

Building Communities Through Leisure: Citizen Participation in a Healthy Communities Initiative

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This paper reports on an in-depth qualitative study of the experience of citizen participation as a leisure pursuit. Participants were involved with a Healthy Communities initiative. Findings indicated citizen participation lead to benefits associated with serious leisure and community building. Five themes reflected benefits citizens identified from their involvement with healthy communities; these were (a) learning and developing new skills, (b) becoming more vocal, (c) balance and renewal, (d) group accomplishment and ability to influence change, and (e) development of community. Participants involved in the visioning process felt greater overall benefit from their participation than those who had not been part of the original visioning exercise. Findings suggest significant implications related to self-determined directions for citizen participation and the rejuvenation of community through leisure.

KEYWORDS: *Healthy communities, citizen participation, serious leisure, community building.*

Introduction

The concept of health has evolved from a narrow focus on the absence of disease, toward a more holistic and dynamic vision that considers the individual, social, and environmental determinants of health (Hancock, 1986; Epp, 1987; Boothroyd & Eberle, 1990; Wharf Higgins, 1992). As the definition of health expanded and evolved, there was a shift in thinking toward a more participatory approach to health planning, involving health professionals, politicians and citizens. This health planning and policy development, which first appeared at the international level in the 1980s, is known as the healthy communities approach. In Canada, the Healthy Community Project began in 1988 as a joint effort among the Canadian Institute of Planners, the Canadian Public Health Association, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. It was based on the premise that government action was to be augmented by local action, with people coming together at the local level to improve municipal health policy (Boothroyd & Eberle, 1990). Hence, healthy communities encourages community groups to define their

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own problems, and identify strategies that will help them move toward achieving community health.

The success of healthy communities lies in citizens embracing the concept, and moving beyond sole reliance on professionals for their health. It provides the opportunity for citizens to play an active role in identifying the sorts of challenges and problems facing the community. Similarly, it is felt that solutions determined by citizen participants are most likely to succeed in addressing the problem. Healthy communities moves beyond tokenism and professional determined direction but does not mean that groups of citizens are left to "fend for themselves." Healthy communities requires the involvement of community professionals (e.g., leisure professionals, health promoters, members of local government, the business community) in a way that is enabling, facilitating and mutually beneficial. Participation of this sort is hoped to encourage self-determination, local action and community building (Hancock, 1986).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the experience of citizen participation as a leisure pursuit. Accordingly, it will examine the experience of citizens who participated in a healthy communities initiative. This has implications for leisure research and practice in relation to understanding the experience of volunteering one's time as a citizen participant. Implicit in the concept of citizen participation is the understanding that this is a voluntary activity which people pursue during their leisure. As Kelly and Kelly (1994) have pointed out, "leisure is embedded in the society, and its meanings are part of the complex dialectic of freedom and repression, action and limitation" (p. 273). Citizen participation in a healthy communities initiative provides an important opportunity to further our understanding of this proposition, particularly given the philosophy of healthy communities which is based in self-determination and local action. Moreover, this examination allows us to gain insight into the possible link between leisure and critical components of healthy communities, with respect to self-determination and community building.

Relevant Leisure and Related Literature

Within leisure research the concept of citizen participation as leisure has not been systematically addressed. Based on the principles of community development, citizen participation involves individuals in identifying their own needs, strategies for change, and taking action. Volunteering, as it is generally discussed in the leisure literature, focuses on volunteer activity in services that are professionally initiated and defined, and based primarily on professional perceptions of community need (Henderson, 1990; Pold, 1990; Larsen, Montelpare, & Donovan-Neale, 1992). This work converges mainly on the management and training of volunteers to strengthen commitment and leadership (Drucker, 1990; McLeod, 1993; Freeman Cook, 1993-1994). Stebbins (in press) provides the most comprehensive examination of volunteering as a leisure pursuit. In this work he summarizes the empirical and

theoretical work completed in this area. In the recreation and leisure literature there has been little emphasis on volunteering as a leisure experience except for a handful of studies such as Henderson's (1981) study of 4-H members in the United States, and Parker's (1987) study of peace workers. In both studies the participants defined their volunteering experience as leisure. Overall, there is an absence of research within leisure which provides for an examination of volunteering as leisure within the context of citizen participation and community building.

