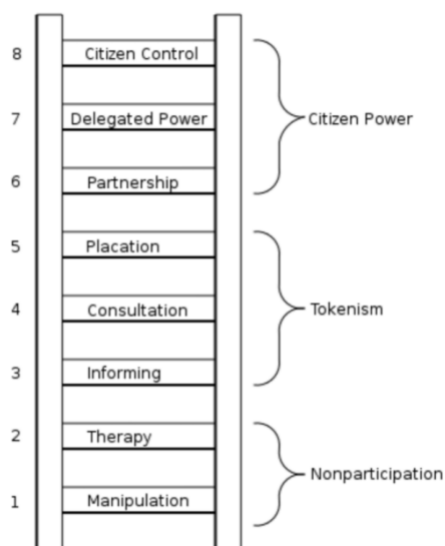
Literature Review

Theorizing Citizen Participation

Citizen Participation: A Contested Concept

While citizen participation is acknowledged as a key principle of contemporary democracy (Crompton, 2017; Margerum, 2002), research has produced a mixed and complex literature on this topic. Public engagement or public participation is a contested concept in community planning and there remains a lack of consensus on its definition (Arnstein, 1969; Bacqué & Biewener, 2013; Brody et al., 2003; Callahan, 2007; Crompton, 2017; Day, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998; Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Roberts, 2004; Tigan, 2005). Although engagement is now mandated in most contemporary planning legislation, it is unclear how it should be accomplished and what is the best way to achieve meaningful processes (Arnstein, 1969; Callahan, 2007; Crompton, 2017; Day, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Tigan, 2005).

Sherry Arnstein has been a key researcher for advancing theories of citizen engagement. This researcher defined citizen participation as "the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). This definition explains the reason why citizen participation originally emerged: to allow those who were not in positions of power to have a say in decision-making processes. Arnstein attempted to theorize the different levels of participation among a spectrum of citizen power called the "Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969). She conceptualized three main levels, (1) nonparticipation (2) tokenism, and (3) empowerment. According to the scholar, citizen engagement goes from information, education and consultation, to partnership and empowerment (Crompton, 2017; Roberts, 2004).

Figure 1. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

Source: Arnstein, 1969, p. 217.

Contemporary Views on Public Engagement

Since the publication of Arnstein's Ladder, the definition of citizen participation has evolved. Many scholars now define citizen participation as the involvement of citizens in governmental planning and administration (Callahan, 2007; Lane, 2005; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). New approaches to participation aspire to decentralize governance between citizens, non-governmental organizations, and social movements (Callahan, 2007; Lane, 2005). These models of collaborative planning position the role of public administrators as public servants who should focus on serving and empowering citizens through helping them articulate their needs and building a collective and shared idea of public interest. Administrators in this context occupy the role of facilitators who should foster dialogue among stakeholders, negotiate decisions between diverse public interests, and encourage relationship building and teamwork (Callahan, 2007).

Studies over the last decade have explored the question of engaging with increasingly diverse communities. This literature points out the need to make the participatory framework increasingly more accessible to and inclusive for a greater number of citizens (Crompton, 2017; Qadeer, 2016; Zhuang, 2017)

The Failure of the Current Participatory Approach to Meaningfully Engage with Citizens

While citizen participation is now a central component of community planning, many researchers and citizens evaluate participatory processes as unsatisfactory (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Crompton, 2017; Glass, 1979; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998; Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Tigan, 2005). Numerous scholars argue that a key issue is the top-down approach of traditional engagement processes that typically take the form of public meetings. Research points out that this approach to engagement often lacks accessibility, transparency, accountability, and empowerment opportunities (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Crompton, 2017; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998; Michels & De Graaf, 2010).

Accessibility

Scholars claim that one limitation to traditional methods of engagement is related to their rigid and formal structure with which the public needs to comply in order to participate. More precisely, the approach based on public meetings generally has a structure in which the agenda and timeline of the participatory process is set by the administrators. To share their feedback, citizens often need to speak in front of an audience, with a limited amount of time to debate their points and with the obligation to follow a predetermined agenda (Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998).

One main issue with this format is that it creates a power relation between the expert and the citizen (Healey, 1992a; Innes & Booher, 2004). As stated by King et al., the typical public meeting model creates a dynamic in which “the citizen becomes the client of the professional administrator, ill-equipped to question the professional's authority and technical knowledge” (1998, p. 320). As this process might discourage participants from sharing their opinions and thoughts out of fear of those being considered invalid and inappropriate (Healey, 1992b; Innes, 2016), it increases the risk of excluding certain members of the society. Indeed, not all citizens are equally equipped in terms of resources and skills to engage with this framework for citizen participation (Crompton, 2017; Healey, 1992a; Innes & Booher, 2004; Roberts, 2004).

Transparency

Furthermore, the literature on citizen participation points out a lack of transparency from the administrators in top-down participatory frameworks. While many participatory activities supposedly aim for collaboration and co-creation, the purpose of such processes sometimes only intends to consult or inform. This absence of transparency regarding how the public inputs will truly be used might result in a loss of resources and citizen dissatisfaction (Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998; Messier, 2006). It also increases the chances of distrust towards municipal institutions due to a gap between what is expected and what is received (King et al., 1998; Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2019).

Research also notes that one-way communication participatory processes typically happen after plans have been proposed. Many scholars even point out that the decisions have often been made beforehand (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Arnstein, 1969; Day, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998; Messier, 2006; Tigan, 2005). In this context, some researchers argue that the real purpose of the engagement process appears to be for the administrator to persuade the public in a context where there is very little opportunity for the audience to respond (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; King et al., 1998).

Accountability

Research also shows a lack of accountability in top-down participatory processes (Crompton, 2017). There is no requirement for the consultant (for instance, municipal staff) to assess the ‘success’ of a participatory process (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012) and therefore, no mechanisms in place ensure that the input provided is considered according to what has been promised (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Crompton, 2017). Moreover, administrators are usually not required to reflect on who was or was not sitting at the table during an engagement activity (Crompton, 2017). These processes do not guarantee that there will be a follow-up regarding what citizens have shared, which limit the opportunities for genuine empowerment that considers values of equity, accessibility, inclusivity, and transparency (Brody et al., 2003; Crompton, 2017; King et al., 1998). Such participatory processes are defined by many scholars as an empty ritual

of participation for which the main purpose is only to “check off the list” the engagement portion of a given project (King et al., 1998).

Empowerment

There is also scepticism regarding the opportunities for empowerment; that is, the possibility to truly affect the processes of traditional participatory activities. Many scholars state that processes based on a ‘notice and hearing’ system do not work to meaningfully engage with the public (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Crompton, 2017; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998; Michels & De Graaf, 2010). When there is a lack of transparency and accountability, these one-way communication processes can be used to legitimize top-down decisions rather than focusing on and truly valuing the input of citizens (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Day, 1997; Messier, 2006; Tigan, 2005). Rather than building capacity and offering opportunities of collaboration as promised, these participatory processes only serve the interests of decision makers (Arnstein, 1969; Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Day, 1997; Messier, 2006; Tigan, 2005).

