

COMMUNIHOOD: BEING A PLANNING ACTIVIST  
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

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ABSTRACT  
COMMUNIHOOD: BEING A PLANNING ACTIVIST  
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Introducing communihood as a hybrid concept and defining planning activism as a planners' role outside the dominant planning power structure are two main contributions of this dissertation in scholarly debates among planning scholars about the shape of cities in twenty-first century and the 'best' role for planners in a postmodern society. Communihood is introduced as a hybrid alternative for historical approaches in differentiating between community and neighborhood based on their social or spatial characteristics that has been escalated in the last decades by the development of Information Technology and Social Media. Therefore, communihood is defined as a synthesis of the socio-spatial dialectic that incorporates social and spatial capital without privileging one over the other. Then I explain identity, diversity, and power relation in communihood and discuss how Information Technology and Social Media can be used to boost these characteristics in communihood in the twenty-first century.

After defining communihood as a context for every planning project in the twenty-first century, I criticize the planning scholars' traditional efforts to define the 'best' role for planners in post-modern society based on Habermas's theory of Communicative Rationality as an alternative for traditional scientific rationality in rational comprehensive planning. I argue that it is important to recognize that there are different roles for planners and needs for planners'

expertise in a society in public and private sectors, and planners can decide to fulfill each of them based on their personal preferences. However, in order to play an activist role in planning, it is crucial for them to work outside the planning power structure to represent those interests that has been traditionally marginalized in the dominant planning processes. Finally, I introduce Jason Roberts' work in Oak Cliff, TX as a case study of planning activism in a twenty-first century communihood.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

We are in the second decade of the twenty-first century, and while planning scholars are still arguing about their role in society, planners often continue to do what they always do in planning departments. For half a century, many scholars have criticized rational comprehensive planning approaches and have sought for an alternative to them in universities, but when planning students graduate from planning schools, they join their colleagues in maintaining the status quo (Dalton 1986). During these fifty years, sometimes new ideas, such as New Urbanism, Smart Growth, etc., find their ways from academia to planning projects, but what most of these plans have in common with previous modernist rational comprehensive projects is their approach in seeking physical solutions to complicated social problems (Grant 2006 ). Furthermore, there have been many discussions about the emergence of a new kind of community, especially after the fast development of Information Technology in the last three decades on one hand and the emergence of the so-called global economy on the other. All these discussions are legitimate, but what they have in common is their positivist approach in defining an either/or situation for an ideal form of community and the ideal role for planners. Moreover, these predefined planning roles are hardly put within the context of new forms of local communities.

This research starts with the question of whether it is important to define one single role for planners and to discredit the others? For example, we can have corporate lawyers, city attorneys, and environmental lawyers all at the same time fighting for various issues but not trying to substitute for each other. I think it is time to move on from this discussion, and recognize that there are different roles for planning skills in society, and planners, based on their personal values and preferences, decide which one to take. One of the indicators that can

be used to distinguish between the different roles of planners is who writes their paychecks. Based on this indicator, like many other professions, planners have three major employers: the public sector (e.g. cities' planning departments), the private sector (e.g. developers or consulting firms), and nonprofit organizations (e.g. environmental groups). When the interests of these groups conflict with each other, employees are more likely to intentionally or unintentionally work in favor of their employers' interests. Through the rise of social issues in planning education since the 1960s, planners often try to play an activist role while they are working in public or private sectors. Therefore, I decided to clarify the planning activist role in this dissertation, and since activists' work has been influenced the most by development of Social Media since the beginning of the twenty-first century, I discuss how planning activists can mirror existing experiences of other activists around the world to pursue their causes inside and outside dominant planning processes.

Before defining planning activism in the twenty-first century, however, it is important to define its context. For many years, neighborhood communities have been the smallest scale for planning projects. Different scholars have used neighborhood and community in different ways, but there is a consensus that neighborhood is used to identify locally and spatially bounded groups, and community is used to identify socially and aspatially bounded groups. This differentiation between community and neighborhood based on social or spatial characteristics raises questions about the decay of one type as the result of the growth of the other. This concern has escalated with the development of Information Technology, and the growing presumption about destructive effects of this new communication technology on the importance of distance and spatial proximity. Therefore, there are three assumptions here: a) community and neighborhood are being differentiated based on the privileging of either social or spatial characteristics; b) Information Technology has had (and will have) constructive effects on social interactions and destructive effects on the importance of distance and spatial proximity; and c)

development of Information Technology causes development of communities and decay of neighborhoods.

Based on these presumptions, cities in the twenty-first century are seen as experiencing a decay of importance of spatial capital in contrast to a rise of social capital in forming social groups. These changes deemphasize the role of city planners because their traditional role in working on social conflicts in physical spaces can now be filled by city engineers, who work to ease the flows of information, communications, and transportations, and by sociologists, who work on social conflicts. After three decades of living in the so-called Information Technology Era, however, I argue that place, distance, and spatial proximity still matter. For instance, decisions about where to live are still one of the most important and most complicated decisions that people make in their life. This decision represents values, preferences, interests, and historical background of local residents besides their economic barriers that limit their options. Therefore, in this research, I introduce 'communihood' as a synthesis of the socio-spatial dialectic about community and neighborhood that can incorporate social capital and spatial capital without privileging one over the other. This dissertation is divided into five chapters, which: introduce the issues; define communihood and its characteristics in the twenty-first century; identify the role of planning activists; introduce Oak Cliff, TX case as a study of planning activism in twenty-first century communihood; and summarize and conclude the discussion.

Before defining the concept of communihood in chapter 2, I, first, review the established definitions of community and neighborhood, and how on the one hand they have been historically differentiated based on their social or spatial characteristics in classic and contemporary literature, and on the other hand how the way that this differentiation has been escalated in the so-called Information Technology era. Then, I criticize these established discussions based on Lefebvrian Critical Thirthing perspective, to argue why this differentiation is a false dichotomy. I then introduce the concept of communihood as a synthesis of the socio-

spatial dialectic that incorporates social and spatial capital without privileging one over the other. I also criticize the discussions about the deterministic role of Information Technology in having destructive effects on neighborhoods and constructive effects on communities, and argue that technology always has had and will have a facilitating role in social changes, but not a deterministic one. Based on these criticism, I define communihood characteristics, and explain how identity, diversity, and power relations are defined in communihood, and how Information Technology and Social Media can be used to boost these characteristics in everyday life in the twenty-first century.

After defining communihood and its characteristics, I focus on planning activism in the third chapter. First, I explain interoperation of the Habermas-Foucault debate in planning as alternatives to dominant approaches in planning to find physical solutions for complex social problems that root in modernist scientific rationality. The expansion of scientific rationality in social science is one of the theoretical foundations of experiences that led to the domination of comprehensive planning as a rational, technical, and efficient way of doing planning in many cities. After Habermas introduces Communicative Rationality as an alternative to scientific rationality, many planners have tried to bring his ideas into planning to define new roles for planners such as advocate, facilitator, mediator, etc. In this chapter, I do not aim to enter this discussion to define a formal role for planners in the existing planning structure, but I introduce an informal role for planners as activist, outside the power structure, to advocate for marginalized interests based on citizens' right to the city. Planning activists, like other kinds of activists such as human right activists, work with local citizens to raise their marginalized interests in the dominant power structure and decision-making processes. Since in recent years, Information Technology and Social Media has revolutionized activists' work in pursuing their causes around the world, this chapter discusses how planning activists can use these tools to: a) inform local citizens about marginalized interests and their right to the city; b) advocate

their rights in negotiation with planning structures; and c) mobilize direct actions (praxis) to face the dominant planning structure.

Based on the definition of communihood and planning activist's role, I focus on the Oak Cliff in southwest Dallas, TX, in chapter 4, as an example of how Information Technology and Social Media can be used to boost existing social and spatial capital in a communihood to raise the marginalized and ignored interests based on local citizens' right to the city. In this chapter, I mainly focus on Jason Roberts' work in Oak Cliff and the way that he uses Social Media to play a planning activist role in Oak Cliff. In addition, in this chapter, I show how Social Media can be used in a qualitative research alongside interviews to conduct a case study and a biographical research. Among Jason Roberts' work in Oak Cliff in the last five years, I focus on three main projects namely: a) bringing streetcars back in Oak Cliff; b) making a bike friendly Oak Cliff; and c) creating a Better Block in Oak Cliff. I use both publicly available online sources about his activities on Social Media in addition to my unstructured interviews with him to explain how Social Media has been used (and can be used) to: a) educate local citizens about marginalized interest based on their right to the city and raise public awareness about opportunities for participation in existing power structures and planning processes; b) advocate for their rights in negotiation with the dominant planning structure; and c) mobilize direct action among local citizens to resist the ongoing projects that ignore their rights and interests.

Finally, in the last chapter, I once again clarify what I mean by Social Media, marginalized interests, planning activism, and communihood as the main terms that have been used in this dissertation. This clarification is necessary because it sometimes creates misunderstandings when we use these terms in different contexts especially in further research on this topic. Then, based on these clarifications, I explain what has been missed and what can be done to further research on both the concept of communihood and planning activism in the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER 2

### COMMUNIHOOD: LESS FORMAL OR MORE LOCAL FORM OF COMMUNITY

#### 2.1 Introduction

Community-in-danger has been one of the main topics of social science for over a century. From Tönnies, several scholars have debated the disappearance of one kind of community and the emergence of another kind. More recently, technological innovations have been blamed as one of the key factors that escalates this process. One of the recent debates that has raised concerns is the emergence of Information Technology, and the fast development and expansion of its effects on different aspects of social life. This debate often centers on the role and necessity of place in the formation of new kinds of community-building, based solely on mutual interests and without restrictions of physical boundaries of neighborhoods. Scholars have different analyses, pro or against, this new phenomenon, from what could be seen as optimistic versus pessimistic points of view. These analyses, however, often suffer from two underlying weaknesses: a) a binary approach that leads them to assume communities are based on either mutual interest or physical boundaries; b) a technological deterministic approach that leads them to objectify societies, and to define an active role for technology as the main factor that causes societal changes.

This chapter introduces communihood as an alternative to previous binary approaches in distinguishing between community and neighborhood based on mutual interests or their attachment to place in one hand, and deterministic approaches in defining a passive role for society and an active role for Information Technology in ongoing social changes in everyday life on the other hand. Therefore, I first look at the discussions that distinguish between community and neighborhood in their definitions and characteristics, and the way that this distinction has been presumed to be escalated in the Information Technology era. Then, I criticize these

discussions from a Lefebvrian critical thirding perspective, and discuss why distinction between social community and spatial neighborhood is a false dichotomy. Based on this criticism, I introduce communihood as an inclusive concept that privileges neither social nor spatial characteristics of social groups over the other, and I discuss how identity, diversity, and power relations are defined in communihood, which is facilitated by Information Technology innovations in conversational communications, but mainly depended upon location and spatial proximity in handshake interactions.

## 2.2 Differentiation between Community and Neighborhood

### *2.2.1 In Their Definition*

The definition of community has been one of the most discussed issues in social science, and it is sometimes introduced as “the most elusive and vague” concept that after centuries of scholarly debates on its definition, remains “largely without specific meaning” (Day 2006, 1). The disappearance of a traditional kind of community, and substitution with an emerging new shape of social groups has been the subject of optimistic or pessimistic analyses of social scientists on this “elusive and vague” concept, from Durkheim and Tönnies in classic studies, to Wellman (2002) and Etzioni (1998) in contemporary ones. The development of information and communication technology makes this debate more complicated by eliminating or reducing the restriction of physical boundaries in forming community, and distinguishing the concept of neighborhood from the broader concept of community, which is discussed in a moment.