Within the broadened understanding of health, the role that leisure may play in the health of the individual and community is gaining recognition. Allen (1991) stated that there is both conceptual and empirical support for recreation and leisure areas, services, and opportunities as contributors to community life satisfaction. Allen considered the concept of the good community and the parameters that define it. As he stated, the majority of the literature focuses on primary group relationships, autonomy, viability, power distribution, participation, commitment, heterogeneity, and control, all of which may be fostered through the medium of recreation and leisure services (Allen, 1991).

The contribution that involvement in community groups and volunteerism can make to health was examined by Reid (1989). He examined the role of volunteerism and social action in increasing social justice, as well as in providing intrinsic challenges which may not be available to people through work.

Volunteerism is discussed in more detail as an aspect of serious leisure in the work of Stebbins (1982, 1992, 1994, in press). He defined serious leisure as: "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge" (1992, p. 3).

Stebbins (1982) identified six distinct qualities associated with serious leisure—the occasional need to persevere at it; the tendency for individuals to have careers in their endeavours; the input of significant personal effort based on special knowledge, training and/or skill; the tendency to identify strongly with chosen pursuits; a tendency to develop a unique ethos or subculture around the pursuit; and the experience of durable benefits. In relation to volunteering as serious leisure, Stebbins (1992) singled out a number of personal rewards that volunteers experience—personal enrichment; self-actualization; self-expression; self-image; self-gratification or sense of play; re-creation or regeneration; and financial return. Among the social rewards Stebbins associates with volunteering are social attraction from involvement with others and participation in the social world of activity, and group accomplishment.

Stebbins (1982) suggested that current values and behaviour patterns in leisure indicate the growth of a serious orientation toward leisure, and a likelihood that this will continue to develop. Leisure, as a significant alternative to work, is seen as a way of finding personal fulfilment, identity en-

hancement, and self-expression (Stebbins, 1982). In addition, serious leisure involves the use of skills, knowledge and talent and is "most rewarding when the participant has been able to develop these three to an adequate degree" (Stebbins, 1994, p. 129). In this regard, Kelly & Kelly (1994) draw our attention to the satisfactions of serious leisure that "involve a sense of 'becoming' a person more competent and more connected with other persons" (p. 257). Volunteering as serious leisure provides a context for individual empowerment and community development.

Community development is based upon a philosophy which emphasizes competencies and helping people to become subjects instead of objects, acting upon their situation instead of reacting to it (Christenson, Fendley & Robinson, 1989). According to Christenson et al. (1989), the aim of community development is to (a) stimulate local initiative by involving people in community participation, specifically the process of social and economic change, (b) build channels of communication that promote solidarity, and (c) improve the social, economic, and cultural well-being of community residents. While a variety of strategies and approaches exist under the umbrella of community development, citizen participation is perhaps the approach that is most familiar in fields such as leisure, health and planning. Citizen participation involves a "process in which individuals take part in decision making in the institutions, programs, and environments that affect them" (Heller, Price, Riger and Wandersman in Florin & Wandersman, 1990, p. 43).

Generally, empowerment involves a change in capacity or control, or an increase in both power and the ability to utilize power (Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988, Wallerstein, 1993). At the individual level, there is evidence that citizen participation is related to increased feelings of confidence and competencies (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988, Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich & Chavis, 1990; Lord, 1991), decreased feelings of helplessness (Florin & Wandersman, 1990), and decreased alienation (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). In addition, citizen participation has been found to increase the individual's sense of commitment and sense of community (Florin & Wandersman, 1990); it has also been linked to increases in community empowerment through improvements in the interpersonal relationships and social fabric (Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Prestby et al., 1990), and the distribution of power and decision making within a community (Florin & Wandersman, 1990). As well, citizen participation has been found to positively influence physical conditions, and social services on the community level (Prestby et al., 1990). Not surprisingly then, citizen participation is directly linked to empowerment as a means of promoting healthier individuals and healthier communities (WHO position paper, 1991 in Wallerstein, 1993).

A Healthy Communities Initiative

In examining citizen participation as a leisure pursuit, this paper draws on the findings of a qualitative study of the experience of participation by

citizens in a Healthy Communities initiative in South Western Ontario. The initiative, known as the Woolwich Healthy Communities Initiative (WHCI), was located in the Township of Woolwich which incorporates a number of small towns and villages dispersed over a relatively large geographical area (327.40 sq. km) with a population of a little over 17,000 people (Statistics Canada, 1991). Its economy is mixed with some settlements incorporating light industrial activity, but the township itself has a strong rural tradition.