The Challenge of Designing Participatory Processes

One explanation for current challenges in terms of meaningful participatory frameworks is that there is a lack of clarity regarding how to balance public involvement and power at the municipal level. Indeed, multiple approaches to citizen engagement are utilized across municipalities and organizations and there is no consensus on how to conduct good public engagement (Arnstein, 1969; Callahan, 2007; Crompton, 2017; Day, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Tigan, 2005).

One of the biggest enduring questions pertains to how much participation is enough participation and to what extent citizen-led suggestions should be acted upon and implemented (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Callahan, 2007). While some are in favour of indirect engagement, others favour deliberative and direct models of participation (Callahan, 2007). There are thus uncertainties regarding how to design and implement citizen engagement processes. Whereas the purpose of some of these processes is solely to fulfil informative or consultative objectives, others target collaboration between stakeholders and foster citizen control (Arnstein, 1969; Crompton, 2017; Roberts, 2004). Based on Arnstein’s spectrum of participation, some theorists argue that only collaborative processes that offer opportunities for partnerships and empowerment allow a redistribution of power, thus representing genuine participation (Arnstein, 1969; Brody et al., 2003; Tigan, 2005). Others believe that meaningful participation is not limited to ‘collaborating with’ and ‘empowering,’ but also encompasses ‘informing’, ‘educating’, and ‘consulting’ (Roberts, 2004).

Furthermore, there are no agreed-upon evaluation criteria to assess the success of an engagement process (Arnstein, 1969; Callahan, 2007; Crompton, 2017; Day, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Tigan, 2005). When assessing a participatory process, there is also a debate regarding the appropriate endpoint; should this be done once recommendations on the project are stated or at the end of it (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012)?

The questions mentioned above reflect the complexity of leading meaningful engagement processes. This level of complexity might explain why policies and directives regarding citizen participation to-date are vague, outdated, and in general, provide minimal guidance to planners that are looking to design genuine and effective participatory strategies and processes (Brody et al., 2003).

Engaging for Inclusivity

A Lack of Representation of Ethnic Diversity in Participatory Processes

In addition to exposing that the current approach to engagement fails to meaningfully involve citizens, research reveals that there is very little representation of ethnic diversity within city-level participation processes (Messier, 2006; Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Qadeer, 2016; Sandercock, 2003; Tigan, 2005). As stated by Messier, ethnicity alone cannot constitute the only explanation to the low rate of participation of ethnic communities; other factors must be mentioned, such as socioeconomic factors or the voluntary or forced exclusion (2006). Yet, the low level of diversity in participatory processes indicates that the limitations of the current participatory approach might impact ethnic communities more significantly (Messier, 2006; Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Qadeer, 2016; Sandercock, 2003; Tigan, 2005). This knowledge has not, however, translated into any significant investment by the municipal, political, and administrative apparatus to address this reality. Although most cities emphasize the importance of extending engagement reach, Crompton's research uncovered that they do not propose diversity and inclusivity targets. Furthermore, as engagement reach is normally expressed as a total number, it is difficult to evaluate to what extent a process was representative of the community (Crompton, 2017).

Barriers to Engagement That Are Disregarded

To understand the possible reasons for the low representation of ethnic diversity in municipal engagement processes, it is useful to review the different physical, economic, and social barriers to participation generated by the current model of citizen engagement (Crompton, 2017). Economic and physical barriers include challenges related to transportation, work schedule, family structure, and economic disadvantages (King et al., 1998). In terms of social barriers, there is a lack of knowledge of the participatory process, low access to technical information, and a lack of knowledge of language making it difficult to engage, among others (Roberts, 2004). King et al. also state that while some individuals would like to engage more with the decision-making and planning of their community, the demands of day-to-day life get in the way (1998).

Equity V. Equality

To achieve more inclusive and meaningful engagement, some scholars advocate for a shift from an equality-based approach to an equity-based approach when finding solutions to address the barriers to participation (Crompton, 2017; Qadeer, 2016). While equality refers to the right to equal status and benefits without discrimination, equity is defined as the enactment of "fairness in the outcomes of distributing opportunities and resources" (Qadeer, 2016, p. 218). Those scholars argue that more balanced distribution of opportunities and resources by local governments is crucial as not everyone is equally able to participate if provided with the opportunity (Crompton, 2017; Day, 1997). Crompton's study revealed that certain groups of the population are excluded from the privilege of democratic participation, as participation in a political process is a luxury that can only be afforded once individuals have fulfilled their essential needs. Furthermore, even when citizens were able to engage in democratic society, many of them perceive the environment as unwelcoming (Crompton, 2017). Crompton's research also showed that "there is a general lack of regard for, or awareness of, the 'whiteness' of many municipal spaces" (Crompton, 2017, p. 75). This might be a reason for the non-participation of ethnic communities, demonstrating the

need for the critical examination of municipal processes to evaluate to what extent they are inclusive (Crompton, 2017).

The Challenge of a Shift Towards More Equitable and Inclusive Participatory Processes

While most planners want to expand their engagement toolbox to overcome the barriers to participation and reach a more diverse audience, there are many challenges to such a shift (Crompton, 2017). One challenge to more inclusive and equitable engagement is that most municipalities do not track demographic information of participants, which makes it difficult to assess to what extent processes are successful in achieving accessibility and inclusivity objectives (Crompton, 2017). In her study, Crompton investigated what prevents municipalities from implementing more inclusive participatory processes. The research highlighted that budget constraints, restrictions, and timelines were the most common barriers. Moreover, to optimize the limited resources allocated to engagement processes, participants explained that the municipality would benefit from knowing better their audience and the obstacles they face. They explained that when municipal staff are aware of these barriers, they use their resources to address them beforehand. In other words, the onus should be on the planner to identify the social structures and obstacles that limit citizens from engaging in participatory processes and plan their program in a way that minimizes these barriers (Crompton, 2017).

Crompton's research also revealed that municipalities are trying to advance the inclusivity of their engagement framework through removing barriers to participation for marginalized communities, and similarly observed a shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach for municipal governance. Yet, she argues that there is still no consensus on how engagement should be done and no mandatory assessment process to evaluate the success of engagement. Therefore, the advantages of more authentic and inclusive engagement are mostly intangible (Crompton, 2017).

Research Methods

This research was completed through a case study of the multicultural enclave of Scarborough in Toronto. The goal was to investigate whether the current municipal participatory approach is effective in meaningfully engaging citizens and assess the inclusivity of this approach. Scarborough was selected for the case study because of its distinctive cultural diversity and its needs in the area of community programming.