In classic literature, community is defined based on Hegelian critiques of individualism in the eighteen century by focusing on the importance of the welfare of society in comparison to the wellbeing of individuals (Borgmann 2004). Then, in the nineteenth century, Tönnies (2005) defines community (*Gemeinschaft*) as based on trust, sympathy, intimacy, and common values that often are linked to place and territory, but which have been undermined by emerging

concepts of association (Gesellschaft) that are essentially “boundaryless and contractual relations” (Day 2006, 5). Durkheim focuses on collective consciousness as the major component of community, and continues Tönnies’ discussion by talking about the disappearance of “mechanic” society and the emergence of “organic” society. Durkheim raises concern about the consequences of organic society and that it may be followed by “excessive individualism and loss of readiness to cooperate on behalf of common purpose” (Day 2006, 3). Durkheim and Tönnies in a sense fostered a backward-looking and dichotomous sociology that still remains existence in recent literature.

The twentieth century also has binary views of community and society, and begins with two different views of society, with each one having its definition of community. Marx defines society as a means to serve humans, and argues that “[the main] danger to community is not urbanization, but exploitative labor practices that pit people against each other in all environments” (Marx cited in Kayahara 2006, 133). Contrary to Marxism, in the Chicago School literature, researchers studied the underlying pattern of residents’ locational choices, and defined communities as “relatively autonomous social units,” which are characterized as “clearly discernable, spatially delimited entities with well-defined boundaries” (Kayahara 2006, 134).

In contemporary literature, two main approaches to the definition of community and neighborhood can be recognized: a) backward-looking nostalgia where examples include Etzioni and Weber b) forward-looking utopia as proposed by Giddens (1991). Etzioni (1998) is one of the pioneers in advocating a backward-looking approach to the values of traditional communities that have been lost in the growth of modernity. Etzioni (1998) introduces communitarianism as a social web of people that have both rights and responsibilities. Weber (1978) also focuses on the importance of physical proximity in traditional neighborhood in providing a source of mutually dependent neighbors, who are “the typical helper in need” (Weber 1978, 75). Putnam (2000) calls these mutually dependent relationships embedded in neighborhood social capital, and argues that American communities have lost this community

involvement and civic engagement that used to exist prior to the 1980s. This phenomenon leads Packard to describe the US as a 'nation of strangers', where "people no longer felt connected to one another, or to places, owing to the breakdown of community living" (cited in Day 2006).

On the other hand, from the forward-looking side, Giddens (1991) warns against this "romantic conception" in looking to traditional communities, and defines community as a pre-modern feature of social relations that has been in decline in the process of modernity. When it comes to recommendations, however, Giddens emphasizes the importance of community for its active citizenship and personal responsibility (Giddens 1998), although in this new community, "social activity becomes detached from localized contexts, to be reorganized across larger stretches of space" (Day 2006, 187). This notion of community detached from locality is what Webber (1999) calls "community without propinquity." This approach prioritizes the quality of relations based on mutual interests over restricted relations based on physical proximity. Wellman criticizes this approach because of its ignorance of "supportive social relations [that] exist at a distance" (Hampton and Wellman 2000, 347).

### *2.2.2 In Their Characteristics*

As discussed before, from Tönnies and Durkheim, sociologists raise concerns about emerging communities based on mutual interest and disappearance of neighborhoods based on physical proximity. To review these approaches to neighborhood's and community's characteristics, and how they have evolved during history, I classify them into three categories: a) exclusive characteristics of neighborhoods, b) mutual characteristics between neighborhoods and communities, and c) exclusive characteristics of communities.

Attachment to place is one of the most important exclusive characteristics of neighborhoods because of the relation that exists between place and social life patterns. According to Day (2006) place is a consumable commodity that determines how people live, and it can provide a context to realize different kinds of lifestyle. Gerson, Stueve, and Fischer define attachment to place as "individuals' commitments to their neighborhoods and neighbors"

(Gerson, Stueve and Fischer. 1977, 139), and they introduce life-cycle stage (being married, having children, etc.), social class, and length of residence as the characteristics that affect how neighbors are socially involved in their neighborhoods (Gerson, Stueve and Fischer. 1977). Separation of place from space is one of the fundamental bases for distinction of neighborhood from community. During this separation, place loses its realistic meaning, and becomes more phantasmagoric (Giddens 1991).

The sense of belonging to a group of people that share location, interests, and/or goals is one of the main mutual characteristics of both neighborhood and community. In communities based on location and family, people belong to community not because of their qualification and not necessarily because of their interest. Fischer (1977) argues that detachment from place not only does not weaken the sense of belonging among community members, but also sometimes makes it stronger because members choose to belong to a community, and are not spatially enforced. The sense of belonging is also one of the main components in communitarianism and social network theories (Castells and Cardoso 2006; Etzioni 1993), and Putnam names it as one of the three forms of social capital beside 'network capital' and 'participatory capital' (Putnam 2000).

Exclusive characteristics of community appear when community detaches from location, and forms based on mutual interest. Distinction of community from neighborhood roots in separation of place from space. Habermas and Castells introduce public sphere and space of flows as new aspects of spaces following independence of space from place. Habermas defines public sphere as "where information exists and communication occurs in a public way, where public discussion and deliberation take place" (Schuler and Day 2004, 4), and Schuler and Day (2004) count broad communication opportunity, openness to everyone, and providing opportunity for powerless voices to be heard as the three main characteristic of public spaces. Castells introduces the space of flows as a result of developing information and communication technology, and clarifies that "[t]he key aspect of the space of flows is not its separation from

the space of places, but its ability to fragment localities and reintegrate some of the components into new functional units on the basis of their connection to the space of flows” (cited in Stalder 2006, 166).

### *2.2.3 In Information Technology Era*

Information Technology (IT) is introduced as one of the main phenomena that escalates the process of disappearing neighborhoods and emerging communities in the last forty years. Discussions about IT’s effects on community and neighborhood can be identified as part of broader discussions of technological determinism. In terms of its destructive or empowering effect on communities and neighborhoods, however, it can be classified in two categories: a) those who discuss IT’s destructive effects on both community and neighborhood; and b) others who discuss IT’s empowering effects on community and destructive effects on neighborhoods. The scholars in each of these two categories can be differentiated by what could be described as their optimistic or pessimistic view on these changes.

Discussion about destructive effects of IT on both community and neighborhood roots in early utopian or dystopian views of the effects of innovation in information and communication technology in the last decades of twentieth century, which is supposed to be followed by a new era of individualism. Durkheim predicts this phenomenon in 1883 that development in transformation and communication tools would reduce collective consciousness, and weaken power of local public opinion (Day 2006). A quote by Margaret Thatcher aptly illustrates this view’s bottom line: “[t]here is no such thing as society, only individuals and families” (quoted in Evans 2004). Cairncross (2001) talks about ‘death of distance’ in the new era of Information Technology and concludes “a technology that makes it easier to communicate should simultaneously reduce human contact.”

With emergence of a new era of individualism, community and neighborhood lose their functions. Basically, in this new era, individuals are “new and exciting selves” (Dreyfus 2004), left in a “do-it-yourself society” (Evans 2004), and home becomes again “the center for many

aspects of human life” (Cairncross 2001, 273), so, as McLuhan mentions, in this era “to go outside is to be alone” (quoted in Holmes 2005). Reeves and Nass call this phenomenon ‘media equations,’ when people treat new communication technologies like real people and real places (cited in Holmes 2002). Therefore, based on this approach, we are observing a “decline in social capital and an increase in interpersonal alienation” (Quan-Haase, et al. 2002, 295), or in other words, “an unrelenting decline from social harmony, solidarity and responsibility into self-centered individualism” (Day 2006, 17).

The second category includes supporting arguments about Information Technology’s empowering impacts on communities and destructive effects of neighborhoods. According to this approach, community does not disappear, but rather transforms into a new kind of “awareness, increasingly detached from the limitations of particular places, neighborhoods, and experiences” (Day 2006). Therefore, individuals are still being integrated in spaces, but these are new spaces, cyberspaces (Holmes 2005), or space of flows (Castells and Cardoso 2006) within virtual communities. One of the most extreme examples of this view can be found in McLuhan’s idea of global village, which Holmes (2005) calls computopia or “liberation from flesh” (191). Furthermore, new communication tools provide a more inclusive community that includes more involvement of members in the process of decision-making within communities (Day 2006). Therefore, neighborhoods are defined as a community of “self-contained local population in pre modern circumstances” (Giddens 1991, 80) in comparison to new emerging virtual communities that people “make through their choices and actions” (Lash and Urry 1994, 50).

Therefore, whether one is positioned in the first category where we are witnessing the decay of community or in the second category where we should celebrate revitalization and rebirth of new kind of community, both agree that Information Technology has had a deterministic role in the disappearance of the physical boundaries of communities, and also attachment to places.

#### 2.2.4 False Dichotomy

*"[U]nless a distinction can be made rigorous and precise it isn't really a distinction."  
Jacques Derrida (1977)*

This dichotomy between spatial neighborhoods and social communities echoes from Lefebvre's criticism of distinction between perceived and conceived space as representation of space. Lefebvre calls concrete and physical space of spatial practice 'perceived space' and mental and abstract representation of space as 'conceived space.' Similar arguments can be found in Foucault criticism in differentiating between real spaces and placeless utopias, and argument against binary categories between Firstspace and Secondspace. This dichotomy between perceived and conceived spaces can be seen in backward-looking nostalgia and forward-looking utopia toward neighborhood and community, which is discussed earlier.

Despite their differences, thirding, hybridity, and Thirdspace are what Lefebvre, Bhabha, and Soja use to argue against binary thinking in picturing what is happening in everyday life. Lefebvre argues that human spaces lie half in nature and half in abstraction, and introduces Lived Space as a socially produced space that relies both on physical and mental constructs. Foucault uses the mirror metaphor to define Heterotopia, as a place where a thing is connected with all the spaces that surrounded it. Finally, Soja (1996) put all these discussion together in his theory of Thirdspace. Soja defines Thirdspace as where "everything comes together...subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconscious...everyday life and unending history" (Soja 1996, 57). It is important to note that in none of these arguments, the combination and mixture of perceived-and-conceived, real-and-imagined, First-and-Second spaces are not a simple A+B calculation, but it is an emergence of something new and different out of creative hybridity of both side of a binary. Bhabha (1990) defines the notion of hybridity in his discussion about cultural hybridity. According to Bhabha, "hybridity gives right to something different, something

new and unrecognizable, a new era of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Bhabha 1990, 211).

This chapter aims to use the same epistemology to breakdown, not only the false dichotomy between community and neighborhood, but also perceived and conceived space as the dominant way that community and neighborhood are examined in academic discussions, and it introduces ‘communihood’ as where social and spatial capital come together without privileging one over another. From Lefebvrian perspective, the concept of communihood can be seen both as a perceived and conceived space, but I am going to look at it as a lived space that involves the critical thirding. I will discuss how communihood can provide a more accurate explanation of identity, diversity, and power relations in everyday life. Since the Internet and Information Technology have intertwined in everyday life in the twenty-first century, I am going to consider its impact on characteristics of communihood, but I also emphasize the spatial dialectic in comparison to the existing approaches in defining the deterministic role of IT.

## 2.4 Communihood as a Lived Space

### *2.4.1 Definition*

Before defining communihood, it is important to note that communihood is not an alternative to previously discussed neighborhoods and communities. According to Soja’s definition of Thirdspace, it is an inclusive concept that overcomes the wall between these theoretically separated phenomena. Therefore communihood can be seen as an alternative to binary approaches to neighborhood and community, and deterministic approaches to IT effects on each of them, but not an alternative to neighborhood and community themselves.

In Communihood, following the hybrid characteristics of critical thirding perspective, there is no distinction between online community and physical community. All online communities have some connection to physical location in one way or another. And physical

communities, like neighborhoods, also include all sorts of communications and interactions including telecommunication. This distinction is a result of utopian or dystopian approaches (Holmes 2005), and traditional dichotomy between idealized neighborhoods in the past and a narcissistic future of communities free from physical restrictions (Castells 2000). These rigid distinctions cannot be found in communihood, and as Holmes (2005) and Wellman and Gulia (1999) mention, "extended forms of connection are just as 'real' as propinquitous ones" (Holmes 2005, 179). Moreover, "all forms of community are 'telecommunities', and vice versa" (Holmes 2005, 179), and "the net is only one of many ways in which the same people may interact" (Wellman and Gulia 1999, 170).