As with all Healthy Communities endeavours, the initiative began with a visioning exercise. When visioning, citizen participants imagine what they would like their community to look like twenty years in the future, and then to begin to share these visions with each other. As an outcome of this visioning exercise, areas are identified in which present realities for the community differ significantly from the vision. Groups of citizen participants then come together to address the areas of discrepancy considered to be of highest importance and interest to the individuals. Through a process of inclusion and decision-making based on consensus, citizens participating in the healthy communities initiative have the opportunity to define their collective health needs and to identify approaches to securing health in those areas. The visioning exercise that began the Healthy Communities initiative in Woolwich is captured in the following excerpt from the Short Story of Woolwich Township's Healthy Communities Project.

It was a time of child-like imagining and sharing our memories and hopes of a cleaner, safer world. Our needs and values had a chance to surface, and we discovered that they were far from incompatible. We all need clean air and water, satisfying work, good fun together, as well as privacy and peace.

Four working groups were formed as an outcome of this visioning process: (1) the Sustainable Communities group, (2) the Woolwich Trails group, (3) the Clean Waterways group, and (4) the Well Water Quality group. At the time that the research was conducted the goal of the Sustainable Communities group was to ensure community input into the values that guide municipal decision making. Much of their work focused on self-education around the concept of sustainability, and the development of a written response to the Regional Official Policies Plan review. The Clean Waterways group focused on exploring the dimensions of stream rehabilitation. Some of their projects included a creek-assessment day to assess the health of the Canagagigue River, preservation of a maple tree and surrounding creek banks by building a retaining wall back-filled with discarded Christmas trees; and discussing with local farmers the measures that might be taken to protect the stream. The Woolwich Trails group had been concentrating primarily on the development of a system of interconnected trails within the township, and the clean-up of those trails. The accomplishments of the Woolwich Trails group included an annual hike day; and the publication of a trail guide complete with maps. The Well Water Quality group was concerned with preventing the further contamination of well water. Their goal was to put together an educational problem-solving programme on water quality in wells.

Some of their activity included seminars for participants and the public on issues pertaining to the quality of well water.

The Study

The study was carried out as an action research project. This was in keeping with the participatory nature of healthy communities and hence the research project was conceived and designed with the researcher and WHCI working as collaborators, rather than researcher and research subjects. Action research responds to both the practical concerns of people and the goals of social science (Rappaport, 1987). It is a process of bringing together social and community interventions with research, and in doing so attempting to create more effective interventions by magnifying different experiences (Health Promotion Summer School on Community Development, 1993). As a result, action research is necessarily collaborative and allows opportunities for substantive input and feedback.

The study was concerned with understanding the processes underlying the WHCI. Qualitative inquiry is highly appropriate for the study of process (Patton, 1990). Depth of investigation was sought to elucidate individual and collective experiences. The use of open-ended questions allowed the researcher to capture the points of view of participants. The participants' words revealed their "depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences and their basic perceptions" (Patton, 1990, p. 24). While the study was not designed to test but rather to contribute to the building of theory, it utilized existing knowledge as sensitizing concepts which helped guide the data collection process (Patton, 1990). Hence, questions were asked to help participants identify what they perceived to be the benefits of volunteering in the WHCI. In pursuing these perceptions, however, the research no doubt reflected sensitizing concepts (Patton, 1980) from Stebbins' work on serious leisure and volunteering, as well as from Christenson and others noted above on community development and citizen participation.