Case Study Context

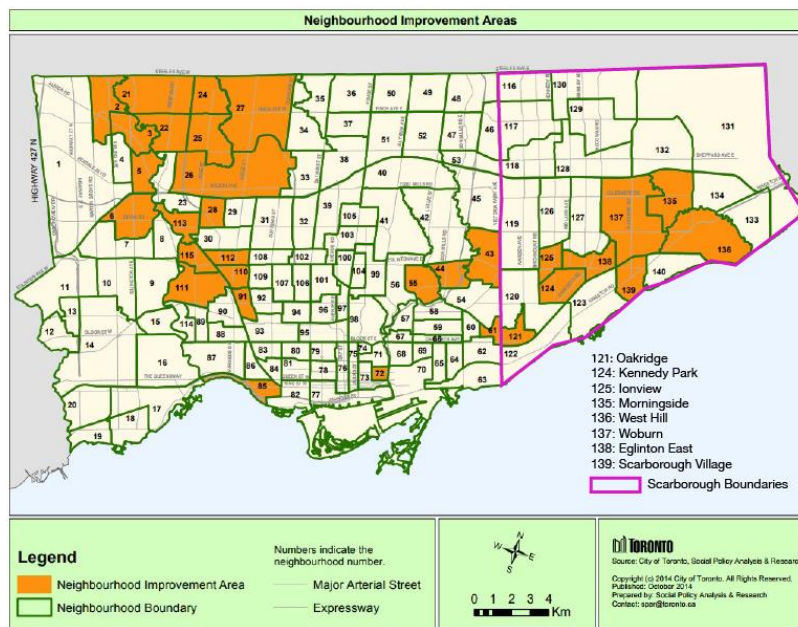
Scarborough is an area located in the east end of Toronto. Post World War II, it became a popular destination for new immigrants. It is now one of the most diverse and multicultural areas of the Greater Toronto Area and is home to numerous religious groups and places of worship (Myrvold & Fahey, 1997). Scarborough is known for being an ethnic enclave, which is a residential concentration of "ethnic groups or ethnic communities that can be easily identified by a combination of religious, cultural institutions and ethnic services" (Ojo & Shizha, 2018, p. 166). Those diverse cultures and ethnicities are reflected in Scarborough demographics: a very high percentage of the population identifies as being an immigrant (70 %) and/or as a visible minority (51 %) (City of Toronto, 2020a; Ojo & Shizha, 2018; Zucchi, 2007). In 2016, Scarborough's main visible minority groups included South Asian, Chinese, Black, and Filipino (City of Toronto).

The Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs)

In addition to being considerably diverse, there is demand for increased economic and equitable opportunities in Scarborough. This area of Toronto was targeted by the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020 (TSNS2020)*, which was first implemented in 2014 and which ended in 2020. The *TSNS2020*'s purpose was to ensure that all neighbourhoods succeed and thrive by strengthening the economic, social, and physical assets of selected areas to generate local impacts that foster citywide change (City of Toronto, 2020b). Those are achieved through engaging residents, creating partnerships, providing targeted investments such as neighbourhood grants, and ensuring continuous service improvements.

Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) are geographically designated areas which were established by the City of Toronto to determine the community in need of support under the *TSNS2020* (City of Toronto, 2020a). In total, 31 Toronto neighbourhoods were identified as NIAs. As Scarborough is home to 8 out of the 31 NIAs (25 %), this area shows a demand for increased resources and support (City of Toronto, 2020a).

Figure 2. Scarborough's Eight NIAs



Source: City of Toronto, 2020a, modified by Kiana Côté.

TSNS2020 and NIAs work included Neighbourhood Planning Tables (NPTs), which are composed of residents, neighbourhood agencies, local businesses, City councillors, and City officials. These stakeholder groups regularly meet to plan and carry-on actions in their NIA.

15 NPTs represent the 31 NIAs. All NPTs have developed a Neighbourhood Action plan that aligns with *TSNS2020*'s objectives (City of Toronto, 2017a). Scarborough NIAs' community programming is led by NPTs. There are three NPTs in Scarborough that manage two to four NIAs.

Table 1. Scarborough's NIAs and their Respective NPT

NPTs	Associated NIAs			
Kennedy Eglinton Progressive Engagement Collaborative	Kennedy Park	Ionview	Eglinton East	
Southeast Scarborough Planning Table	Morningside	Kingston Galloway/Orton Park (West Hill)	Woburn	Scarborough Village
Taylor-Massey Oakridge Neighbourhood Action Partnership	Oakridge	Taylor-Massey (not in Scarborough)		

Source: City of Toronto, 2017.

Interviewees

To gain an in-depth understanding of the NIAs' strategies for citizen participation and ultimately uncover how ethnically diverse citizens are being engaged, I conducted a total of seven semi-structured interviews. All participants were recruited using the snowball sampling strategy (Gaber, 2020; Neuman & Robson, 2014) and were familiar with the NIAs' processes.

Interviews with three Scarborough residents helped understand their role with the NIAs initiatives, how they are engaged and involved, and the outcomes of their participation. The respondents were ethnically diverse (all interviewees identified as being from different ethnic groups), reflecting the ethnic diversity of Scarborough. Resident interviewees were also from three different NIAs or former NIAs. This diversity of citizen representation was fundamental as one ethnic group is different from another one and as NIAs have different backgrounds and equitable opportunity needs.

Additionally, interviews with three neighbourhood agencies or organizations uncovered their role in the NIAs processes and their relationship with the City and residents.

Finally, an interview with one City Community Development Officer (CDO) from the City of Toronto helped with understanding the City's approach to citizen engagement and community programming in NIAs.

Meaningful and Inclusive Engagement: Has This Been Achieved?

A Tokenistic Process

The interviews revealed that the City of Toronto participatory processes in Scarborough NIAs show a serious lack of accountability and transparency. This raises questions regarding the intent of the process, which some respondents perceived to be more of a symbolic ritual than meaningful engagement.

A Lack of Accountability and Transparency

Participants both from the agency and resident groups of interviewees mentioned a lack of accountability and transparency regarding the NPTs' participatory and funding processes. On the topic of engagement, Participant 3 from an agency mentioned that although the intentions appeared to be around achieving meaningful engagement, there is a lack of follow-up on the processes, which results in a failure to translate the feedback into concrete actions. This criticism

echoed what agency and resident participants said regarding how certain issues have been raised many times, but no improvement can be noticed:

“And then you can ask the City from the time that you documented this consultation, and this has been brought up, what have been the actual local approaches that have been able to reduce the issue or mitigate the issue? And they’ll maybe share all these fancy reports that go back to council and say that ‘this is what they’ve done’, meanwhile, on a local level we’re still seeing the same issues.” Participant 2, Agency.

“A lot of things that they (the residents) really want are not met. It’s almost like they (the City) throw us a bone and they bring in some things, but things that people have been asking for many, many years, they say they’re going to try or they don’t know how to implement it. And then they don’t bring it in.” Participant 6, Resident.

