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Shimon E. Spiro
Tel Aviv University

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EX POST FACTO EVALUATION
OF NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION PROGRAMS*

Shimon E. Spiro
Tel Aviv University

ABSTRACT

Quasi-experimental designs, which are currently dominant in the methodological literature on Evaluative Research, are mostly not appropriate for the evaluation of Planned Change in the social organization of urban neighborhoods. In this paper we propose an alternative approach, based on ex-post-facto case studies. Criteria for evaluation, as well as study design and instruments, are discussed in some detail. A concise summary of one local evaluative study is presented as an illustration.

Much of the current literature on Evaluative Research goes under headings such as "Social Action" (Suchman, 1967, Rossi, 1971, Evans, 1969), "Social Intervention" (Mullen & Dumpson, 1972), or "Social Experimentation" (Riecken, 1975). These titles may be unintentionally misleading. They evoke the idea of changes at the level of Social Organization, although, as a matter of fact, virtually all the programs discussed have the attitudes, behavior or well-being of individuals as their targets of change. Delinquency prevention, school achievement, employment and emotional adjustment would be typical objectives of programs which have received attention in the Evaluative Research literature.

As different from individual change, change in social organization has been defined (Meyer, 1972) as "... change in the combination of roles and statuses and their distribution within a social system". This may involve the creation of new groups (or the elimination of existing ones), the redistribution of power and influence, the creation or deletion of positions, the opening or blocking of communication channels, etc. Such changes are related to, but not identical with, changes in the behavior of individuals.

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The Evaluation methodologies expounded in recent or current writings of Suchman (1967), Weiss (1972), Riecken & Boruch (1974) and many others, while growing increasingly sophisticated and powerful, are also getting to be less applicable to programs of induced change in Social Organization. The "Classical Experiment" is emerging as the model of choice (Riecken & Boruch 1974, Campbell 1970), with quasi-experimental designs and "Natural Experiments" as "second best" alternatives recommended for situations where ethical or pragmatic considerations preclude the use of the classical design.

One would be inclined to agree with Weiss and Rein (1969), who argue that the methods currently advocated are mostly appropriate for standardized programs with multiple subjects. Programs of planned change in Social Organization, however, typically involve attempts to change the organization of a single unit or a handful of units, such as villages or industrial plants. Even in cases where a large scale national program is involved, we often find the variation in essential characteristics, of both the units affected and the programs implemented, to be so great as to preclude almost any kind of quantitative analysis. The American "Model Cities" program or the British National Community Development Project (1974) would be cases in point.

Thus, the methodology of Evaluative Research, as it has developed in the last two decades, is probably not quite relevant to the evaluation of outcomes which are defined in terms of social systems. In this paper we shall try to explore the usefulness of some less sophisticated study designs for the evaluation of planned change in social organizations. However, since there are important differences between units which can serve as objects of change (Bureaucracies, "Total Institutions", Neighborhood, etc.), we shall limit our discussion to one type of unit, i.e., the urban neighborhood. The programs we refer to are discussed in the literature under a variety of headings, such as "Community Organization" (Perlman & Gurin, 1972) and "Community Development" (Clinard, 1970). Since these and other terms are used rather loosely, we shall henceforth use the title "Neighborhood Organization" to apply to programs which are designed to produce social-structural change at the neighborhood level.

Programs of Neighborhood Organization have proliferated during the last three decades. The American "War on Poverty", for example, included a major "Community Action" component (Clark & Hopkins 1968), Britain has mounted the "Community Development Project" as an attempt to focus and systematize an extensive and diffused effort at the local level, Israel and Holland (Kramer, 1970), India (Clinard, 1970), and many other countries have extensive programs of their own.

Some of these programs have been accompanied by critiques and debate (e.g., Moynihan, 1970), and a few had built-in evaluations

(Clinard, 1970). There has, however, been only scanty discussion of the methodology of evaluation as it applies to program of this kind (Moseley, 1971). Both the magnitude of society's investment, and the questions raised about effects and effectiveness, justify a greater concern with Evaluative Research in this specific field.

Goal of Neighborhood Organization

Before discussing the methodology of evaluation we need to review the kinds of goals most commonly associated with neighborhood organization programs. These can be divided into three categories:

1. Changes in the Social organization of the neighborhood, often involving the creation of new voluntary organizations (Perlman & Gurin, 1972). The new organization may be a coalition of existing groups, each having its own constituency, interests and program (Alinsky, 1970), or a neatly structured pyramid of artificially created groups of standard form (Clinard, 1970). Although the creation of a new organization (or organizations) is the most prevalent form of intervention, it is not the only one conceivable. A program could aim at changing the operation of existing organizations and the relationships between them. However, Neighborhood Organization programs are always based on the assumptions that the target neighborhoods are inadequately organized to deal with problems facing them, and that a variety of ills, such as alienation, anomie and poverty, can be remedied through improved organization.