In the conceptualization of the study, the members of the WHCI distinguished between those participants they considered to be "core" and those they considered to be "reliables." The people in the core were actively involved in the planning and organization of one of the healthy community groups. Core participants were regularly involved in the monthly meetings held by one of the four groups. In comparison, the reliables were those people who did not participate regularly in the monthly meetings. The reliables may have participated in a task or event that the four groups undertook, and may have participated in the occasional monthly meeting. To gain an understanding of as broad a base of experiences within the healthy communities groups as possible, it was decided that study participants would be purposively sampled from the membership of the four healthy communities groups. Two core and two reliable members were selected from each of the four groups, for a total of sixteen members. Additional participants were to

be sought if, at the end of these interviews, it was felt that saturation had not been achieved. In-depth qualitative interviews lasted from 40 minutes to one and a half hours. The interviews focused on the individuals' experiences in relation to their involvement in the WHCI, factors that helped to maintain participation, challenges encountered in participation, and perceived benefits to themselves and to the community arising from the actions of the WHCI. Due to other commitments, one individual was unable to take part in the interview. It was felt that saturation had been reached within the data collected from the fifteen participants and therefore no further interviews were held. It was agreed that in reporting the findings of the study, participants' anonymity would be protected and no identifying information would be included in any subsequent accounts of the research. Accordingly, no demographic data are included here.

The tape recorded interviews were transcribed and the data reviewed to begin to discover the principal themes. The analysis was inductive in that the themes describing the benefits of participation in the WHCI and their properties came from the information provided by the participants (Henderson, 1991). After each additional interview, as analysis continued, the themes and their properties were refined based on the insights of participants (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990).

There were three distinct phases in the data analysis—the ongoing discovery phase, coding the data, and finally attempts to discount the findings (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In the ongoing discovery phase, the focus was on identifying themes and developing concepts and propositions. Themes were discovered by examining the data in as many ways as possible. Again, sensitizing concepts related to volunteering, community building, citizen participation, and serious leisure, were likely influential in the way the researcher was able to “illuminate features of the settings or people under study and to aid understanding” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 130).

As part of the attempt to discount findings, and in keeping with the participatory nature of the study, members of the WHCI were encouraged to provide further input in feedback workshops. These allowed people to engage in further discussion and reflection and ensured participants had the opportunity to take part in problem posing and problem solving—an essential characteristic of action research (Pedlar, 1995). Parenthetically, it is worth noting perhaps, that knowledge gained through this study enabled members of the WHCI to develop a critical understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with participation in the WHCI. As an outcome of this process, the members of the WHCI utilized the research findings in the development of a strategic framework for the WHCI for the following year.

Findings

The findings of this study point to several benefits of citizen participation as experienced by the people involved in the WHCI study. The themes in which these benefits are embedded are (1) developing new skills, (2)

becoming more vocal, (3) balance and renewal, (4) group accomplishment and the ability to influence change, and finally (5) the development of community that evolved from people's involvement in Woolwich healthy communities process.

Theme 1: Learning and Developing New Skills

Participants in the WHCI described their involvement as an opportunity for learning and developing new skills. The learning that occurred was linked to specific issues targeted by the groups (e.g., well water quality, stream rehabilitation). As one individual described his experience "I am learning. I am still learning. It is just one of those things that you don't ever get to that point where you feel that you know it" (Participant 4-Core).

The WHCI provided the opportunity for individuals to develop knowledge about their community as a whole. As one participant stated, "Well, it is a learning experience, and I mean there is so much to learn about this area and the more you get into it the sooner you realize you don't know as much as you need to know either" (Participant 3-Core).

Theme 2: Becoming More Vocal

Closely tied to skill development and enhanced competencies are feelings of self-confidence which, in the case of WHCI, allowed people to become more vocal. This experience is best described by the participant who said:

I have become far more vocal. I used to do a lot of thinking about it and not doing a thing about it. Now I've reached the point where if I feel strong about something I will get up at a public meeting and speak on it, and I never would before. (Participant 1-Core)

Similarly, another person talked with pride about being able to "speak out":

But maybe I wouldn't have even said that if I hadn't gotten involved in some of the things that have gone on, because I didn't used to when I first started into the Healthy Communities. I didn't say anything. I just sat back. I was so afraid that I was going to say something wrong. . . . But I am not afraid to talk anymore. So it has done a lot for me. It has made me perhaps more outgoing than I was before. (Participant 4-Core)

Participants learned also to speak out in other community organizations, and in other aspects of their daily lives. Participants regarded this as a positive development, and they related this to balance and renewal that they gained from their involvement in WHCI.