The lack of accountability was also highlighted by all resident interviewees. One resident mentioned not understanding how the process of engagement ultimately results in the creation of useless agitation with nothing achieved.

“...(The City was) agitating the thing not resolving anything and, as you will see from the final report, nothing was achieved, nothing.” Participant 4, Resident.

Both resident and agency interviewees also spoke of unclear goals of participatory processes. For instance, Participant 3 mentioned that once, their NPT never got to the point where they could develop a strategic plan because of the confusing nature of the discussion. Expanding on their experience with NPT meetings, Participant 3 said they found that their CDO had good intentions and showed a desire to meaningfully support the community, but that the lack of structure resulted in a failure to accomplish work:

“...like I said, without the structure and the processes to actually surface those ideas, it was a non-starter; we had trouble getting anywhere.” Participant 3, Agency.

According to this participant, the main issue at the table was the absence of clarity regarding the intentions of the meeting:

“...I think the big tension that I have noticed or experienced participating at the table is intention versus impact... He (the CDO) definitely had a strong intention to support grassroots leaders, he definitely shared values around building up the community. But there was very little follow through on those sorts of values and intentions...” Participant 3, Agency.

While Participant 3 qualified this lack of intentional approach as ‘a missed opportunity’, Participant 2 from another agency described it as ‘fake consultations’. Participant 4 who is a resident used the term ‘negative agitation’ to describe the process.

Building on this, both agency and resident participants pointed out a lack of transparency with regards to the intentions of the City concerning the inputs collected. Many participants showed frustrations regarding the City and NPTs facilitators not clearly stating what would happen with their feedback. Both residents and agencies also highlighted having experienced situations where the City had made decisions prior to the engagement processes:

“I don’t know anything until after it’s done. After they put everything through, that’s when I find out.” Participant 4, Resident.

On the topic of transparency, residents highlighted issues concerning residents' intellectual property. Some resident participants mentioned situations where the City asked for their feedback, did not consider their ideas, and later on, implemented the input with the agencies while leaving out the residents from the process. Two residents agreed that this is a denial of their intellectual property and mentioned feeling disrespected:

"...I feel that a lot of our intellectual property is being stolen... a lot of neighbourhood leaders and residents are not given their do, especially when organizations are at the table, because, as I said, our intellectual property is usually taken, and then they... do their own thing." Participant 6, Resident.

"...then I also witness a lot of (situations where)... I'm sharing the idea (and) they would go ahead of me and put things together, you know for themselves. It wasn't planned or they didn't let me know. After I bring it to the forefront, they tell me no... or they'll say, 'Oh well, we already were doing it on the 17th'." Participant 4, Resident.

A final important critique that was mentioned regards the compensation of residents for their work. Both resident and agency participants pointed out a lack of clarity between what is expected and what is received. One participant mentioned that they once got involved with a City initiative for which resident participants' compensation was framed as if they would be hired and trained as City staff. Yet, they said that the compensation in the end was an honorarium and that they do not know anyone in the community who got hired by the City:

"We were told that the City was funding us and basically the only time we ever got anything was an honorarium to run certain events (for which) we were never paid. I don't know anybody that has really gotten a City job as a resident leader to help consult for the community through that program..." Participant 6, Resident.

A Lax Framework That Allows and Possibly Enables Such Tokenism

Some interviewees suggested possible reasons for the lack of accountability and transparency in community programming. They revealed flaws regarding the funding and legal framework, which do not comprise mandatory evaluation mechanisms to assess the success of participatory processes. Those statements help understand the reasons behind this tokenism. Whether this framework's laxity is a political intention or the unintended result of a series of political mechanisms and interactions between residents and political actors, however, remains unclear.

On the funding framework, agencies must meet certain criteria to be eligible for City or other governmental funding. When developing an initiative or project, this might encourage them to prioritize the fulfilment of those criteria rather than residents' priorities. One agency participant even wonders whether some agencies are only involved with NIAs initiatives to get funding:

"...I feel like a lot of those agencies, they're on those calls because they get funding from the City and United Way..." Participant 2, Agency.

Similarly, a resident believes that some agencies carry on initiatives that will lead them to receive funding rather than prioritizing what the community really wants:

"...You get so many thousands of dollars to come into the community just to do a needs assessment because that's what you put in an application, you know, because your

organization needs funding for the not for profit, organization and corporation.” Participant 4, Resident.

They added that it seems like the agencies’ goal is to meet the mandatory requirements and/or to receive recognition rather than truly supporting residents. This might be a consequence of both the current community programming funding system and legal framework:

“...it seemed as if it’s so that they can get their recognition and put it on paper that they did their job kind... Because they have a quota. Or they have to implement the results in reports... After they’ve reached their quota, or met their goal, then I’m on my own. Now, what I am going to do?” Participant 4, Resident.

On legal context, this resident argued that it ultimately seems like the work of City officials intends to achieve their agenda and keep updated on what is happening in the communities, but not to make actual change. This stresses a possible consequence of the absence of mandatory evaluation processes to assess the success of participatory processes:

They’re just over the communities to actually see what’s happening, to keep an update. It is not really to affect any kind of change. It is not to actually see improvement...” Participant 4, Resident.

A Top-Down Approach

Although the City official mentioned that the City is trying to enhance the empowering lens of their participatory framework, the interviews showed that the process is still largely a top-down approach.

The interviews revealed that neighbourhood agencies are involved with the NIA initiatives through partnerships with the City. They sit at the tables, work with the CDOs, and sometimes co-facilitate meetings. They can receive neighbourhood grants from the City to finance community programming in NIAs. Concerning the role of those agencies at the NPTs, one agency participant said that their organization sits at NPTs as a passive participant and that the community makes the decisions. However, residents demonstrated a different opinion and highlighted that the agencies have a decisive role at the tables. They described those agencies as City partners who typically receive the community programming funding to allocate it to citizen grassroots initiatives.

As residents claimed that the City and agencies ultimately control how they can use the funds, the interviews revealed that the processes are more tailored to the City and agency staff’s ambitions and wants rather than the needs of residents.

Neighbourhood Planning Tables (NPTs) Meetings That Are Not Tailored to the Residents’ Needs

The data revealed that the NPTs process is top-down and coordinated by City and agency staff. For instance, agency and resident participants mentioned that one issue regarding providing opportunities for residents to affect the process is that the meetings’ agendas are decided by the City, limiting the opportunities for residents to provide input. This top-down approach was confirmed by Resident 1 who mentioned that they did not feel heard at the NPTs meetings:

“...no one was listening to me, and I felt like I was going to meetings, but not being heard at all, no one was listening to me.” Participant 4, Resident.

The interviews also revealed that the City's system to provide funding support to residents and grassroots groups is embedded in a top-down approach. All residents pointed out that the way the funding process is designed does not allow for resident empowerment:

"They never pay the residents directly, it's always an agency holding the money..."
Participant 6, Resident.