In communihood, Information Technology does not have a deterministic role in deemphasizing the importance of spatial proximity, and demolishing the importance of distance. Leamer and Storper (2011) challenge this presumption about the emergence of a new geography connected with wires and microwave transmission, not with streams and roads, and call it a faulty analogy, and a historically inaccurate reasoning.

Face-to-face communication derives its richness and power not just from allowing us to see each other's faces and to detect the intended and unintended messages that can be sent by such visual contact. Copresence-being close enough literally to touch each other-allows visual "contact" and "emotional closeness, "the basis for building human relationships. (Leamer and Storper 2011, 652).

In order to clarify the IT effects on social interactions, Leamer and Storper identify conversation and handshaking as two components of communications. According to them, "the handshake refers to information exchanges made while in same physical space, [and] the conversation refers to interactive... exchanges of visual and oral information," and internet can only facilitate conversational communications, but not handshaking interactions (Leamer and Storper 2011, 653). Therefore, while communihoods' members can use Information Technology to expand and enhance their conversational communications in an online sphere, many of their

characteristics depend upon the handshaking interactions in physical spaces that will be discussed further in this chapter.

In communihood, there is no absolute distinction between local and spatial neighborhoods and social and aspatial communities. People living in the same neighborhood may face common problems, and benefit from similar advantages that form mutual interests such as reduction of crime and safer neighborhoods, or improvement of schools and better education. On the other hand, location and physical distance always matters in any form of communication in interest-based communities. In other words, a better perspective can be reached by looking at this issue as an imaginary fraction where mutual interests are the numerator, and distance is a denominator. Therefore, by increasing the scale from local to national and international, the generality of interests and concerns need to be expanded in order to create a communihood (Figure 2.1).

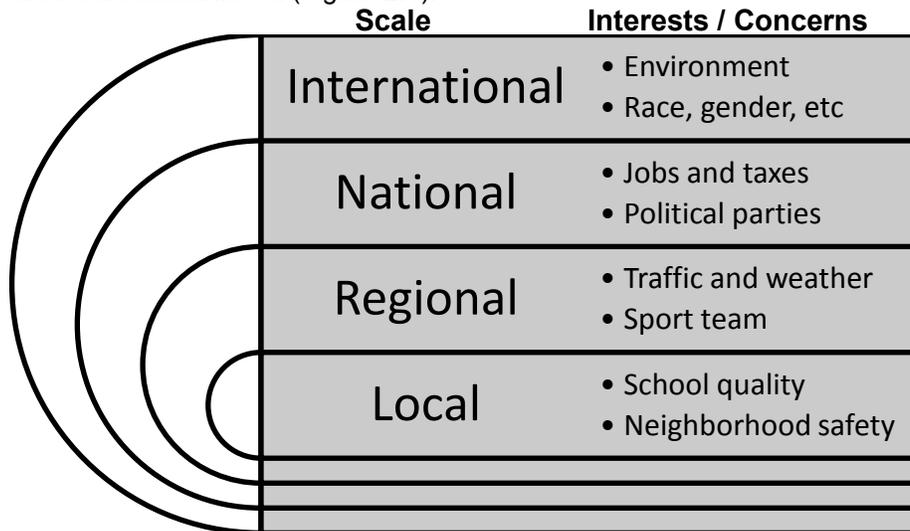


Figure 2.1 The relation between the physical scale and interest and concern in order to build a communihood

As Figure 2.1 suggests, in a neighborhood where distance between members is minimal, very specific issues and concerns, like quality of school or safety of streets, can become the basis of mutual interest. However, to form a communihood on bigger scales, we need broader issues of mutual interests such as nationality, ethnicity, race, sex, occupation, or political views.

Therefore, both issues of interest and distance are key players in forming a communihood, and none of them has privilege over another.

In communihood there is no distinction between traditional and modern, nor modern and postmodern communities. Communihood is about now, i.e., existing forms of social organizations. This contrasts with previous approaches that were either a forward-looking utopianism of what community should look like, or a nostalgic view of how communities used to be (Harvey 2000), are what Castells calls a dichotomy between idealized neighborhoods in the past or a narcissistic future form of communities (Castells 2000). Therefore, the communihood argument suggests that instead of looking for a way to revitalize traditional neighborhoods or to imagine the future forms of communities, we need to study the current organization of communities, including local interaction and social communication among members, in physical and online spheres. Therefore, communihood is about current forms of social groups that have been formed based on mutual interests and been affected by location. Communihood includes different kinds of communications from handshaking local interactions to distant conversational communications that have been facilitated over time through the development of digital communication and mechanized transportations.

#### *2.4.2 Characteristics*

Using this definition of communihood, I discuss how identity, diversity, and power relations can be explained in communihood in comparison to their definitions in community and neighborhood. Moreover, despite the existing discussion about the determinist role of IT on identity, diversity, and power relations in community and neighborhood, in communihood they are rooted in location and spatial proximity, and IT, like previous technological innovations has a facilitating role.

##### *2.4.2.1 Identity in Communihood*

In communihood, place is one of the main factors that defines the identity of members, which also extended to online spheres via Social Media. Even in the presumed placeless

communities of interest, place still plays an important role in the quality of relations among members and the levels of communication options among members. The importance of presence in the same place is why most of national/international communities have local chapters allowing them to develop stronger ties among their members. Among the Lefebvrian theorists, Bhabha talks about the “power of place-based identity,” and Soja calls it the “reassertion of the local, the power of location-based identities” (Soja 2000, 202) that includes “struggles over the right to be different” because of existence of “politics of location and a radical spatial subjectivity” (Soja 1996, 84).

It is important to distinguish between identity of place and location-based identity. Massey criticizes the essentialist approaches in defining a single meaning and identity for a specific place, and she defines places as “interesting networks for social relations” (Massey 1994). In addition, Day (2006) criticizes current approaches that posit a deterministic role for place that defines how people live.

Instead of determining how people live, as used to be supposed, places serve as arenas for the realization of particular lifestyles, and are constructed socially to deliver what is required of them. Rather than making people what they are, places can be made, or re-made, to serve particular purposes, and great effort is devoted to advertising and marketing what different places can offer, incorporating the outcomes of these local processes of place-construction and reconstruction. (Day 2006, 186)

In communihood, members use, choose, produce, and reproduce places based on their lifestyles and purposes, and place plays an important role in defining their identity, and shaping how they live their lives. This idea of building social networks among members with location-based identity is in conflict with the computer-science derived idea of a social network that sees members as nodes and social relations as links between nodes (Figure 2.2).

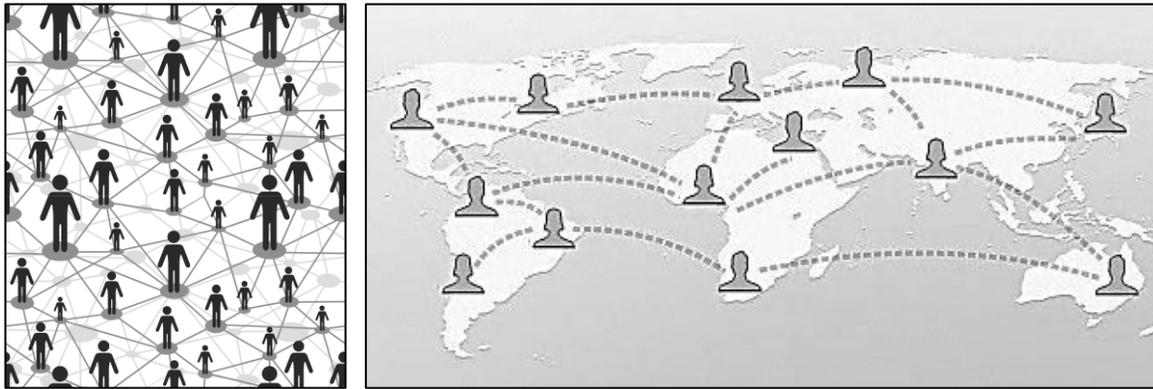


Figure 2.2 Difference between placeless social network (left from: <http://unationblog.com>) and place-based one (right from: <http://facebook.com>).

In communihood, the distinction between identity of members in physical and online spaces is blurred. Members start their relations on physical spaces, and continue them on online spaces and vice versa. Arguably, however, most interactions among members that build trust and transfer knowledge take place in physical spaces. This importance of presence is why for example, despite all the development of Information and Communication Technology, classrooms and university campuses are the main spaces for transferring and obtaining knowledge, and conferences are the most appropriate place for developing and expanding professional and academic networks. Therefore, in communihoods, members use physical spaces to start a relation, build trust, and transfer knowledge, and use online spaces, such as Social Media, to be in touch, and share information and updates about their interests and concerns, and vice versa.

#### 2.4.2.2 Diversity in Communihood

Loss of cultural diversity is one of the biggest potential threats of interest-based community. In addition, there is a relation between having placeless identity and losing cultural diversity, or we might say that placeless identity can weaken cultural diversity. Jacobs (1992, 160) calls interest-based communities 'one purpose community', and argues "no neighborhood or district, no matter how well established, prestigious or well-heeled and no matter how intensely populated for one purpose, can flout the necessity for spreading people through time

of day without frustrating its potential for generating diversity” (Jacobs 1992, 160). Jacobs also emphasizes the importance of the possibility of meeting a stranger and being a stranger in forming public spaces.

Hybrid diversity of communihood, in *American Dream* terminology, is more like a salad bowl, in which members keep their identity and create something new and different, in comparison to a melting pot, where the identities of members dissolve in favor of the dominant group characteristics. Therefore, in communihood, members keep their identity and contribute in forming a multicultural society. In addition, in communihood, people not only can be different, but also have the right to be different. Soja (1996) calls the struggle over the right to be different as part of a “politics of location” and a “radical spatial subjectivity” (Soja 1996, 84). The difference between considering diversity as an advantage or as a right appears in the attitude of the dominant culture in controlling and containing others. Bhabha criticizes this approach that basically says “these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid” (quoted in Soja 2009, 58), and he introduces the notion of hybridity as an alternative for that approach.