Theme 3: Balance and Renewal

Participants described the learning and the sort of involvement that WHCI provided as helping them to experience fun and gain some balance in their lives. One member said:

Personally, I am not, I never have been, much of a joiner for groups or clubs or anything like that, so I have enjoyed this and have started to learn things about . . . this specific area, that I like and I find fun. (Participant 14–Core)

Another person noted the balance participation in WHCI brought to her life:

I am having more fun I think, more balance in my life. I have always felt guilty about my lack of community, or a shortage of community involvement. I mean, I have generally been on a volunteer board or two and that sort of thing, but it feels more real now. (Participant 8–Core)

Through participation in WHCI there was also the opportunity to affect individual health through the release of tension and frustration. Some individuals acquired this benefit by being able to share concerns with others and to begin to take positive action toward change. In the words of one person:

My involvement in Healthy Communities gave me . . . some power and influence, and it gave me the chance to share (with other people) something that I had been carrying for a long time. In terms of wanting to talk about what I needed in the community and in the environment. And as soon as I began to (speak) out at meetings or (read) things that I wrote . . . as soon as I began to deliver out all of this that had been pent up and uselessly sort of locked in for a long, long time, my health improved by leaps and bounds. (Participant 15–Core)

People thought it was important to accomplish something and influence their environment. This opportunity was furthered by working as part of a community, as suggested in Theme 4.

Theme 4: Group Accomplishment and the Ability to Influence Change

Individuals indicated that they were able to accomplish more by acting within a community than would be the case when acting alone. As a result of collective action, people's feelings of being able to influence, or impact on decision-making, increased in magnitude:

More effective, beyond a doubt. One person has very little impact on any government body. (Participant 5–Core)

We as a group I think do have more of a sense of being able to influence, not control but influence, ensure. Like I think the Township will now ensure that certain discussions take place because they know that we will call them on it if they don't, that sort of thing. (Participant 8–Core)

The importance of being heard and the ability to have some input into decision making processes was clear. One participant's comments pointed to the expectations that many older adults have today, in terms of being listened to and being able to influence community life. Membership in the healthy communities initiative seems to have provided an opportunity for such influence:

Well, then maybe somebody listens to you. If you weren't part of this group nobody would give a darn as to a senior. You know I think we are getting more

and more seniors around who are going ahead and taking part in life. (Participant 4—Core)

People were able to connect not only with their immediate community, but also with different regions. This, in turn, enabled participants to influence processes which they felt important for their community:

I have never really been involved in anything out of the village of Breslau . . . we would never have accomplished as much as we have if we hadn't been connected to the trails [group of WHCI]. (Participant 7—Reliable)

Although people did gain satisfaction from the accomplishments of the group, there were also periods of struggle and challenge for some participants. When asked about the overall direction of the group, one member said:

We have seen some concrete things, but, and . . . my impression was their goal was eventually to have trails linking all of the small communities in the township which I thought was a nice goal. But I guess the way that it is working in reality, is to kind of concentrate on one at a time, and you know, we may not actually reach that goal if you just kind of focus on one thing. (Participant 11—Reliable)

Another person gave vent to his frustration with the observation:

I guess for me, I am an action person. I like to see things done. Of course I work on [the group], I just found that there was too much talk being done and not enough action. (Participant 2—Reliable)

These sorts of challenges tested people's ability to persevere and work to overcome the difficulties they or their group faced. Commenting on their commitment to the WHCI, one participant had this to say:

Well, that's a strength, we are all a group that perseveres. I think it is because everybody has gotten something out of the group and believe that they will continue to do so. Some people are coping with it by staying on the periphery slightly . . . to the extent that when time commitments conflict they choose to do something else. And I know the minute that we are back and have got our teeth into something, they will be back in the door. (Participant 8—Core)

The willingness to overcome adversity and the rewards that involvement and contribution to the WHCI presented to participants point to the realization that community exists for people. This is explored in the final theme, development of community.

Theme 5: Development of Community

Participation in the WHCI provided for the development of community among citizens. A number of patterns contained in the data help to explain this theme, including: (a) the opportunity for shared learning between a variety of people, (b) the development of camaraderie and feeling connected to community, (c) the opportunity to contribute to community, and (d) the enhancement of individuals' knowledge about community and connection with different parts of the community.