"...the group is doing the work for free... And we have to work with a non-for-profit, in order to be able to get anywhere or get anything done." Participant 4, Resident.

One resident added that even when residents are successful in securing funding, agencies control what they can do with that funding:

"And then they're telling you what to do with the money. Because there are certain criteria... in order for you to receive that money." Participant 4, Resident.

Exclusivity in the Support Provided

The top-down approach was also reflected by the process that determines which communities can be classified as a NIA and access City funding or programming. For instance, one agency participant mentioned the name of a neighbourhood in Scarborough that is no longer a NIA, although residents have voiced that there are still important needs for more equitable and economic opportunities in this community. One resident interviewee lives in this former NIA and similarly pointed out not understanding why their community was no longer a NIA as it is a neighbourhood in need of support. Furthermore, all resident participants agreed that the City prioritizes organizations for funding if they had been working with them for a long time:

"They have their own people that they're working with and nobody gets in, they don't work with anyone else. And these are the people that have been in these positions for years."
Participant 4, Resident.

"... sometimes I observe that those big funds, which come from the City, they are just preferring the old organizations." Participant 5, Resident.

"...they're giving it (the funding) to agencies who tend to always get this funding..."
Participant 2, Agency.

One agency participant mentioned that residents have asked the City for explanation regarding the funding process, but that no satisfactory answer has been provided:

"...these same individuals have reached out to the City asking for clarification asking, 'Why do these groups get it' and... there hasn't really been a clear response around that."
Participant 2, Agency.

A Diverse Outreach but Some Missing Voices

All participants mentioned that NPTs resident participants are ethnically diverse, although it seems like there are often missing voices at those meetings. While they do not appear to have a

strategy to increase the diversity of attendees, the City mentioned being aware of this issue and wanting to continue removing barriers to participation especially for equity seeking groups.

Recurring and Absent Voices at the Neighbourhood Planning Tables (NPTs)

Although all interviewees agreed that NPTs participants are generally ethnically diverse, the data revealed that there are some absent groups at the tables. For instance, resident and agency participants pointed out a lack of young voices and an absence of Indigenous participants.

Furthermore, all agencies highlighted that it seems like the City is reaching out to the same people to participate in leadership activities. Participant 3 pointed out that a lot of participants from another City-led program called the Local Champions Program were at the NIAs tables:

“...so many of the grassroots leader residents who were there at the monthly (NPTs) meetings are also Local Champions. So whether that's how they found out about it, or whether they just have had that like kind of skilling up to feel like we could navigate those spaces with confidence, like whatever it is, there were more local champions there.” Participant 3, Agency.

This resonates with comments from the two other agency participants who question to what extent the City makes efforts to reach out to all voices:

“Sometimes I feel like the City's cherry-picking in terms of the leadership opportunities or capacity building that we've done with our tenants.” Participant 2, Agency.

“I think that when you go to the tables, they're, for the most part, they're filled. There are people sitting around all the tables. But I also think, and I don't know how they do that and how they reach out, but I think it is the low-hanging fruit that they go for right. So these are the easiest people to reach out in the community and I don't think that they have really reached out to the people that are harder to find.” Participant 1, Agency.

The Importance of Removing Barriers to Participation

Concerning the outreach and diversity of NPTs participants, all agency interviewees as well as the City pointed out how crucial removing barriers is, which confirms Crompton (2017), King et al., (1998), and Roberts (2004)'s findings. Regarding physical barriers to participation, all community programming has been moved online due to Covid-19. This removed the barrier of location while exacerbating technological access barriers as explained by residents:

“Now it's more challenging because no one is going outside, everything is online... and online tools are sometimes not accessible to all. Some people do not have access to internet.” Participant 5, Resident.

On the topic of technology and internet access, the City mentioned being aware of those challenges. They are currently reflecting on how to ensure an inclusive and accessible transition from in-person meetings to online web-based meetings.

Another important barrier that was highlighted concerns communication methods. This has been particularly pointed out by one agency interviewee who argued that institutions should adapt communication methods so they better match the needs of residents:

“...there’re tenants that mobilize on WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, or whatever else that’s the new trend, these days. But I think, as institutions, sometimes we’re hesitant doing so... I want to respect that there are probably valid reasons why people can’t do or communicate in a text message or WhatsApp. But I think, where there is an opportunity to, then why not. If it’s a matter of training and just adapting to the times and then so be it right.” Participant 2, Agency.

The participant added that failing to remove communications barriers can result in missed opportunities:

“This shows how things start to fall through the cracks. It falls into the cracks because we think that by providing an email contact or a line extension, people all of the sudden will reach out to get support. But this don’t happen. So it’s important to unpack who can do what and when.” Participant 2, Agency.

No Clear Inclusive Focus

The data showed that the City does not have a strategy to increase the inclusivity and diversity of NIAs participatory activities. To the question: “Do you know how minority groups are approached and engaged in NIA initiatives?”, no resident and agency representative was aware of a strategy or measures. For instance, one agency answered that the City appears to intend to expand their outreach and increase the diversity of participants. However, when this organization asked the City about a strategy, there was no clear answer.

Although they do not currently have a specific plan that aims to increase the diversity of the outreach, the City recognizes that more work needs to be done in this area and mentioned continuing their efforts to reduce barriers to participation:

“...we need more input from residents, especially those resident equity seeking groups that are not regularly at the table and not going to come to a big forum... We need to have a plan and a strategy that engages partners and finds a way of getting their voices to the table, whether they’re actually at the table and that will be part of it, but also what are their narratives and stories and how do we ensure that engagement is across the board and a lot more equitable.” Participant 7, City.

Improvements Needed for the Process to Be Meaningful

The interviews revealed that most residents do not find the process meaningful. The data highlighted frustrations regarding the NIAs participatory processes. All residents supported being asked for their feedback through the NIAs processes. Yet, it appears that the engagement framework and support provided do not offer real opportunities for them to affect the processes nor implement sustainable change. According to most of them, this results in missed opportunities and a waste of resources.

Few Empowerment Opportunities

Most resident and agency participants agreed that NPTs are helpful to build connections, exchange ideas, and collect citizens’ feedback. Yet both agencies and residents question the motivations behind the NIAs processes and NPTs. Undeniably, most participatory activities and

meetings are informative or consultative rather than offering empowerment opportunities through collaboration and partnerships (Arnstein, 1969). Most residents explained that NIAs administrators and facilitators do ask residents for feedback, but that opportunities to really impact the process or collaborate are rare:

“There’re always opportunities for residents to go and speak their mind and say what they want to say, but as I said, that’s when they want to gather information...” Participant 6, Resident.

“I think the participation was okay, because we did participate, there were many lively discussions. Our opinions were well received sometimes. Do I feel that changes were made? Not really. And if some of them were implemented, it took a long time for that change tapping. It wasn’t within a month or so, it was months and months or not even. It’s very slow.” Participant 6, Resident.