Cultural diversity has dual characteristics. Day (2006) talks about this duality that, on the one hand, “can encourage stereotyping, stigmatization and the building of communal walls,” and on the other hand, “can foster the kind of tolerant postmodern sensibility which welcomes, values and even celebrates difference and otherness, and tries to build upon them in positive ways” (Day 2006, 193). Chaung describes this duality as a problem of intercultural communication approaches in “overwhelmingly binary representation of cultural differences” (quoted in Kalscheuer 2009, 36). The destructive consequences of diversity, like stereotyping, are mainly a result of media that traditionally has been in the hands of those who have the most money and power. On the other hand, cultural diversity has constructive results in fostering handshaking interactions in physical spaces. In Soja’s words, the binary between “structuring and reconstitution of differences” is the “basis for a new cultural politics of multiplicity and

strategic alliance among all who are peripheralized, marginalized, and subordinated by the social construction of difference (especially in its strictly dichotomized forms)” (Soja 1996, 93). In a communihood as a lived space, people celebrate the cultural differences in physical spaces, and use IT and Social Media to share information about their culture and to get to know other cultures that exist around them. Therefore, people instead of playing a passive role by being consumers of traditional media, play an active role by producing and distributing information and raising awareness in physical and online spaces via Social Media. (Figure 2.3 and 2.4)

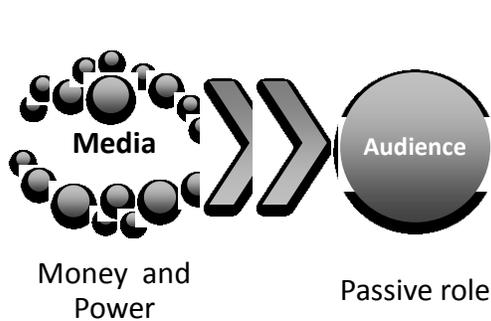


Figure 2.3 Traditional relation between Media and Audience

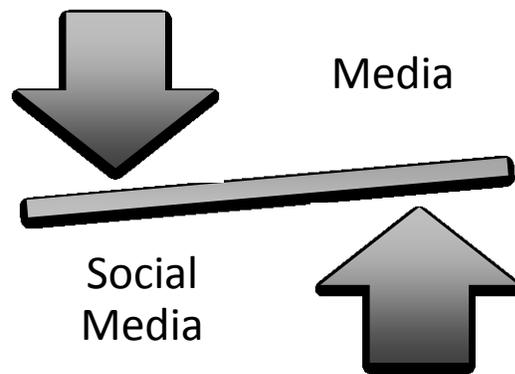


Figure 2.4 Social Media changes the equation between money, power, and media

Social Media plays an important role in supporting a diverse and multicultural society by changing the way people communicate with one another through development of a ‘To-Whom-It-May-Concern’ option. Traditional communications between people took the form of one-to-one or one-to-group, and people used different communicative tools, like face-to-face, phone, mail, email, IM, etc., to communicate with one another. Through Social Media, however, people can ‘share’ their interests and concerns to targeted or untargeted population without addressing a specific person or group of people. Facebook and Twitter play a revolutionary role in Communication Technology by developing this notion. As the next step in this evolving medium, in communihood, people have this option to share their interests and concerns with the people

living around them in addition to-friends and to-whom options that already exist, and thereby fill this huge gap that exists between them.

#### 2.4.2.3 Power Relations in Communihood

Thirdspace scholars have criticized this binary distinction between space of flows and space of places. Soja (2000) calls it a “dichotomized and totalizing conceptualization” (215), and criticizes the ‘pessimistic’ position of Castells about raising “place-based or territorial power in the spaces where people live.” Before Thirdspace scholars, Harvey talks about the importance of local spaces in providing a “possible material basis for the formation of political consciousness and action,” and continues that “places still have the potential to act as reservoirs for collective action, and for the formation of oppositional movements, among those who are ‘relatively empowered to organize in place, but disempowered when it comes to organizing over space’” (cited in Day 2006, :195). Soja (2000, 200) refers to Lefebvre’s description of producing “perceived, conceived, and lived spaces” that are “socio-spatial constructs and can therefore be changed through human action.” Soja considers the debate between space of flows and space of places as part of larger debate between globalization and localization that he calls an ‘externalist approach.’ Glocalization is a Thirdspace in this binary debate. Soja (2000) argues that “[h]ybridized and glocalized movements and practices are developing that recombine abstract flows and concrete places, opening up new and different real-and-imagined spatialities of resistance and contention at multiple scales” (215). Communihood as a Thirdspace is a glocalized group, which includes lived spaces and can be changed through human action.

In the early age of Internet and Information Technology, there used to be a distinction between public and private spaces in terms of accessibility to Internet. People were losing their accessibility to Internet when they left a private space with Internet access. It was this fact that led some scholars to assume that increasing the amount of time people expend in online spaces jeopardizes neighborhoods’ ability to form public spaces. Nevertheless, development of

Wi-Fi and 3/4G access beside smartphones and tablets has demolished this distinction by providing this opportunities for staying connected while leaving private spaces, like home and office, to public spaces, like cafes and neighborhood centers. Therefore, we are moving in a direction of making Internet invisible in our daily lives as a result of being equipped with new ways of communication beside previous ones (Figure 2.5).

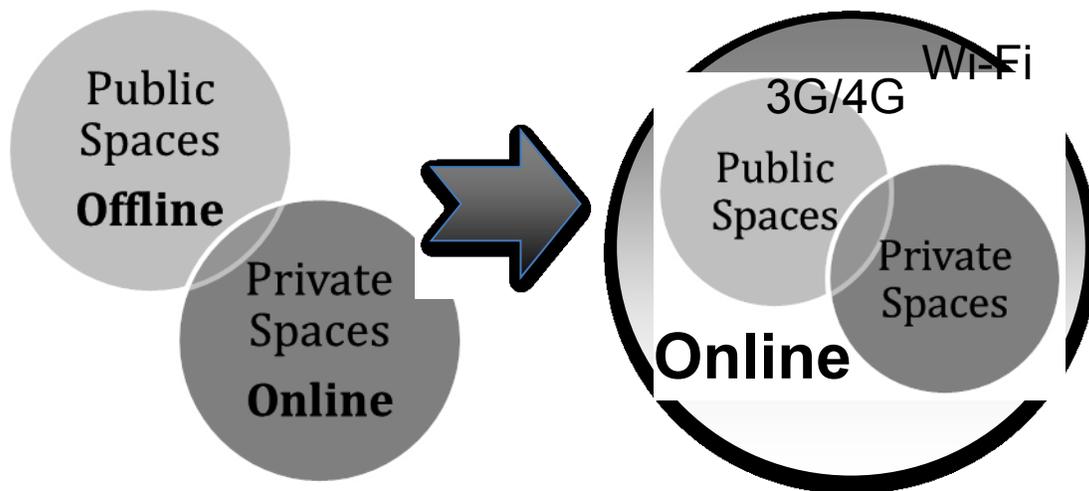


Figure 2.5 Change of Public and Private Spaces in terms of accessibility to Internet

Like previous innovations in communication technology, new developments in Internet access and Social Media raise the important concern of the digital divide, about those who are marginalized because of their inaccessibility to this new form of communication. Since a free market lacks an ability (or desire) to address this concern, government needs to step in and escalate the process of expanding new modes of Internet access by providing required education and equipping vulnerable groups. In this part, however, I focus on how these new innovations change the existing power relations for already marginalized powerless voices in a community.

Thirdspace scholars are criticized because of their inability to introduce a way for the marginalized to be empowered and to be heard. Kalscheuer (2009, 39) questions whether the

marginals really have the chance to “set up new structures of authority” when they enter in to Thirdspace, and he concludes that “ [m]arginals do not have the same chances to articulate their interests and the powerful representatives surely have an interest to keep their powerful position” (Kalscheur 2009, 39). Thirdspace, in Soja’s and Bhabha’s definition, is supposed to be an “in-between space [that] enables marginals to disorder, deconstruct and reconstitute the dominant definitions of belonging and power relations” (Kalscheur 2009, 37). Communihood responds to this criticism by introducing the potentials of Information Technology and Social Media to change the existing power relations. In Communihood, local activists can use Social Media to mobilize local citizens and to raise the marginal voices. This is not an idealistic, imaginary, and utopian role that activists can play, but it is a role that activists around the world have played to face the most repressive regimes with absolute domination of power, money, and media. Therefore, if Social Media can raise the voices of powerless people on a national scale to change power structure of a country, there is no reason for local activists not to use it for raising the interests of local citizens to confront local power structure.

### 2.5 Summary

In this chapter, communihood is introduced as an alternative for previous binary approaches in distinguishing between community and neighborhood and deterministic approaches in defining a passive role for society that is affected by Information Technology on communities and neighborhoods. It is important to note that communihood is not an alternative for community and neighborhood, but an inclusive concept that includes characteristics of both community and neighborhood, and provides a more realistic picture of the social groups to which people belong in their everyday life. In terms of characteristics of communihood, this chapter discusses location-based identity, hybrid diversity, and place-based power, but further research can expand this list both in terms of number of characteristics and detail of analysis in possible empirical research.

Communihood, by definition, is a context for human and social life in the twenty-first century, and it also provides opportunities for active citizenship and local activists to improve the quality of life in their communihood. These opportunities arise from the recognition of hybrid diversity and the importance of location-based identity, and place-based power relation in communihood on the one hand, and potentials of Information Technology and Social Media in facilitating social communications and sharing information among the members on the other. In next chapter, I will discuss the role of planning activists in communihood that can shed light on the sometimes darker side of planning, where interests of voiceless and powerless populations are excluded or marginalized in decision-making processes.

## CHAPTER 3

### BEING A PLANNING ACTIVIST IN COMMUNIHOOD

#### 3.1 Introduction

From modernist experiences in the early twentieth century to comprehensive approaches in the mid-twentieth, and recent experiences of New Urbanism, planning has often sought to find a physical solution for complex social problems. These approaches are rooted in modernist scientific rationality that became dominant in social science, and that faced several criticisms in the last decades of twentieth century. As an alternative to modernist scientific rationality, Habermas introduces the concept of Communicative Rationality and Communicative Action, and planning scholars have brought this concept into planning as a theoretical and practical alternative to rational comprehensive approaches in planning. However, they face the similar criticism that Habermas has faced from Foucault and Foucaudian theorists because of the lack of consideration of power relations in different steps of every decision-making processes. Despite these criticisms, this new definitions of planning has identified new roles for planners beyond the rational technical expert such as planner as advocate, planner as facilitator, planner as mediator, etc. (Friedmann 1987). Most of these discussions are generated around the role that planners can play inside the mainstream planning structure, but in this chapter, I introduce planning activism as a role that planners can play outside the dominant planning structure to support, advocate, empower, and mobilize local citizens to claim their marginalized interests based on their right to the city.

This chapter's theoretical foundation is built on a critical thirding in the debate between Habermasian and Foucaudian planning theorists that includes advantages of both sides while also recognizing the weaknesses of each side. Based on this theoretical foundation, I bring the discussion about citizens' right to the city, and explain how planners can play activist roles to

defend these rights by: a) informing local citizens about marginalized interests and their right to the city and opportunities for participation in existing planning processes, b) advocating their rights in negotiation with planning structures, and c) mobilizing direct action (praxis).

### 3.2 Planning's Role in the Habermas-Foucault Debate

#### *3.2.1 Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action in Planning*

After widespread criticism of modernism in the second half of the twentieth century, Habermas introduces communicative rationality as an alternative to modernist scientific rationality, "in which knowledge is used instrumentally as a mean of successfully gaining strategic ends" (Hillier 2002, 33). In Habermas's communicative rationality, "knowledge is used communicatively for purposes of understanding and discussion of issues" (Hillier 2002, 33). Scientific rationality and communicative rationality are also differentiated based on their goal: instrumental control is the main goal of scientific rationality, and consensus building is the main goal of communicative rationality. Following the definition of communicative rationality, Habermas defines communicative action as "the conviction that a human collective life depends on vulnerable forms of innovation-bearing, reciprocal and unforcedly egalitarian everyday communication" (Habermas 1987, 82). Therefore, the theory of communicative action represents the "theory of society conceived with a practical intention" (Habermas 1973, 3) in which "participants communicatively negotiate to reach a rational consensus" (Hillier 2002, 33).

Lifeworld and system are two distinct concepts in Habermas's theory of communicative action. Habermas defines lifeworld as a product of both historical traditions surrounding people, and the process of socialization (Habermas 1987, 137). Culture, society, and identity (personality) are three main components of lifeworld that are reproduced through communication and in the cultural-linguistic and sociological background (Hillier 2002, 31). In contrast to lifeworld, system operates via "the steering media of money and power" (Hillier 2002, 32). Therefore, in communicative action, lifeworld and system are often in a 'tug-of-war' in public

spaces where actors can play a defensive role when lifeworld is colonized. In this 'tug-of-war', the defensive role of lifeworld is sometimes called social resistance (Hillier 2002).