The opportunity for shared learning between a variety of people. Through participation in the WHCI, the opportunity existed for people from a wide range of backgrounds to come together on common ground and over a shared interest (e.g., interest in well water quality, hiking and biking trails). Several participants mentioned the benefit of a collaborative approach that brought different community players to the table, and the shared learning that resulted. This created the opportunity for individuals to learn about the experiences, needs and opinions of other members of the community. Consequently, the participants indicated that they began to value the opinions and knowledge of the other individuals within their group. As one participant stated:

But what's interesting is that it is a very diverse group when you look at the age ranges, and the interests, and the knowledge base, and the opinions and biases of that group. It is extremely diverse and I think that is what keeps me coming out. I am starting to really value that range of opinions and that range of experiences and to learn to listen and really try to extract what people are saying. So it really has been a valuable experience for me. (Participant 8—Core)

The diversity and cross-sectional representation that the WHCI attracted was considered a strength of the initiative:

Strengths? A good cross-section of members, or regular attenders that are in on these committees. There is a good cross. Different [people], male and female, and people of different backgrounds, anywhere from university to [shop-floor] workers . . . they would be good in organizing and paper skills in the meetings, and then there were people that were good in hand-on work outside, involved in outside projects. (Participant 2—Reliable)

Out of these diverse groups, strong bonds were formed.

The development of camaraderie and connectedness to community. The exchange that occurs between the diversity of people within the healthy community group is a benefit identified by participants. For some, the interaction with other members of the group developed into a shared emotional connection that was clearly important to participants. One individual described the feeling within the group as:

a feeling of camaraderie, and the links are an important part of the group, so it is not the activity but also the links that are important. (Participant 8—Core)

In addition to the social relationships that developed, people commented that participation in WHCI helped them feel that they were more connected to their community.

So you would never have done that if you were sitting in the house. It's the people, people that you meet, and the nice ones, and some of them are cranky ones, but it is getting out in the community. And whether you really are or not, you feel as though you are part of the community, you really are part of it. (Participant 4—Core)

Others who were unlikely to pursue volunteer leadership roles, nevertheless felt a sense of purpose through the WHCI, as indicated by the following comment:

I feel good inside just being involved. Whether it is just with the local service club or something directly dealing with the township as such, or my own town, or the environment, like a creek or building a trail, doing something or being part of it, yes. I myself am not a leader. I like to . . . I pass myself as a follower but I just like being with the group and being involved in it. (Participant 2—Reliable)

Opportunity to contribute to community. Closely related to connectedness to community was a keen interest in contributing to processes that affect community. Individuals described how they were able to make their contributions in ways that were meaningful to them:

I like the waterways too, because they did a survey of the creek and I am very familiar with that end of it so I helped out on that end. (Participant 2—Reliable)

When asked what kept him coming out to the group meetings, one participant said:

Well, I am technically experienced, so I know that at these meetings there will be opinions expressed, ideas expressed and I thought that maybe I could help in some little way, technically. (Participant 6—Core)

Another participant illustrated the way contributing to the community can enhance one's sense of worth:

Feeling like I am value added to the community. I am not just living there, I am adding to it through the group and the other things that I have gotten involved in because I was involved in [WHCI]. (Participant 8—Core)

While these factors help explain the development of community, it is important to note that not all citizens participated in the WHCI to the same extent. The level of involvement appears to have been influenced by the visioning exercise which helps to launch all healthy community initiatives.

Visioning as a Possible Mediating Factor in Participation

Involvement in the visioning process appears to have a mediating influence of one's level of participation. This becomes more apparent when examining the differences between those citizens identified as core and those identified as reliables. Overall it was found that more core members had been part of the visioning process in which people collectively defined their vision of a Healthy Community and their health related needs. Involvement level as distinguished between core and reliable members is summarized in Table 1.

Seven of the study participants had been involved in the visioning process. These 7 (Group A) all turned out to be core participants in terms of their involvement in one of the four WHCI working groups. Two individuals (Group B) who had not been involved in the visioning did become core participants. However, generally indications are that not being part of visioning activity meant that individuals had lower levels of participation in the WHCI. Six (Group C) of the 8 study participants who had not been involved

Table 1
Participation in Visioning Process and Level of Involvement

	Core participants	Reliable participants	Total
Involved in visioning	7 (Group A)	0	7
Not involved in visioning	2 (Group B)	6 (Group C)	8

in the visioning process were identified as reliables (i.e., with lower levels of participation than the core).