A resident explained that citizens are asked to provide feedback, but that the way this feedback is used, in addition to not being transparent and accountable, do not empower them. That resident also argued that the process does not appropriately recognize citizens for their contributions:

“They do ask residents, for their advice and feedback, but as I said when the City is doing that, there’s always some kind of organization at the table. And the leaders on the ground that are working hard to get change and give their intellectual property to the City, the City never recognizes these people, don’t compensate them (residents) in any form, or fashion. Participant 6, Resident.

Processes That Are Not Sustainable

Some agency participants pointed out the importance of ensuring that the engagement processes and support provided are sustainable. The interview guide asked for the participants’ opinion on meaningful engagement and whether the transparency, accountability, empowerment, inclusivity, and accessibility components are being achieved.

To the question: “In general, what has been achieved successfully regarding ethnic minorities engagement and what has not according to you?”, one agency answered:

“...there is meaningful engagement. How long and how sustainable this meaningful engagement is the question that I would ask... what happens when you’re not giving funding?” Participant 1, Agency.

This agency gave the example of grassroots groups who received funding once and are now at higher capacity, but who are not able to receive funding again because the City prioritizes new initiatives. They argued that there is no space for such organizations with higher capacity, which results in no opportunities for them to evolve or ensure the sustainability of the work they started. They also find that providing funding and creating programs is great, but that it is a missed opportunity if this momentum cannot be sustained, evolve, and grow over time. The importance of being intentional, accountable, and committed to residents in the support provided was also pointed out by a resident:

“I realized that people need to see real support you know, in order for them to participate... And if the people are sincere that they are involved, they’re not going to embarrass the

person that's trying to do something, they're going to support them they're going to show up, they're going to be involved, they're not going to give excuses, they're not going to come late, they're not going to come with an attitude, or they're not going to go on as if they were busy. But they'll make accommodations to be here for you..." Participant 4, Resident.

Discussion and Recommendations

Good Intentions but Meaningless Process

This study explored the City of Toronto's approach to citizen engagement. It targeted the work conducted in NIAs through TSNS2020. The research findings indicate that while the participants of NIAs' meetings and programs are ethnically diverse, there is a need for increased transparency, accountability, and equity in the processes of engagement.

Although the research revealed that the City is aware of the need for increased efforts to remove barriers to participation and engage harder-to-reach audiences, the study found that those intentions are not reflected in the processes. Agencies and residents highlighted the necessity to be more transparent regarding participatory activities' objectives and what level of engagement is involved. Participants also mentioned the need for more transparency regarding the compensation residents can expect in return for their contributions. They also highlighted the need for more clarity and honesty regarding what happens with their feedback. These findings confirm what has been highlighted by engagement scholars about the lack of transparency from the administrators in many top-down participatory processes. As described by Innes & Booher (2004), King et al. (1998), Messier (2006), and Weymouth & Hartz-Karp (2019), such lack of transparency creates a gap between what is expected and what is received, and therefore leads to wasted resources and the erosion of citizen trust.

This research also uncovered a lack of accountability in participatory processes. Participants deplored the meagre follow-up on the input shared by residents as well as on the initiatives that are being implemented. For many participants, this absence of follow-up is considered an obstacle to the accomplishment of sustainable work. To achieve accountability and increase the sustainability of initiatives, rigorous metrics and methods to track progress are needed. The City also highlighted the need to assess which resident groups typically receive funding to ensure that the process is equitable. Those findings confirm what the literature says about the lack of mandatory assessment of engagement processes (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Crompton, 2017; King et al., 1998). It also aligns with Crompton's conclusion about the need for mandatory metrics to measure the success of engagement (2017).

Participants also highlighted the necessity for increased facilitation and cultural awareness skills. Such skills could help engage harder to reach audiences and create a safe space for all groups of citizens to feel comfortable to participate. Furthermore, a more straightforward and transparent approach when asking for residents' feedback was suggested to be more respectful of citizens' time and to use resources more efficiently. Some participants also highlighted the need to hire residents to run the NIAs programs rather than relying exclusively on agencies. Hiring residents who have proven their commitment for the community and have expertise on the local context could not only increase the accountability, outreach, citizen trust, and efficiency of the process, but also help achieve capacity building. Undeniably, delegating and partnering with residents would move away from the informative and consultative levels of participation and advance towards meaningful collaboration and empowerment as theorized by Arnstein (1969).

The Importance of Addressing Inequalities Regarding Funding Opportunities Access

This study revealed frustrations from residents concerning funding opportunities. The funding was depicted as insufficient, and the process described as exclusive and non-transparent. Those arguments were supported by most residents and agency participants.

One recommendation is to have a more equitable process when providing funding opportunities. This resonates with Qadeer (2016) and Crompton's (2017) discussion on the importance of shifting from an equality-based approach to an equity-based approach. Opening funding to all grassroots groups and when not possible, being transparent and accountable regarding the process was suggested.

Another recommendation is to review how communities who can receive support are selected. Reviewing the definition of a NIA was suggested to ensure that no neighbourhood falls into the crack or on the contrary, is over-privileged in terms of support. Another suggestion was to ensure that resident groups that have gained capacity but that still need support for their work to evolve or sustain are considered by City community programming.

As funding and support have been pointed out by all participants as the most crucial elements to build capacity, a shift towards a more equitable, accountable, and intentional process for providing support appears fundamental.

Building Capacity Through Empowering and Increasing Resiliency

Although the City explained wanting to increase residents' autonomy and resiliency, NIAs community programming is still based on a top-down model of engagement. All participants highlighted the need for residents to have an active role at the NPTs; they should not only be informed and consulted, but be partners involved in the decision-making and initiative implementation processes. This confirms the argument that many participatory programs are still grounded in the traditional top-down framework to engagement (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Crompton, 2017; Glass, 1979; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998; Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Tigan, 2005). It also supports Arnstein (1969) and King et al. (1998)'s claim that there is a difference between meaningful engagement that provides true opportunities to affect the process and symbolic rituals of citizen participation.

To achieve a bottom-up approach and attain capacity building, residents and agencies pointed out the need for residents to be able to have a say on the NPTs and other meeting agendas. This study demonstrated a necessity to shift the power balance through hosting activities during which residents are active participants, can voice neighbourhood priorities, and be meaningfully heard.

All participants also mentioned barriers to accessing funding. This study revealed a need for more direct funding to citizens and fewer agencies monitoring how this support can be used. Moreover, most participants mentioned the need to meaningfully compensate residents for their work. They argued that the City should refrain from providing one-time honorariums and compensation and rather hire local residents as consultants.