Planners have found Habermas's theory useful because it finally provides an alternative to broadly criticized modernist rationality (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004 and Forester 1989). Norris (1985) defines the notion of communicative rationality in planning where "communication will no longer be distorted by the effects of power, self-interests, or ignorance" (149). Communicative action inspires many planning approaches such as 'planning through debate' (Healy 1991), 'Communication Planning' (Healy 1993; Innes 1995), 'Collaborative Planning' (Healy 1997), and 'Deliberative Planning' (Forester 1993). Planning interpretations of Habermas's theory are classified by Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (2002) into two categories: 1) communicative planning as prescription where planners go 'about planning' to challenge and avoid distortion of communication; and 2) communicative planning as a normative theory that deliberates a form of collective decision-making over aggregated methods (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 2002, 210).

*What role do planners play in the Habermasian theory of communicative action?* In order to answer to this question, Innes and Booher (1999) introduce consensus building as a means for planners to "search for feasible strategies to deal with uncertain, complex, and controversial planning and policy tasks" (412). Although the consensus building process will not change the entire structure of power, it aims to 'equalize power' in decision-making by requiring a 'super-majority agreement' before making decisions and giving "the power of veto or withholding agreement" to participants. Thomas and Healey (1991, 29) summarize the key emphases of communicative planning in the following list.

- a. A recognition that all forms of knowledge are socially constructed;
- b. A recognition that the development and communication of knowledge and reasoning take many forms, from rational systematic analysis, to storytelling, and expressive statements, in words, pictures, or sound;

- c. A recognition, as a result, of the social context within which individuals form interests; individuals thus do not arrive at their 'preferences' independently, but learn about their views in social contexts and through interaction;
- d. A recognition that, in contemporary life, people have diverse interests and expectations, and that relations of power have the potential to oppress and dominate not merely through the distribution of material resources, but through the fine grain of taken-for-granted assumptions and practices. (Thomas and Healey 1991, 29)

### 3.2.2 Foucault and Power Struggle in Planning

Foucault is fundamentally different from Habermas in terms of his epistemology. Habermas follows the universalistic and normative “theorizing tradition derived from Socrates and Plato proceeding over Kant” (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004, 54) to define an ideal society where the society constructs people’s behaviors. In contrast, Foucault follows particularistic, contextualist, and analytic tradition with roots in Thucydides via Machiavelli to Nietzsche (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004, 54) to criticize the social structural approaches.

The concept of power is the central point of Foucault’s criticism of Habermasian theories. Foucault argues that “action is the exercise of power,” so to make an action, we need to understand the way that power works (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004). Despite Habermas, Foucault looks at both productive as well as destructive roles of power, and in addition to power, he also emphasizes the issue of subjectivity. In his theory, Foucault recognizes the individuals’ differences in creating their own identities through ethics and forms of self-constitution (Hillier 2002). Therefore, different groups can build social networks to develop and reinforce their power in order to pursue and advance their causes (Hillier 2002).

In Foucauldian theory, power and knowledge are integrated and inseparable, and they “directly imply one another ... [,so] there is no power relation without constitution of a field of knowledge” (Foucault 1979, 27). Therefore, because knowledge engenders power, resistant

groups need to acquire and produce knowledge to gain power in order to call attention and challenge dominant power through “discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledge” (Foucault and Gordon 1980, 83). In other words, understanding production and constitution of knowledge at a specific site where a localized power-discourse prevails is essential to explore and build upon contending discourses (Hillier 2002). In sum, people could and should cultivate and enhance local decision-making processes by “resisting the institutions, techniques, and discourses, which are attached to oppress them” (Hillier 2002, 55).

Similar to Habermas, Foucault’s theory also inspires many planning theorists. Flyvbjerg is one of the main scholars who has brought Foucault’s theory to planning, and found Foucault’s space-time discussion as an important entry point for applying his theory in planning. Foucault talks about particular sets of practices and knowledges that are specific in both space and time. According to Flyvbjerg and Richardson (2004), “Foucault links space with the operation of discourses, and hence with power” (55), and “the spatiality of Foucault’s work opens up the possibility of planning theory which understands how power and space are closely bound up in planning” (57). Similar to Foucault’s criticism of Habermas’s theory of communicative action, Communicative Planning is also criticized by Flyvbjerg because of its limitations in understanding the role of power in shaping planning. According to Flyvbjerg and Richardson (2004), communicative planning is weak in “its capacity to help us understand what happens in the real world,” and in “serving as a basis to effective action and change” (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004, 45). This discussion is rooted in Foucault’s analytic approach on what is actually done, compared to Habermas’s normative approach in focusing on what should be done.

As an alternative for Habermasian Communicative Planning, Flyvbjerg suggests an analytic planning in which recognition of power and understanding how planning is actually exercised can open space for democratic social changes (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004, 61). In other words, creating a powerful message out of local sources of reverse-discourse not only

provides an opportunity for examination of power relations in planning, but also for getting powerful messages across political resources (Hillier 2002). Some planning theorists criticize Foucault's theory for being oppressive by "accepting the regimes of domination which condition us" (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004, 61). Flyvbjerg and Richardson (2004) disregard these criticisms by saying Foucault's theory is not about accepting the domination of existing power, but rather in contrast, about using analytical approaches to understand power and its relations regarding rationality and production of knowledge to challenge the dominant discourse, and using the resulting insights to engender social changes in society.

### 3.2.3 *Critical Thirding in Habermas-Foucault Debate in Planning*

The concept of thirding and Thirdspace, which is mainly theorized by Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja, is an inclusive both/and approach that provides an alternative to traditional debate wherein both sides try to assert an either/or situation. Soja (2009) refers to Bhabha's idea of hybridity (Bhabha 1990) and Lefebvre's notion of 'space-of-othering' (Lefebvre 2009) to argue that in every binary discussion, by choosing each side, we lose the potential advantages of the other side. Therefore, based on Thirdspace theory, we should be able to identify a Thirdspace in the ongoing debate between Habermasian and Foucauldian theorists in planning. Flyvbjerg and Richardson in their book about *The Dark Side of Planning* and Hillier in her book about *Shadows of Power* talk about this gap although they do not call it Thirdspace. They each argue that both Habermas's and Foucault's theories have their own strengths and weaknesses that cannot be substituted with one another. The following list summarizes their arguments about the strengths and weaknesses of each sides of the debate.

- a. *Normative versus analytic.* Despite modernist theorists of scientific rationality, both Habermas and Foucault are political thinkers. Nevertheless, Habermas has a normative approach in his theory about how political system *should* work in an ideal civil society, but Foucault's theory is more analytical, and is about understanding existing power in different societies (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004, 50).

- b. *Top-down versus bottom-up.* In terms of defining political action, both Habermas and Foucault are bottom-up thinkers. When it comes to defining processual rationality of action, however, Habermas takes a top-down moralist approach, but Foucault remains a bottom-up thinker.
- c. *Process and outcome.* Habermas discusses the processes that groups can go through to build a discourse and constitute communicative rationality, but he does not say anything about outcomes. On the other hand, Foucault talks about neither processes nor outcomes. He instead emphasizes the importance of recognizing power and power relations embedded in all forms of knowledge, and the way that they affect the planning processes (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004).
- d. *Solution.* ‘What is to be done?’ is a major question in Habermas’s communicative rationality, but Foucault refuses to provide a solution, and argues that any type of solution is itself part of the problem (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004, 53).
- e. *Resistance.* Foucault’s idea of “localised resistance to domination and the powerful privileges of knowledge” is similar to what Habermas calls sub-institutional and extra-preliminary resistances by social movements. Foucault only advocates resistance, but Habermas explains the entire process from destroying the reciprocal conditions of communication, continuing through “practical resistance of morally injured subjects,” and to mutual recognition via communicative renewal of the situation. (Hillier 2002, 66)

Based on the definition of Thirdspace, by choosing either side of a debate, we lose the strengths of the other side, and will be influenced by weaknesses of our side. Hillier (2002) is one of the main scholars who has put theories of Habermas and Foucault together, and provides what could be interpreted as a Thirdspace in this debate although she does not call it such. In order to define this Thirdspace, Hillier refers to Forester’s (1981) and Hoch’s (1992) works to conclude that Habermas’s theory would benefit from the analytical approach of

Foucault in recognition of the pervasiveness of power instead of using it as a standard for distorted versus successful communicative action. On the other hand, according to Hillier (2002), Foucault desperately needs normative criteria in his theory.

Since planners deal with both questions of “How” and “Why,” they are more interested in finding the Thirdspace in the Habermas- Foucault debate to develop an alternative for rational comprehensive planning, which has answers for both of these questions. Therefore, when Forester, Healy, and Innes apply Habermas’s theory in planning, they also recognize the usefulness of Foucault’s work in understanding micro-politics of power, and how it affects planning in the real world (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004). For instance, when Hillier talks about the empowerment of disadvantaged interests, she also acknowledges power relations and possibility for power to be used in both destructive and constructive ways (Hillier 2002) that can only be reached through “negotiated win-win agreements” where all affected groups have their voices heard in the process of local decision-making (Hillier 2002, 64). Therefore, we can reach a constructive way of empowering marginalized voices in planning, but not by avoiding power relations and existing conflicts among different affected groups (Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2004). Before turning to a discussion about how Social Media can be used in empowering marginalized interests of local citizens, I want to introduce right to the city as the basis of planners’ work as activist.

### 3.3 Citizens’ Right to the City

We are hearing news from people around the world that are protesting against existing power structures to claim their human rights. The United Nations in 1948 adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that defines fundamental rights that everyone around the world as a human being are equally entitled to them. Along these changes in international regulations, different activists have used this concept to raise awareness among people about their rights as

humans, and mobilize them in order to claim their rights as a member of the society in which they live (e.g. Civil Rights, Women Rights, and Gay Rights Movements). But what about cities? Does everyone who lives in a city have an equal right to that city? If so, can local activists do something parallel to what Human Rights activists are doing, to raise citizens' awareness about their rights to the city in which they live, and mobilize them to claim these rights? Who can play the local activist's role in local communities? These are some of the questions that I am going to address in this section by reviewing the relevant literature about right to the city and urban social movements.

### *3.3.1 Right to the city*

'Right to the city' is the title of two different essays written respectively by Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, separated by a forty-year window. In 1968, Lefebvre defined 'right to the city' as "a cry and a demand," and he argued that it cannot be simply interpreted as a right to visit the city, or return to the traditional city (Lefebvre 1996). In Lefebvre's definition, right to the city "can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre 1996, 158). About four decades later, Harvey expanded Lefebvre's definition, and made a stronger statement that "the right to the city is not merely a right of accessing to what already exists, but a right to change it" (Harvey 2003, 939). Even now, 'a cry and a demand' definition of Lefebvre is still the foundation of many discussions about the right to the city. Marcuse (2009) is one of the scholars who has developed this definition, and provides a clearer picture of what the French philosopher meant by defining the right to the city as 'a cry and a demand'. A summary of Marcuse's discussion about differences between cry and demand is summarized in the following table (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Differences between cry and demand in Lefebvre's definition of the right to the city (derived from Marcuse 2009).

A cry	A demand
For material necessities of life.	For what is necessary beyond material to lead to a satisfying life.
For existing legal rights.	For future; discontented with life as they see around them.
From those superficially integrate into the system...but constrained in opportunities and oppressed in their social relations.	From those directly in want, directly oppressed; those whom even their most immediate needs are not fulfilled.
From who are alienated.	From who are excluded.
Ex. led to fall of the Berlin Wall.	Ex. led to Russian Revolution.

The relation between Human Rights defined by the UN and the right to the city defined by Lefebvre has been another question related to this topic. In 2008, UNESCO (UN Habitat) published a report, entitled “Urban Policies and the Right to the City,” to answer this question (Brown and Kristiansen 2008, 17). In this report, Brown and Kristiansen explain “the right to the city is founded on the intrinsic values of human rights as initially defined in the UN Declaration, but does not form part of a human right regime” (Brown and Kristiansen 2008, 17). Right to participation is a basis for right to the city in Brown and Kristiansen’s definition. They argue that right to the city is a vehicle for urban changes, but to make these changes happen, “citizens must claim [their] right of participation, and allow others the same right” (Brown and Kristiansen 2008, 17). Finally, they identify five axes toward the right to the city, which are: 1) access to benefits of city life plus responsibilities to facilitate these rights; 2) transparency, equity, and efficacy in city administration; 3) participation and respect in local democratic decision-making; 4) recognition of diversity in economic, social, and cultural life; and finally 5) reducing poverty, social exclusion, and urban violence.