2. Changes in Resources - Neighborhood Organization programs generally are expected to result in the expansion of the resource base of a neighborhood. This may include physical development (such as roads, playgrounds or public telephones), the establishment of new services (such as a Mental Health clinic or Adult Education classes) or an increased responsiveness of existing institutions (such as Police, Schools and Welfare Centers) to neighborhood needs and demands (Vanecko, 1969).

In urban Neighborhood Organization the expansion of the resource base is generally not seen as an independent event but as a consequence of improved neighborhood organization. New resources may become available through "self help" efforts, or (more typically) as a result of increased power of neighborhood groups vis-a-vis the institutions that control resources. It should be noted that goals related to the resource base of a neighborhood are usually not specified at the outset of a program but emerge as part of the process of organization and community involvement.

3. Changes in the well-being, behavior and attitudes of individuals. Programs are often initiated on the assumption that neighborhood organization and expanded resources will be reflected in higher standards of

living, especially in areas of "public" consumption (education, safety, recreation, etc.). Similarly higher levels of participation, an increased sense of control over one's environment and other desirable changes in behavior and attitudes are seen as related to improved life situations and new opportunities for community involvement (Lovell and Riches, 1967-8).

Changes in organization, resources and behavior are mutually interrelated and reinforce one another in more than one way. Still, Neighborhood Organization is usually the main focus of the change effort. Hence, it should also be the focus of any attempt to evaluate outcomes. In other words, evaluation efforts should consist, first and foremost, of attempts to assess the effect of a program on the organizational structure of the neighborhood, and only secondly of measurements related to changes in resources and in the well-being and behaviour of individuals.

Methodological Constraints

The "Case Study" Approach: From the above discussion a number of consequences seem to emerge for the evaluation of Neighborhood Organization programs. A few tentative attempts at quantitative analysis (Vanecko, 1969) notwithstanding, it would seem that the bulk of evaluation effort would have to be on a case-study basis. The relatively small number of neighborhoods affected by any one program, and the great variation in relevant program and neighborhood characteristics, generally preclude randomization or the proper use of quantitative technique. The challenge facing researchers in this field is to develop a methodology of case by case evaluation¹ which is both rigorous and cumulative.

Ex Post Facto Analysis: "After the fact" evaluation of planned intervention has become the villain in much of the current methodological literature (Riecken 1975). While there is merit to the case against ex-post-facto evaluation of programs which have individuals as their targets of change (Campbell 1971), different consideration should be involved in the case of Neighborhood Organization. These programs are often based on precarious legitimation and funding, and faced with shortages of essential resources such as, for example, competent and committed professional manpower. Consequently, many programs never really get off the ground, while others abort prematurely. The predicaments and tribulations of such programs are undoubtedly of great

1 The "comparative" evaluation of a small number of projects is essentially not different from an accumulation of individual cases.

interest to students of planned change, but such studies should not be equated with the evaluation of outcomes. The latter is relevant only to programs which have in fact been implemented.

Incidentally, the instability of change programs is occasionally matched by the precariousness of the accompanying research (Weiss & Rein, 1971), and for some of the same reasons. Furthermore, often program administrations are somewhat less than enthusiastic to have evaluators "breathing down their neck", so that occasionally a major part of available resources and energy have been spent on attempts to resolve conflicts between the action and research components of a program (Weiss, 1967).

Thus it may be advisable to embark on Evaluation Research only after a program has been going on for some time and can be expected to have made some headway. By "Ex-post-facto" we do not necessarily mean a point in time after the completion of a program (there is some question whether Neighborhood Organization is ever "completed"), but a point at which changes should have occurred and can be meaningfully described and assessed.

Criteria for Evaluation

In ex-post-facto evaluations involving case studies we can address ourselves to only two of the three types of change goals discussed above. We shall try to show that changes in the social organization and resource base of a neighborhood can be assessed meaningfully through the use of the proposed methods. On the other hand, changes in individual well-being and behavior would require the use of a before-after model with controls. However, since changes in individuals are seen as secondary effects of Neighborhood Organization, their measurement could wait until we have developed ways of knowing whether the programs studied actually affect the social organization of neighborhoods and their resource base.

Organizational Growth: To evaluate the outcomes of a Neighborhood Organization program, one would have to locate and study the voluntary associations created or revived as a result of the program, and to assess them in terms of their membership, activity, representativeness and acceptance. One would be seeking answers to questions such as the following:

- The number of members and officers.
- The frequency of meetings and other activities.
- Attendance at meetings and functions.
- How representative is the organization of different segments of the neighborhood, in terms of geography, ethnicity, SES, age, sex, etc.