Core members, not surprisingly, expressed greater overall benefit from their citizen participation in WHCI than did reliables. Table 2 summarizes the proportion of core and reliable members who experienced benefits as identified in the 5 major themes discussed above.

It is generally the case that people will most vigorously involve themselves in things that they find most rewarding. However, it is equally possible that having been in on the ground floor, so to speak, in terms of identifying common concerns, problems, solutions, and developing a shared vision, those who turned out to be core members were more embedded in the initiative and more ready than were the reliables to approach their volunteer contribution to the WHCI as they might a career. This suggests that there are significant ramifications related to self-determined directions and the benefits people reap as citizen participants.

Discussion

Based on this examination of the benefits of citizen participation, it is possible to link citizen participation in Healthy Communities with serious

Table 2
Benefits Identified From Citizen Participation in WHCI

Benefits	Core (N = 9) %	Reliables (N = 6) %
Learning new skills	66	66
Becoming more vocal	33	0
Balance/renewal	55	0
Group accomplishment	44	0
Development of community		
shared learning	55	33
connectedness	66	33
opportunity to contribute	55	33
increased knowledge	11	33

leisure. In addition, the apparent effect of visioning on the level of involvement (core versus reliable members), illustrates the importance of collective decision-making processes and community building.

The ability to allow for self-determination and self-direction among community members is a key element of the healthy communities philosophy. Practitioners in recreation and leisure are cognizant of the importance of self-determination and choice for individual well-being. These conditions proved to be particularly significant to the individuals who came forward to volunteer in the WHCI, as evidenced in the apparent influence of involvement in the visioning exercise. Staff in the process served as resourceful enablers, but the community determined the action. It is through such action that communities gain strength and begin the process of reclaiming responsibility for individual and collective well being.

Individual empowerment includes an increase in individual feelings of self-confidence and personal efficacy, and the development of personal competencies (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988, Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Prestby et al., 1990). Support for this is evident as participants said they benefited by developing new knowledge and skills and becoming more vocal. In addition, empowerment was evident in people feeling valued and being able to make a contribution, as well as through the accomplishments of the group, including their ability to influence decision making processes. Similarly, people's sense of individual and collective efficacy helped to build community between citizen participants. Within the WHCI, strong interpersonal relationships and social cohesion were evident through much of the group action, including the opportunity for shared learning across diverse segments of the community, camaraderie and connectedness to community.

The experiences of the core members suggest that they "found a career" as citizen participants in WHCI. In comparison, reliable members were less likely to approach their volunteer activity with WHCI as they would a career. However, many of the benefits described by core participants, i.e., those who had been part of the visioning exercise, reflect the characteristics of serious leisure as described by Stebbins (1992). For instance, while people occasionally needed to persevere to overcome challenges, personal rewards associated with serious leisure, such as self-expression, self-conception and self-actualization were evident in people becoming more vocal, feeling valued and listened to, and being able to contribute. Related to what we know of serious leisure, Kelly & Kelly (1994) noted that "prolonged investment in the skills of an activity leads to its identity centrality and the formation of communities of activity" (p. 257). In the WHCI, social rewards stemmed from accomplishments that people experienced in their collective or group efforts; as well people enjoyed a feeling of connection with other members of WHCI.

The participants in this study were able to clearly articulate the ways in which they had benefited from their individual and collective action. These individuals were involved in citizens participation in its most meaningful sense and, in accordance with the community development tradition, the

involvement in WHCI allowed volunteers to act upon their situation as subjects (Christenson et al., 1989). While motives of self-interest underlie all serious leisure pursuits, volunteerism is further differentiated from hobbyist and amateur activities by the motives of altruism (Stebbins, 1982). In the case of the WHCI volunteers, they gained a sense of purpose, control and contribution from the community building activity. They freely gave of their time to the initiative which in turn allowed for personal enrichment and empowerment. The benefits to the community were similarly rewarding to the participants, which suggests that volunteering as serious leisure can play a role in effecting meaningful change within individual and community life. This further suggests that in their practice, leisure professionals have a role in fostering community building and empowerment among the people they support.

Given that this study represented only a snapshot of the WHCI at a given point in time, it did not capture the dynamic, evolving process of change. Future research would enable us to examine the sustainability of initiatives that depend upon citizen participation, and also to consider whether the rewards of serious leisure as reflected in WHCI, sustain the citizen in the role of career volunteer.

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