### 3.3.2 Social Mobilization and Urban Social Movements

Urban social movements are a response to this question about how the right to the city can be granted or claimed through planning and decision-making processes. Based on the definition of right to the city, citizens have both rights of *participation* in decisions affecting where they live, and *appropriation* in accessing, occupying, and using spaces, and also creating

new spaces that meet their needs (Lefebvre 1996). These rights need to be granted both to individuals and collective groups- creating cosmopolitan development that celebrates cultural diversity and intercultural collaboration (Brown and Kristiansen 2008).

Since previous planning traditions “failed to acknowledge this lack of consensus and the existence of fundamental inequality of opportunity in society” (Friedmann 1987 cited in Healy 1991, 28), different scholars have tried to fill this gap by raising discussions about urban social movements. Castells defines urban social movements as a reaction, not an alternative, which aims to transform the meaning of the city, not society, through “calling for a depth of existence without being able to create that new breadth” (Castells 1985, 327). In Castells definition, urban social movements can occur in very different forms “from counter-cultural squatters to middle class neighborhood associations” (Castells 1985, 327). Friedmann talks about characteristics and problems of urban social movements, and calls them “an ideology of dispossessed” (Friedmann 1987, 84). According to him, each social movement has three main characteristic features: 1) the primary assertion of direct collective action; 2) planning conception as a form of politics; and 3) seeking a transformative process (Friedmann 1987, 83-84).

Building on this definition of urban social movements, their goals, and characteristics, two main questions still remain: Who is in charge of mobilizing and facilitating urban social movements? How can she/he mobilize local groups to reach their goals? Friedmann introduces planners as “social change experts,” and defines their role as social reformers with clients who are “mobilized community and groups.” He argues that planners can raise awareness about “the promise of emancipation” and “confidence in the possibilities for change” (Friedmann 1987, 301). In addition to Friedmann, Healey also identifies a similar role for planners as “intermediators.” According to Healy (1991), planners have the skills to play a combined and harnessed role as intermediators to the societal tasks of social mobilizations, and to mediate between theory and practice in social transformations. Healy emphasizes that planners “will not

centrally engage in action,” but their role will be more reflective and consolidative regarding “the knowledge needed to guide such challenging transformative actions” (Healey 1991, 32).

#### 3.4 Planning Activist to Claim Marginalized Voices Based on Citizens’ Right to the City

More than any other field, planning scholars have tried to identify and specify their role in society, and most often they advocate one role by critiquing the others. This never-ending debate sometimes leads to the conclusion that “if planning is everything, maybe it’s nothing” (Wildavsky 1973). Before entering into this debate, I want to clarify my position here. I do not see planning different from other fields in terms of the participant’s role in society. According to Forester (1989), the main skills of planning practitioners is controlling information and shaping attentions, and planners use these skills differently depending on who they work for and their personal interests and values. Three employment sectors can be identified for planners: public sector, private sector, and nonprofit sector including local groups. Planners decide which sector they want to work for based on their personal interests and preferences. When they work for the public sector, they are considered policy analysts; when they work for the private sectors, they are considered consultants; and when they work for nonprofit local groups, they are considered activists. There are parallels to this formulation in other professions when practitioners deal with this triangle. For example, a physician can work for the public sector and take action by writing a public health plan, or work for a private sector pharmaceutical company to maximize its profit by producing marketable products, or work for and with local or global groups to prevent expansion of HIV around the world.

Since money and power are mostly in the hands of the public and private sectors (Gibson 2004), being an activist can be costly and risky in terms of a job in many societies. Therefore, no one can say that the planner’s best or most suitable job is to be an activist, but similar to other professions, planners can decide to use their specialized skills to play an

activist's role in order to raise the marginalized voices of local groups and help defend their right to the city. Again similar to other fields, a person does not need to be a planner to play an activist role in planning, just as one does not need to be a physician to work on preventing HIV around the world, nor does one need to be a lawyer to work for human rights.

Lack of access to media has been one of the consequences of activists' inability to compete for power and money, and it makes protest and demonstration one of the only ways for activists to gain attention for their causes, and to raise voices that want to be heard. Through the development of Information Technology and expansion of its access, activists have started to come up with creative ways of using this low-cost/free means to access media to pursue their goals. Email was one of the first types of new communication tools that reduced mailing costs, and eased the process of communication to get support for specific causes. Following emails and webpages, weblog, Podcast, and YouTube become the second generation of IT tools that virtualized the previous medium such as newspaper, radio, and TV channels. Now, activists have alternative tools to promptly and widely communicate and broadcast their causes.

These tools have their own limitations however. Online communicating tools, such as email, IM, and voice/video chat, are limited to private person-to-person or person-to-group communications, and audiences are specified as individuals rather than by interests. In addition, broadcasting online tools, such as weblog, podcast, and YouTube, are in danger of getting lost due to the huge amount of information produced online and they depend on the already interested audiences who are looking for specific issues through search engines. Twitter was a revolutionary tool because of its ability to overcome these two restrictions of traditional online communication and broadcasting tools in publicly targeting interested groups and gaining attentions for specific causes.

But how? How, in Twitter, can someone target a specific interest, and how can she/he echo an existing voice to prevent it from being marginalized? Twitter's answers to these questions are simple. First, in Twitter's terminology, each person can open a discussion by

creating a hashtag (for example #OCW for Occupy Wall Street movement and #Jan25 for Egyptians' revelation in January 2011) and everyone can use the same hashtag in his or her tweets to enter into that discussion or simply follow it around the world. In addition, the retweet feature provides an opportunity for each person to amplify a voice, and make sure that a specific concern has reached its target audiences. Facebook's share feature also does the same thing in amplifying voices, but it has restrictions in targeting specific groups because of its closed structure of social networks. These features are added to Twitter's 140-character limitation for each post that wisely addresses the lack of patience in reading long pieces among online audiences. This encourages each tweet to be as concise as possible. All these features work together to make Twitter a revolutionary tool for different activists around the world to raise their voices, and maintain momentum for their causes.

Beside all these features, what makes Twitter an even more useful tool in the hands of planning activists is the current trend in Social Media to store the geographic locations of online contents from users' IP addresses or fast growing GPS equipped mobile devices. With this trend, planning activists can address specific locations as well as specific interests. On the other hand, citizens can follow both what is going on around them as well as specific points of interest around the world. In the following sections I discuss how planning activists can use social media to: 1) raise awareness about marginalized interests based on citizens' right to the city and encourage informed participation in existing planning and decision making processes; 2) advocate and represent marginalized interests and rights of local groups in negotiations with existing planning structures; and finally 3) bypass power structures and encourage direct action (praxis) on the street.

#### *3.4.1 Inform: Using Social Media to raise awareness and encourage participation*

For more than half a century, planners have talked about public participation, and as a result, now most planning projects are required to open opportunities for public involvement in their different phases. If everyone has equal opportunity to participate in and influence public

projects, what is the problem? In order to answer this question, Forester (1989) emphasizes planners' ability to systematically shape participations through selectively channeling information and attentions (Forester 1989, 20). He also talks about how planners can strategically hide information and manipulate expectations. Therefore, planners can "shape not only documents, but also participations: who is contacted, who participates in informal design review meetings, who persuades whom of which option for project development" (Forester 1989, 28). Therefore, he concludes that information is a source of power for planners, and planning can be a source of misinformation.

Planning activists can play a crucial role in challenging this political system of misinformation that determines who knows what when, and claims legitimacy by claiming to act in the interest of singular public. Forester refers to Luke's classification of three modes of power in controlling 1) decision making, 2) agenda setting, and 3) need shaping, and argues how planners can be a source of misinformation in each of these three modes by encouraging passivity and thwarting democratic participation (Forester 1989). Since planners have specialized knowledge and skills of shaping attentions and participations, they can also use them, as an activist, to confront each of these three modes of power. Planning activists can shed light on decision-making structures to show opportunities of participation in each phase of planning processes. They can inform powerless citizens about how the power structure legitimizes the predefined agendas. They can also inform the public about their rights and needs, not what the political system tries to introduce as public needs. The well-informed citizen can actively participate in decision-making processes to set agendas based on their real needs.

*But how? How can planners play this crucial role?* In order to raise awareness and educate local groups about marginalized interests and the importance and opportunities for participation, planning activists can benefit from media. Castells (1985) identifies this problem as a lack of "autonomous means of expression, organization, and mobilization" (326) because mass media is in the hands of "empire of image producers that monopolize the codes, flows,

and information” (329), or in other words, because of underlying relations between power, money, and media. Information Technology, and especially Social Media, is challenging this equation around the world. Planning activists, like other types of activists, can use Social Media to establish local networks of local activists and active citizens to reach grassroots populations. They can illustrate public data and announce public meetings and public hearings. They can use online social network services to establish online and offline networks to educate local groups about marginalized interests and their right to the city, and to inform them about ongoing projects and existing opportunities to participate, and to influence the dominant planning processes and their outcomes. In turn, these educated informed citizens can know where to participate in the existing decision-making processes to ensure agendas are being set based on their real needs that they face in their everyday life.

It is important for planning activists to use the experiences of other activists in coming up with creative ways of using IT and Social Media to raise awareness and encourage participation in the existing systems of decision and policymaking. Elections are an important example of a legitimized way of participation in any political system. In repressive regimes, existing power relations discourage the participation of oppositions in elections to avoid any conflict. Nevertheless, whenever activists can overcome these pressures, and find their way to raise awareness about the importance of participation, they cause fundamental changes and challenges to the existing political structure. As an example, in the 2009 presidential election in Iran, in the absence of free mass media, reformists creatively used Social Media to encourage participation among young people who are the dominant cohort of the Iranian population and the most active generation in online spheres. They used YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Weblogs to produce online contents, and broadly share them around the country. This coming together of popular views via Social Media led Mirhossein Mousavi, as the main opposition candidate, to make his main slogan “Each Citizen: A Media” (Dabashi 2011).

### *3.4.2 Advocate: Using Social Media to represent marginalized interests in negotiation with planning structures*

Raising public awareness about marginalized interests and encouraging participation among local citizens is essential, but not sufficient. Planning activists sometimes need to play an advocate role to represent marginalized interests in negotiation with power structure of planning. Davidoff is one of the first planning scholars to emphasize the advocate role of planners (Davidoff 1965). Looking at planners' roles as advocates is beneficial because it provides a clear picture of the planner-client relationship. Even if all clients have equal opportunity to defend their own rights and interests, since they lack sufficient knowledge and experience, they may, and more likely will, not be able to defend their rights themselves. They need someone who knows the rules of the game and have bargaining skills to defend their rights in courts and through negotiation with power.

The fact is advocates typically defend rights of people or groups of people who write their paychecks. Forester (1989) argues that the planners' abilities to organize attention raise questions about not only legitimacy, adequacy, and openness of their practices, but also about the organizations that they work for them. When planners work for planning departments, they, more likely, pursue the interest of power structure as a policy analyst and expert; and when they work for corporations, they defend their interest as a business analyst. This explains why those who have minimum money and power have the least influence on decision-making processes and being ignored and marginalized (Gibson 2004). Here, planning activists can play an important role of empowering marginalized voices, by being their advocate and their representative in planning processes.

Despite advocates in courts that by necessity end up as either loser or winner in each case, planners' efforts in representing different groups should be based on a "negotiated win-win agreement" (Hillier, 2002, 69). Habermas calls this process 'consensus building,' and he acknowledges the legitimate role of bargaining and compromising in a democratic decision-making process among conflicting interests (cited in Hillier 2002, 124). Hillier defines

participatory democracy as “a process of open discussion in which all points of view may be heard, not a search for correct answer” (2002, 29). Therefore, planning activists can play the advocating role for those who are traditionally excluded, and encourage attention to those alternatives that might be suppressed by dominant interests (Forester 1989).