- How much consensus is there, in relation to problems and goals, between officers, members and other residents of the neighborhood?
- Communication between the organization and the public. Do people turn to the organization and its officers for help in individual and community matters? Are residents aware of the organization's actions and achievements?
- Does the organization represent a net addition to leadership in the neighborhood, or has it given old activists a new banner?
- Is the organization accepted by power centers in the neighborhood and at other levels (the city or the state) as a legitimate spokesman of the neighborhood? How autonomous is it?

Resource Base: While the questions listed above represent dimensions of organizational outcome, one would want to take a more dynamic approach in trying to assess the achievements of the organization as they relate to the resource base of the neighborhood. Here we would have to locate and study developments in physical amenities and social services which took place since the beginning of the program, identify the ones for which the program claims credit, and study their history to determine the actual role played by the organization in bringing about desired changes (as well as some "unintended consequences"). Essentially we are asking the same kind of questions which were asked in Community Power studies using the "Decisional" approach (Clark, 1975).

Research Instruments

In trying to answer these questions one would have to employ a variety of instruments:

1. A series of unstructured interviews with key informants (Houston & Sudman, 1975). These would include, in addition to the change agents, individuals occupying key political and bureaucratic positions in the neighborhood, the city and the state, who are or were involved in decisions and actions related to the community. One would add to the list persons who were in a position to observe happenings and developments (e.g., newspaper reporters), and who could supply information about organizations active in the neighborhood, the distribution of power and influence, and the "real story" behind relevant decisions and projects. The list of informants would have to be kept small (so that they can be interviewed personally by a small group of researchers), but flexible, so that names can be added and deleted as the relevant stories unfold.

2. Review of Documents, e.g., minutes of committee meetings, correspondence between the organization and other groups and bureaucracies, newspaper clippings and any other material which may shed light on the history, activity and achievements of the organization. The review of documents should start before the main interviews with informants, and should supply some of the questions to be explored during these sessions. The interviews, in return, should serve to point to additional sources of information, and help gain access to them.

3. Direct Observation: We have said already that Ex Post Facto evaluative studies do not necessarily have to wait until "It's all over". More characteristically they will take place at some advanced stage in the life of a program. Hence it should be possible for the researchers to engage in direct observation of activities such as committee meetings, rallies, negotiations, etc. While some researcher-effect will always be a problem, the insights gained could be invaluable in themselves, and serve as an aid to the elaboration of other research instruments.

4. Interviews with members, "activists", and office holders of the organization(s) established through this program. These interviews should focus on question such as the following:

- The demographic characteristic of the respondents.
- Their perception of neighborhood problems and needs.
- Their participation in the organization, and in other groups.
- Their perception of goals, actions and achievements of the organization.
- Their definition of the membership and constituency of the organization.
- The degree and patterns of their communication with their "constituents".
- Their perception of the role of the change agency and agents.

5. Structured interviews with a sample (or a number of specific sub-samples) of neighborhood residents. The interview schedule should include questions about:

- The problems and needs of the neighborhood.
- Organizations and leadership in the neighborhood.
- Acquaintance with the program under study, and an assessment of its significance to the neighborhood.
- Awareness of specific improvements and achievements, and of the organization's role in bringing them about.

- Participation, actual and potential, in any activity or action organized or sponsored by the program.

The combination of instruments described above will provide us with some quantitative measures, such as the extent of participation, in, or acquaintance with, an organization among any given category of neighborhood residents, the extent to which residents and officers agree in their perception of neighborhood needs and problems, etc. There may be some value in the comparison of different program and of the same program at different points in time, using these measures.

The main product of these methods is, however, qualitative. They supply us with a description of an organization, its activities and impact. Even if these kinds of data do not lend themselves to "cost benefit analysis" and other quantitative approaches, they may serve as a basis for informed decisions about the continuation or expansion of programs, and contribute to a theoretical discussion of the feasibility of planned change and the effects of specific kind of intervention.

Application of the Method: an illustration

The methodology discussed above has been used by the author and three graduate students in the study of one Neighborhood Organization Program in a small town which is part of the greater Tel Aviv Metropolitan Area.² A "Community Worker", employed by a Public Housing Authority had been working in the same neighborhood for three years. The goals of Community Work were presented to us by the director of the agency, in the following terms: "... to help residents... to come together in groups and committees so as to co-operate in the development and maintenance of their common environment, to resolve problems and conflicts, and to negotiate with the authorities for improved neighborhood facilities and services". The project under study involved a cluster of housing estates, with a population of 7,000. The estates had been built at different times during the last twenty years. This project was selected because of easy access, and because it was presented to us as a success story. According to the persons responsible for the program the Community Worker had created a stable and active "Neighborhood Council", which had had some impressive achievements, the most dramatic being their ability to convince the authorities of the need to construct two new air-raid shelters in the neighborhood.