Covid-19: Challenges and Opportunities

Amidst Covid-19, this study exposed that there has been an exacerbation of all barriers to citizen participation. Technology, communications, and schedule barriers were highlighted by many participants as obstacles to civic participation. Although the shift towards virtual meetings has removed the location barrier and therefore makes it easier to connect, participants pointed out that it has increased the inequities in terms of technology and internet access. Respondents

also highlighted that the pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues although some mentioned believing that the mental health factor has not appropriately been taken up by the City.

Furthermore, the City's lack of accountability was highlighted as a possible threat to the community programming momentum that has been happening in some neighbourhoods. Although the City programming work in NIAs is now on pause, the need for support as well as the work of grassroots groups are not. Many participants pointed out the need for the City to be accountable to residents to ensure that the work that has been started prior to Covid-19 can be ongoing.

The City indicated an awareness of the necessity for increased resiliency in NIAs and mentioned being open to criticism. They explained that this is one of their biggest Covid-19 learnings and shared a desire to reframe their engagement framework to address equity and resiliency challenges. The City aims to focus on two priorities: equity and inclusion. They also intend to be transparent in their intentions throughout the process of reviewing the NIAs engagement framework. Yet, the City interviewee was realistic concerning the challenges of undertaking such work. According to them, time is the biggest constraint. Undeniably, moving forward towards a different approach to engagement that further reduces the barriers for equity seeking groups to participate, and build relationships, trust, and awareness will take time. They also mentioned that a shift towards a more inclusive approach to community programming that places sustainability as a central component of the work can only be achieved if thinking long term. They added that there are no shortcuts or other ways to proceed to lead towards authentic connections and sustainable engagement that foster meaningful skill building and leadership opportunities. As the City is still in an emergency situation, the City interviewee explained that they would rather take time to build a thoughtful and sustainable framework than rush into building something quickly.

Summary of Participants' Recommendations for Meaningful and Inclusive Engagement

The following table summarizes participants' suggestions to achieve meaningful and inclusive engagement.

Table 2. Participants' Recommendations for Meaningful and Inclusive Engagement

Accessibility	Transparency	Accountability	Empowerment	Inclusivity	Sustainability	Covid-19 Related Inputs
Increase the accessibility of funding opportunities to all grassroots groups (all residents and Agency 2).	Have a clear purpose when hosting participatory meetings (Residents 1 & 3 and all agencies).	Have metrics to track the progress of participatory initiatives (Agency 2 and City).	Include the residents to have a meaningful say in the participatory events' agenda (Resident 1 & 3 and Agency 2 & 3).	Review how NIAs are selected so all undeserved communities are considered (Agency 1).	Be mindful that building trust and relationship takes time, therefore allocate enough resources to enable such process (City).	Give a particular attention to address technological barriers (Resident 3 and City).
Have a more direct and transparent process to provide resources to residents (all residents).	Be transparent in regard to the level of participation involved (Agency 3).	Have metrics to track the progress of City and agency staff (Agency 2).	Aim for a level of participation that foster collaboration and partnerships rather than being informative or consultative processes (Resident 3).	Provide cultural competency facilitation training (Agency 3).	Be aware that sustainability will not be achieved without transparency, accountability, accessibility, empowerment, and inclusivity (Resident 3 and Agency 1).	Provide mental health support (Resident 3 and Agency 2).
Provide residents meaningful compensation (e.g., provide hourly rate rather than honorarium or gift card, hire them as consultants) (Resident 1 & 2 and Agency 2).	Be transparent in regard to what will happen with the feedback (Resident 1 & 3 and Agency 2 & 3).	Follow-up with residents after having carried out an initiative (all agencies).		Have facilitation materials that are tailored to the unique local needs (Agency 3).		When designing a participatory process, be particularly mindful of new schedule barriers and mitigate those barriers (Resident 3 and Agency 3).
		Have metrics to assess which residents or grassroots groups typically receive the funding (City).		Have volunteers and facilitators that are from the community (Resident 2).		Continue to support the work of grassroots groups to sustain resident leadership momentums (all agencies).
				Increase efforts to engage with Youth and Indigenous people (Resident 2, Agency 1 & 2, and City).		Have resident participants at the Covid-19 cluster tables (Agency 3).
				Prioritize equity-seeking groups in the support provided (City).		

Conclusion

This research focused on the perspectives of ethnically diverse citizens, neighbourhood agencies, and the City on the municipal participatory framework. It targeted the City of Toronto's strategy *TSNS2020* and the NIAs participatory processes to explore the inclusivity and meaningfulness of this approach to citizen participation. The goal was to explore the reasons behind the failure to implement meaningful and inclusive engagement in community programming, despite the fact that such approach is valued by political discourse and institutions. This objective was achieved through uncovering how ethnically diverse citizens engage with and are engaged by the municipal participatory framework, and to what extent this approach fulfills their needs.

The literature on engagement and planning for diversity mentions a shift towards a bottom-up approach to citizen participation but points out a lack of accessibility, transparency, accountability, and empowerment opportunities (Arnstein, 1969; Aubin & Bornstein, 2012; Brody et al., 2003; Day, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2004; King et al., 1998; Messier, 2006; Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Tigan, 2005; Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2019). This research confirmed these arguments. Undeniably, while the City of Toronto is aware of the need for more autonomy and empowerment opportunities for residents, especially for equity seeking groups, those intentions are not reflected in the processes. This study revealed that meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable engagement is not achieved in Scarborough's NIAs.

This research revealed that a bolder shift towards a bottom-up approach is necessary to achieve meaningful and inclusive engagement in community programming. A departure from the top-down model would help reach citizen empowerment as well as increase the accountability, transparency, and equity of the framework. Ultimately, it would enable more sustainable processes. As a whole, the study exposed that citizens, neighbourhood agencies, and the City share similar viewpoints on what is needed to achieve meaningful engagement. Hence, enhanced transparency and genuine collaboration between all stakeholders when establishing the conditions of participatory processes is fundamental. Such genuine collaboration could help reach mutual understanding and diminish frustrations. Ultimately, and as proposed by one agency participant, it would be beneficial for municipalities to adopt an ethic of engagement, which would be framed by both residents, agencies, and City administrators.

Beyond exposing areas of improvement for the professional field of planning, this study's findings contribute to a larger discussion on the civic inclusion of diverse populations in Canadian societies. Reflecting on how to better engage those populations and the role of local authorities in building capacity is crucial to reach enhanced civic and political cohesion. It is also fundamental for the achievement of more equitable societies where both minority and majority populations are seen as part of a collective national project (Bloemraad & Wright, 2014).

Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guide for Resident Participants

Interview Guide for Representatives of the Community

Questions

Section 1: Context

1. Can you let me know when you first engaged with your local NIA and Neighbourhood Planning Table and why you decided to do so?
2. Could you tell me more about your role in the ongoing NIA initiatives, such as the neighbourhood planning table?
Prompt: other than the planning table, do you get involved in any other local community engagement activity?