*But how? How can planning activists play an advocate role for marginalized voices?*

According to Forester (1989), planners not only need to understand how some voices can be ignored, confused, and marginalized by public and private sectors, but they also need to learn how to support and empower them. Therefore, advocating for marginalized interests is a two-step process: first, defining problems in the existing system that marginalizes powerless citizens; and second, bargaining and negotiating to solve these identified problems. Planners have the knowledge and skill to fulfill both of these responsibilities.

Another tool of Information Technology that can be used to empower marginalized interests, especially in planning, is Geographic Information System (GIS). GIS can be a key tool in the hands of planning activists to visualize and illustrate the existing problems in a way that decision-makers in the power structure can understand. Traditionally, planners use GIS in positivist and quantitative projects to provide a general picture about existing problems and future plans. To use Forester’s terminology, GIS can be a source of misinformation in planning, or in other words, GIS is used as a common quantitative and positivist way of misinformation to generalize ‘public’ needs based on ‘public’ interests. GIS can also be used in qualitative and critical projects. Pavlovskaya and Kwan are two main scholars who talk about this way of using GIS in critical research. Kwan (2004) argues that GIS can provide a better understanding about “complex interaction between space and time and their joint effect on the structure of human activity patterns in particular localities” (267). Following her, Pavlovskaya (2006) introduces “the spatial configuration of networks, relationships, activities, meaning of places, and flows that link people and places” as the main area in which GIS can play an important role, by mapping nonquantitative data to incorporate critical geographical explanation about specific issues.

It is important to note that we do not need professional skills or complicated and expensive software to conduct a qualitative GIS research on critical issues. In fact, Google Maps is one of the most used GIS platforms around the world. Whenever someone uploads a picture on Flickr, a video on YouTube, or posts a tweet or a blog and adds a geographical location to her or his online contents, she/he is actually doing the data entry process for a potential qualitative research on particular locations. Therefore, planning activists can encourage local activists and active citizens to produce online contents (picture, video, tweet, blog) about existing problems, needs, or concerns in their neighborhoods. Then, in the next step, they can visualize and analyze this online data by integrating them as additional layers in existing GIS projects. This use of GIS would be a source of their bargaining power in the ongoing negotiation about future projects.

The difference between these two ways of using GIS, to deliver “scientific” top-down information vs. locally-produced grassroots information, can be seen in Forester’s discussion about the importance of differentiating between technical and practical planners. According to Forester (1989), “being practical means responding to the demand of a situation with all its particularities,” and “using ordinary skills on unique context-dependent problems” (63). On the other hand, “[b]eing technical typically means using a generalizable technique”(63). Based on these definitions, planners are technical when they use GIS in a quantitative and positivist way to generalize a need in favor of public interest. In contrast, when they use GIS as a qualitative tool to illustrate a context-dependent and critical issue, they are practical. In addition, planning activists can use Social Media to shed light on the complicated planning process. They can use Social Media, especially Twitter, to provide online and live broadcasts about every meeting that they attend, every local official that they met, and every reaction that they received. Therefore, planning activists can hold local officials responsible about the effects of their reactions on local citizens that they need their votes and supports in future elections.

### *3.4.3 Direct Action (Praxis): Using Social Media to mobilize direct action among local groups*

In last two sections, I discussed how planners can play an activist role to raise awareness about marginalized interests and encourage participation, on the one hand, and to play an advocate role for local groups in decision-making processes, on the other. In addition to right of participation, however, citizens also have the right of appropriation. According to Lefebvre, “appropriation includes the right to access, occupy, and use [existing] spaces, and create new space that meets people’s need” (Lefebvre 1996, 174). In the rest of this section, I discuss how planning activists can mobilize local citizens to bypass the dominant power structure, and cause direct action in agnostic spaces.

I use the term praxis to refer to these informal direct actions. Praxis has been widely used by American pragmatists and European NeoMarxists to identify the types of social actions that frame and refine theory through practice, not directed by theory (Forester 1989). Lefebvre defines praxis as a form of social practice in which “people individually or in teams clear their way, propose, tryout, and prepare different forms of action, and learn from failure and give birth to the possible” (Lefebvre 1998, 151). Freire defines praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it,” and argues that oppressed citizens can acquire a critical awareness about their condition to struggle for their liberation (Freire 1986, 36). If praxis means informal direct action by local citizens to bypass the power structure, and raise marginalized voices based on their right to the city, does it mean that praxis undermines ability of traditional public sector planning to plan? Hillier (2002) raises this question and states even if it does so, “is it not a legitimate means of obtaining goals” by otherwise voiceless citizens? Therefore, according to her, informal direct action (praxis) is “a means of giving voice to the traditionally voiceless in planning decision-making processes” (Hillier 2002, 117), and it is a legitimate way of gaining decision-makers’ attention and making them consider alternative options. This definition of praxis in planning can find roots in Foucault’s concern about necessity of citizens’

actions to resist the institutionalized attempts to oppress their voices in the process of decision-making at the local level (Hillier, 2002).

More than any other thing, activists around the world have used Social Media to call for direct actions, and seek global coverage for their causes. The Iran 2009 election aftermath, Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, and current Occupy Wall Street movements are highly empowered by the abilities that Social Media provides for local activists to raise their voices and calls for action on the streets. What these three examples have in common is their civil disobedience approach in bypassing the power structure, and claiming their right on the streets, rather than through established ways of public participation in the existing power structures. For instance, in Iran 2009, when people found their legitimized way of participating in the presidential election to choose their president had been disputed, they decided to come to the streets to protest against the result of what they believed was a disputed election. Social Media and citizen journalists have played a crucial role in the election aftermath in the absence of traditional media of oppositions that were closed and political activists that were jailed right after the election.

Planning activists also can call for direct actions when they cannot pursue their goals in supporting marginalized interests and the right of local groups to the city in the bureaucratic ways of public participation, nor by bargaining as advocates in the existing planning processes. Hillier refers to Foucault's concern about citizens' responsibility to cultivate and enhance the local decision-making processes by developing action to resist the institutions, techniques and discourses that attempt to oppress them. Hillier continues that establishing networks is essential for most forms of direct actions. These networks provide access to material resources, knowledge, and power to the participants in any direct actions. Information Technology, and especially Social Media, has revolutionized the activists' abilities to establish and expand networks for their causes. Planning activists can use Social Media in establishing and expanding location-based networks to call for direct actions on streets, spread the word, and get

public attention for their causes. Different forms of direct action include civil disobediences such as marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, and refusal to pay taxes. Planning activists do not seize opportunity to gain political power through direct actions, but their purpose is to gain decision-makers' attention to consider other alternatives that are regularly ignored in bureaucratic processes of decision-making.

### 3.4 Summary

Like many other professions, planners can decide to work for public or private sectors based on their personal values or preferences. This chapter does not enter into this discussion about the 'best' role that planners can play in the planning structure as public or private sectors employees. Instead, it discusses how planners can work outside the power structure to raise marginalized interests of local citizens based on their right to the city, and how Social Media can facilitate this process by giving them a media that has traditionally been dominated by those who have the most access to political and financial recourses. In this chapter, I used other activists' experiences to explain how planner activists can use Social Media to inform local citizens about marginalized interests and their right to the city, to advocate their rights in negotiations with planning structures, and to mobilized direct actions among them to claim their rights on the streets.

Digital divide is a legitimate concern when planning activists entirely depend on the Internet in all their activities because those who traditionally have the least access to power often have the minimum access to, and knowledge about, technological innovations. That is why this chapter focuses on how these tools can help planning activists, not ordinary citizens, raise local citizens' marginalized interests. In addition, there are many experiences around the world about how local and community activists have fulfilled these roles, but since 'local' and 'community' has broad meanings and cover different causes, this chapter introduces planning

activism as the specific area of interest for those who play the activist role in facing the dominant planning power structures and to influence planning processes. Future research can conduct empirical studies on local and community activists' experiences in fulfilling each of these three roles.

## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDY: THE STORY OF JASON ROBERTS AS A PLANNING ACTIVIST IN OAK CLIFF AS A COMMUNIHOOD

#### 4.1 Introduction

Building upon the theoretical discussion about the definition of communihood and the role of planning activists in previous chapters, in this chapter, I introduce Oak Cliff, TX and Jason Roberts as one of the closest examples that I found for communihood and planning activism. In other words, I explain how Jason Roberts has played a planning activist role, and why Oak Cliff can be an example of communihood. Before entering into this discussion, I want to explain my research method in this chapter. This research is a descriptive case study using an ethnographic approach that incorporates a combination of unstructured in-person interview, online data gathering, and in the field experience to tell the story of Jason Roberts's experience as a planning activist in Oak Cliff as a Communihood. Since I had this opportunity to live near Oak Cliff during my research, I attended numerous projects and local events. Besides that, I also conducted two unstructured interviews with Jason to talk about his projects in Oak Cliff. In this sense, I was a "participant observer," and one contribution of this research method is the strategic use of Social Media to conduct a qualitative research. Hamera (2011) defines participant observation, and explains how it distinguishes from traditional ethnography:

"[P]articipant observation," meets "performance" on the terrain of expression. Where traditional ethnography asks, "How and why do my research interlocutors express what they do?" performance ethnography takes a more layered and critical approach, examining expression about the site as well as within it. It demands explicit attention to the politics of representing that expression, not just to conventions of accurately recording and interpreting it. (Hamera 2011, 320)

Through the development of Information and Communication Technology, social researchers have developed new ways of doing qualitative and quantitative research. Markham

(2008) suggests that the Internet is similar to many earlier forms of media for communication, such as letter writing, telephone, telegraph. He emphasizes the unique capacities of online communications in configuring and shaping perceptions and interactions of qualitative researchers, and the way they collect, make sense of, and represent data (Markham 2008). In the early years of Information Technology, identity has been an important concern for reliability of online data because the internet gives users the ability to remain anonymous or to create a fake identity (Markham 2008). However, by expansion of Social Media via Facebook and Twitter, people more likely keep their identity in both physical and online spheres, and they use Social Media to expand their networks, not to create a new one (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007).

In the last few years, online contents via Social Media have been broadly used in quantitative and qualitative research, especially through content analysis or trend analysis methods. In most of this research, massive amounts of online data are collected and then sometimes localized to show how specific topics have spread around the world. In the last five years, Social Media provides this opportunity for public figures and activists to bypass traditional media, and personally reach their audiences. The combination of Social Media and cell phones makes it even easier for them to record everyday life and reactions to ongoing events. Therefore, by going through activities of a specific person on Social Media such as Twitter, researchers can find the story of a public figure written by her/himself. Traditionally, these stories were written in diaries and personal journals, and selected writers used these diaries to write biographies of public figures besides in-person interviews.

In this research, as researcher, I introduce a new version of this traditional method of biographical research to write a short biography of Jason Roberts as a planning activist in Oak Cliff through his publicly available diary on Twitter and Facebook as well as in-person interviews that I had with him about these tools. I first collected Jason's online activities that were relevant to my research in a Microsoft Excel database including the date and location that each activity

produced. Then, I triangulated this data with two unstructured interviews that I had with him in order to confirm and clarify his activities in Oak Cliff as a planning activist. This method can be used in further biographical research about public figures who heavily use Social Media. Here is my story of Jason Roberts as a planning activist.