² The study was conducted within the context of a graduate seminar in Sociology, dealing with "Planned Change in Urban Communities". Three students, Gila Menachem, Ora Kahanovitz and Nachum Shoor participated in the study and submitted papers. One of them later produced a M.A. Thesis replicating the study in another location (Shoor, 1974).

In our study we made use of all the instruments described above, although sample size, number of field observations and amount of materials assembled were affected by limitations of time and manpower. We did establish a list of informants with whom we conducted extensive interviews, mainly trying to determine how decisions affecting the neighborhood were reached, and the role of the "Neighborhood Council".

A combination of structured and open-ended interviews were conducted with the members of the council. Structured interviews took place with a sample of residents. Since we found, at the outset, that the committee members all lived in one sub-section of the estate, we decided to limit the sample to that specific area. Later, our largely negative findings prompted us to draw another sample, consisting only of families with school-going children, who were more likely than others to be affected by the work of the committee. This kind of "loading the dice" was designed as a challenge to our findings, as reported below.

The three sets of interviews were supplemented by a review of records, newspaper clippings and correspondence files. Students participated in some meetings and accompanied the community worker on visits and conferences.

Our findings were unambiguous and somewhat unexpected. It turned out that the organization created by the program consisted of five quite active individuals and a periphery of seven passive members, all of whom lived in a relatively small and new section of the estate, which was different from the older estate not only in its physical characteristics, but also in the socio-economic status, age and origins of the residents. The active members of the committee were all women.

The committee had been successful in a number of projects, all of which involved bringing new facilities and resources into the neighborhood by exerting pressure on outside bodies, i.e., the municipal council, various department of the national government, the "Labor Federation", etc. These included a public telephone, a new playground, open-air entertainment on summer nights, improved garbage disposal, and the two air raid shelters mentioned above, which were designed so that they could serve as club-rooms during peacetimes. Our interviews showed that the shelters had, in fact, been part of a master plan for the development of civil defense in the region, but would have been built many months (if not years) later were it not for constant badgering by the committee.

These improvements were all carried through without involvement of the neighborhood. Our interviews showed that except for a few next-door neighbors of the committee's energetic chairperson, none of the residents were aware of the existence of the committee, let alone had any contact with it. The various neighborhood improvements which were

instituted as a response to petitions and appeals by the committee were attributed by the residents to the routine operation of external bureaucratic and political forces. They had never approached any of the committee leaders (listed in the questionnaire by name) with any individual or communal problem.³

Thus, the only organizational development which seemed to have occurred as a result of this program was the creation of a small, very active group unable or unwilling to mobilize a wider constituency, and achieving changes in facilities and services through their "nuisance power", i.e., the inclination of bureaucracies to buy "peace and quiet" by acceding to demands and pressure even when these are not backed by real power.

The implication of the findings summarized above are a matter of judgment by program administrators and professionals. The findings themselves, while not uncommon (Gove & Costner, 1969), are not necessarily representative of Neighborhood Organization programs. A later study of a program in another town, using the same research instruments, showed more significant organizational growth and provided a basis for the suggestion of some variables which might be affecting outcomes (Shoor, 1973).

Conclusions

In the study of Community Power, an area of inquiry which poses problems similar to those encountered in Evaluative Research on Neighborhood Organization, most progress in recent decades has been attributed to the accumulation of case studies (Clark, 1975). Early attempts at statistical studies of large samples, necessarily focusing on a narrow range of variables (Hawley, 1963) seem to have misfired (Williams, 1973). The factor which probably made possible a rapid accumulation of relatively rigorous case studies was the emergence of two or three widely accepted conceptual and methodological approaches. This made for comparability of studies, fruitful secondary analysis and the derivation of meaningful generalizations.

3 We did, however, discover that the neighborhood had a leadership clique, consisting of young males, living in the old estate, who occupied key posts in various local bureaucracies, were active members of the party in power, and acted as brokers between the residents and the authorities. The community worker was only dimly aware of the existence of this group.

We have been arguing for a similar approach to the evaluative study of planned social structural change. Two of the methodological cornerstones of modern evaluative research, e.e., large samples and before-after comparisons, are obviously not applicable at this point in time, to the evaluation of Neighborhood Organization and similar kinds of social change programs. In this paper we presented a conceptualization of the goals of Neighborhood Organization programs and a combination of instruments for ex-post facto evaluative case studies. While a few studies, employing similar methods, have been published in the past (e.g. Clinard 1970, Zurcher, 1970, Bailey 1972), it is hoped that a more explicit and self conscious treatment of methodological issues will lead to the accumulation of case studies employing widely accepted concepts and research methods, thus contributing to the development of a theory of planned change in neighborhood organization and to more effective practice.

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