Section 2: The City's Engagement Strategy

3. Can you provide concrete examples of how you were engaged (e.g., contacted and consulted by city staff, invited to meetings, involved in decision-making, etc.)?
4. In terms of other attendees in the City's engagement activities, is there a good representation of ethnic minorities? Do you know how minority groups are approached and engaged in NIA initiatives?

Section 3: Evaluation of the City's Approach to Citizen Engagement

Evaluation of a Concrete Participatory Activity

5. In terms of the participatory activity you mentioned in Section 3, how satisfied were you with the engagement event or process?
Prompts:
 - Did the meeting meet your expectations?
 - Did you feel you had a chance to participate?
 - Did city staff honour and value your feedback?

Evaluation of the NIA's Approach to Citizen Engagement

7. The Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy (TSNS) 2020 identified four objectives to achieve effective civic participation in decision-making. Considering the City's approaches to engage ethnic minorities, can you comment each of these objectives? For instance, how have minority groups been engaged to meet these objectives?
 - Objective 1: Ask residents for advice and feedback
 - Objective 2: Build capacity for civic engagement and community leadership
 - Objective 3: Involve residents directly in community decision-making
 - Objective 4: Remove barriers to voting in municipal elections

8. Meaningful engagement activities should include transparency, accountability, opportunities for citizens to truly affect the process, inclusivity, and accessibility. It should also be sustainable over time. In general, what has been achieved successfully regarding engagement of ethnic minorities and what has not according to your experiences in any of the NIA initiatives?
9. According to you, are there any other key components for effective engagement with ethnic minority groups? Which one(s) is/are the most important in your opinion?
10. Do you have any recommendations, wants, or suggestions for things you would like to see improved in the future in regard to the NIAs and Neighbourhood Planning Table's process for citizen participation, especially for engagement with ethnic minorities?
11. In the light of COVID -19, do you see any new issues or challenges in regard to the City's strategy for engaging ethnic minorities that you believe should be addressed?
12. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix B. Interview Guide for Neighbourhood Agency Participants

Interview Guide for Neighbourhood Agencies

Section 1: Context

1. To begin, could you tell me how long you have been working for your organization?
2. What is your role working for this organization? Can you describe your work?

Section 2: The City's Engagement Strategy

3. What is the working relationship between your organization and the City regarding any NIA initiatives (e.g., neighbourhood planning table)?
4. Can you provide concrete examples of how you were engaged with the local NIA initiatives and/or Neighbourhood Planning Tables (e.g., contacted and consulted by City staff, invited to meetings, involved in decision-making, etc.)? Are you an active or passive participant?
5. In terms of the City's engagement activities, is there a good representation of ethnic minorities? Do you know how minority groups are approached and engaged in NIA initiatives?

Section 3: Evaluation of the City's Approach to Citizen Engagement

6. In terms of your engagement in the local NIA initiatives you mentioned in Section 2, how satisfied were you with the engagement process?

Prompts:

- Did the engagement meet your expectations?
 - Did you feel you had a chance to participate?
 - Did City staff honour and value your feedback?
7. The Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy (TSNS) 2020 identified four objectives to achieve effective civic participation in decision-making. How have minority groups been engaged to meet these objectives (e.g., build ethnic minorities capacity, involve these populations in decision-making, use their feedback)?
 - Objective 1: Ask residents for advice and feedback
 - Objective 2: Build capacity for civic engagement and community leadership
 - Objective 3: Involve residents directly in community decision-making
 - Objective 4: Remove barriers to voting in municipal elections
 8. Meaningful engagement activities should include transparency, accountability, opportunities for citizens to truly affect the process, inclusivity, and accessibility. It should also be

8. Meaningful engagement activities should include transparency, accountability, opportunities for citizens to truly affect the process, inclusivity, and accessibility. It should also be sustainable over time. In general, what has been achieved successfully regarding ethnic minorities engagement and what has not according to you?
9. According to you, are there any other key components for effective and inclusive engagement with ethnic minorities? Which one(s) is/are the most important in your opinion?
10. Are there any barriers faced by underrepresented or “hard to reach” audiences? Or on the contrary, do you believe the City’s engagement strategy is increasing the diversity of participation and if so, how?
11. Do you have any recommendations, wants, or suggestions for things you would like to see improved in the future in regard to the NIAs and Neighbourhood Planning Table’s process for citizen participation, especially for engagement with ethnic minorities?
12. In the light of COVID -19, do you see any new issues or challenges in regard to the City’s strategy for engaging with ethnic minorities that you believe should be addressed?
13. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix C. Interview Guide for the City Official Participant

Interview Guide for City Officials

Section 1: Context

1. To begin, could you tell me how long you have been working with the City and with the NIAs as a community planner?
2. What is the role of a community planner in the NIAs? Can you describe your work?

Section 2: The City's Engagement Strategy

3. What are the existing engagement tools/initiatives such as the Toronto's Neighbourhood Planning Tables? Can you describe the City's approaches to engage with ethnic minorities?
4. How do you select the representatives sitting on the planning table? Do you have a strategy and/or mechanism to ensure the representation of ethnic minorities? In terms of the people that cannot sit at the table, can they have a say in the NIAs decision-making process? If so, in what ways?
5. In terms of engagement activities, can you describe the outcomes? (e.g., are a lot of people showing up, can you tell me about the demographics of the participants, are they some recurring participants)?
6. Does the NIAs and/or your neighbourhood planning table have evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the engagement in terms of outreach, inclusivity, and accessibility? If so, how does it work? Could you give me some examples?

Section 3: Evaluation of the City's Approach to Citizen Engagement

7. The Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy (TSNS) 2020 identified four objectives to achieve effective civic participation in decision-making. How have minority groups been engaged to meet these objectives (e.g., build ethnic minorities capacity, involve these populations in decision-making, use their feedback)?
 - Objective 1: Ask residents for advice and feedback
 - Objective 2: Build capacity for civic engagement and community leadership
 - Objective 3: Involve residents directly in community decision-making
 - Objective 4: Remove barriers to voting in municipal elections
8. Meaningful engagement activities should include transparency, accountability, opportunities for citizens to truly affect the process, inclusivity, and accessibility. It should also be sustainable over time. In general, what has been achieved successfully regarding ethnic minorities engagement and what has not according to you?

9. According to you, are there any other key components for effective engagement with ethnic minority groups? Which one(s) is/are the most important in your opinion?
10. Are there any barriers faced by your department in terms of increasing the participation of underrepresented or “hard to reach” audiences? Or on the contrary, do you believe the engagement strategy is increasing the diversity of participation and if so, how?
11. Do you have any recommendations, wants, or suggestions for things you would like to see improved in the future in regard to the NIAs and Neighbourhood Planning Table’s process for citizen participation, especially for engagement with ethnic minorities?
12. In the light of COVID -19, do you see any new issues or challenges in regard to the City’s strategy for engaging with ethnic minorities that you believe should be addressed?
13. Is there anything you would like to add?

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