#### 4.2 Background

*Where can I find a relevant example of local activists using Social Media to pursue their causes in neighborhood scale?* For one year, I desperately searched to find an answer for this question from Netville (Canand) with a *high-speed* network as part of its design (Hampton and Wellman 1999), to Boulder (Colorado) with high access to internet and vibrant and walkable neighborhoods. *Netville* is where Keith Hampton conducted his two-year ethnographic research on constructive effects of the Internet on social interactions in physical spaces as part of his dissertation under Barry Wellman's supervision in last years of the twentieth century. In the summer of 2009, when I went to Toronto to personally visit this project, I could not find my answer there nor in other similar projects that Wellman led in his Netlab at University of Toronto, because first, I couldn't find an activist there, and second, I was looking for an existing neighborhood, not an intentionally "equipped suburb with high-speed internet with small population" (Hampton and Wellman 1999). After Netville, I focused on Boulder. At the beginning, it seemed an appropriate example as a small-sized city with high-access to the Internet and one of the main hubs of information technological development with fast-growing frontier online enterprises. When I went there, I found it too 'good' to be a viable case study since it is one of the top-ranking cities in health, education (S. Thomas 2010, Zumbun 2008), well-being (Witters 2011), quality of life (S. Thomas 2010), and also by being mostly occupied by upper middle class citizens (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

In November 2010, while walking on the UT Arlington campus and thinking about these two cases that I personally visited and many other cases that I had read about them, I stopped in front of a flyer announcing a talk, (Roberts 2010), in the UTA School of Architecture by a local

activist discussing his experiences in one of southern Dallas's neighborhoods (Figure 4.1). At first look, it seemed the perfect case study, except the question of whether there was usage of Information Technology and Social Media. I decided to attend the talk anyway to learn more about it. In the very first sentence of the introduction that the host gave to the audience, I heard my answer: "Jason Roberts is an IT expert...." Yes, he was an IT expert! I hardly remember the rest of talk, but at the time I was pretty sure that I finally had found the lost piece of my mostly theoretical research. After his speech, I introduced my research and myself and the following week I found myself at the Corner Bakery restaurant in downtown Dallas talking with him about his experiences in Oak Cliff. By then, I knew that Jason Roberts is an IT expert, a local activist, and a musician from Oak Cliff, Texas.

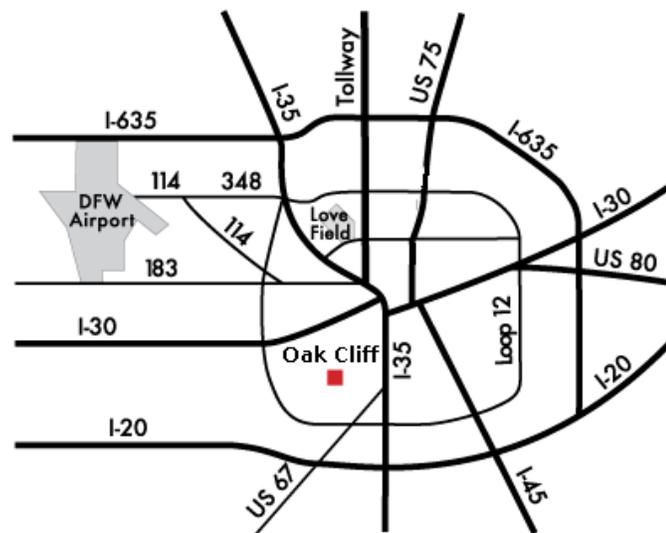


Figure 4.1 Oak Cliff location in Dallas Area

#### 4.2.1 'Oak Cliff That's my hood'

*I am from Oak Cliff.* The sense of pride that exists in this sentence is one of the common characteristics of neighbors in this southern part of Dallas that used to be a separate town, and was annexed by Dallas in 1903 (Nall n.d.). Many American first heard about Oak Cliff after the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, after the media reported that the suspected killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, lived and was captured in Oak Cliff (Jackson 1964). This

was not the first time that Oak Cliff made the front-page news reports (The New York Times 1934). In the 1930s, while America was facing the Great Depression, Bonnie and Clyde from Oak Cliff became the symbol of a public enemy as two of the most famous outlaws, robbers, and criminals who were involved in robbing dozens of banks, stores, and gas stations, killing nine police officers, and murdering several civilians. Bonnie Elizabeth Parker and Clyde Chestnut Barrow met each other and were buried in Oak Cliff for less than five years (1930-1935), but their names are attached to Oak Cliff forever. These two famous cases along with high rates of crime (Figures 4.2 and 4.3), poverty, gang violence murders, and drug epidemic led media to sometimes call Oak Cliff “the capital of crime” (Guinn 2009).

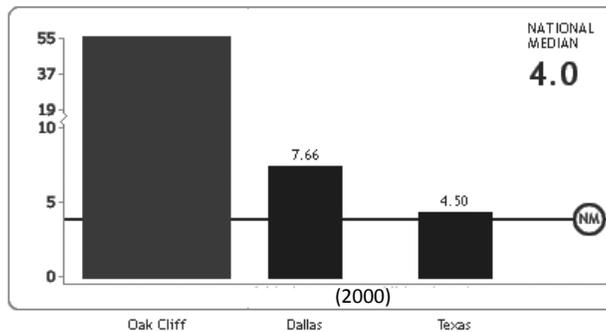


Figure 4.2 OC Violent Crime Comparison per 1,000 residents (LOCATION, INC 2011)

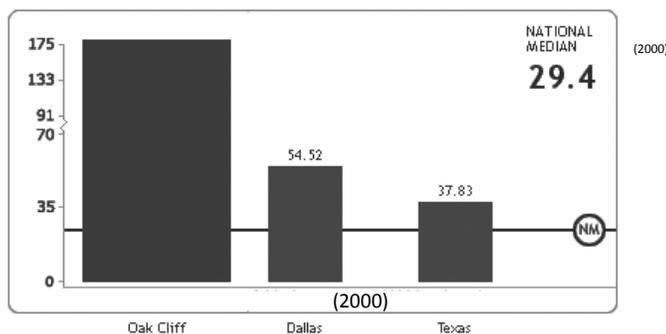


Figure 4.3 OC Property Crime Rate Comparison per 1,000 residents (LOCATION, INC 2011)

Coming from a Middle Eastern country, I could understand how a few members of a community can feed the media to create a stereotype about a community that other members are proud of belonging to it. So I started to research this stereotype in particular the question of what Oak Cliff has that makes its citizens proud, and more specifically, if a national figure living

in a neighborhood helps determine the identity of that community, who else has lived in Oak Cliff? The answer was impressive. It turns out that America's blue, jazz, and rock music owes much to Oak Cliff for introducing musicians like Grammy Award winner Stevie Ray Vaughn, Erykah Badu, Edie Brickell and T-Bone Walker (Townsel 2007). In addition to the music industry, Oak Cliff has been home to Dennis Rodman, an American Hall of Fame basketball player (Caplan 2011). Therefore, even by only considering this celebrity factor, Oak Cliff citizens have more things to be proud than ashamed of in their neighborhood.

This dual characteristic of Oak Cliff also continues on the streets of this neighborhood. When one walks from north to south Oak Cliff in less than a twenty-minute walk, one experiences a whole different kind of being in different urban spaces that is reflected in housing types, social classes, sense of security, etc.. Looking at demographic maps of Oak Cliff also shows this high level of differentiation and segregation in the neighborhood. The maps show that the northern blocks of the neighborhood are mostly occupied by high-income, highly educated, white-Americans, while in southern blocks the population of low-income, less educated, non-white Americans increases. This high level of segregation in such a small area can create both conflicts and opportunities for the neighborhood. However, it is important to note, that the Bishop Arts District, the small and vibrant downtown area of Oak Cliff, is located in a part of the neighborhood that is the most diverse in all these three aspects: income (Figure 4.4.a), education (Figure 4.4.b), and ethnicity (Figure 4.4.c).

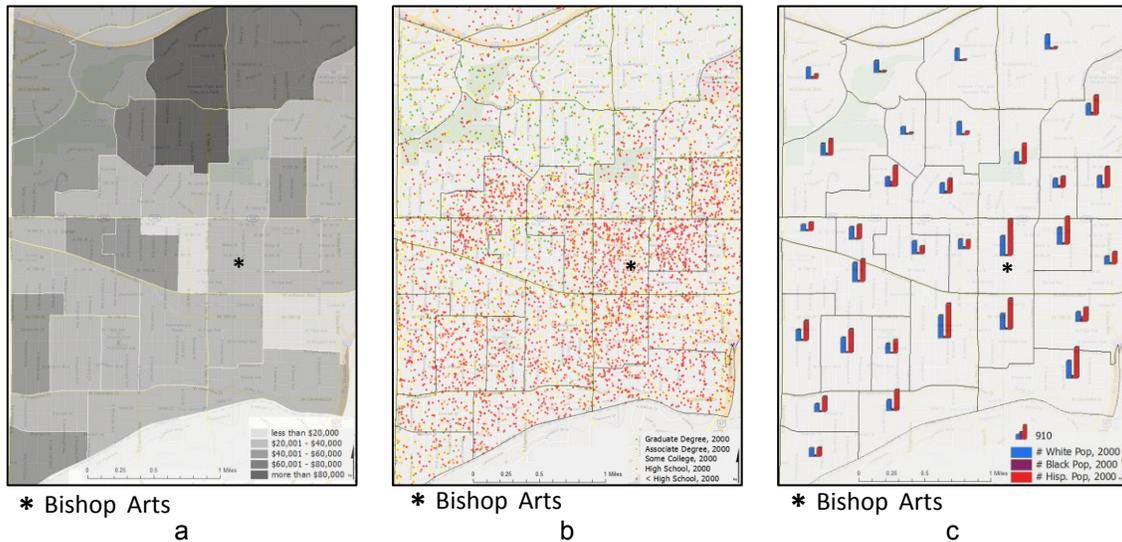


Figure 4.4 Oak Cliff Demographic Maps (US Census 2000): a. Household Median Income, b. Education, c. Race and Ethnicity.

#### 4.2.2 Have you met Jason?

This was the first reaction I got when talking to one of the neighbors at Espumoso café on my first visit to Oak Cliff about my research. By that time, I knew Jason, as we had a short talk with him after his speech at UTA and a lunch meeting in downtown Dallas, but I pretended that I didn't know him. *"Who is Jason?"* I asked. *"You should meet him, he is the guy behind many projects in Oak Cliff,"* the neighbor quickly answered while looking in his cellphone to give me Jason's number. But who is Jason?

*Jason Eric Roberts* was born and raised in a small farming community in Oklahoma. He moved to Oak Cliff after he married in 2000. At that time, he was an IT expert working at IBM and a freelancer musician. Both his expertise in Information Technology and his talent in art and music helped him find his way in his new neighborhood.

*"Before coming to Oak Cliff, I'd never been in a community where neighbors talk to each other,"* Jason said in my first interview with him.

Jason quickly fell in love with the new neighborhood that had everything he missed before. Coming from a suburb where everything was maintained and in a good shape in terms

of landscaping and infrastructure, it was hard for him to see many buildings in disrepair and businesses devaluated around the neighborhood. He started to ask “*what if we have all these things together? A socially connected neighborhood with great infrastructure, and more local businesses.*” This question was the beginning of his six-year journey as local/online activist/artist in Oak Cliff that I am going to explain in this chapter.

*“My first step was getting to know the press and people and getting more social activities in that area,” Jason explained.*

Jason as an Artist started his work in Oak Cliff based on his strengths in music and IT. He started a band named *Happy Bullet* that played several shows around the neighborhood. That was the time he noticed that the Texas Theater, one of the most valuable historic buildings in Oak Cliff, was falling down. “*It was a great building. We should do something about it,*” he said and asked, “*what if we play music here and bring our artist friends to play their shows.*” That was Jason’s first experience in 2005 in doing something about that building. Soon after he and his artist friends funded a nonprofit organization named *Art Conspiracy*, and Jason Roberts became the president of the *Texas Theater* in Oak Cliff. In the first official *Art Conspiracy* event in December 2005, 700 people showed up and everyone in the neighborhood “were excited to see life and energy back in the building” and in the part of the neighborhood that used to be considered the bad part of town. This amount of energy and excitement along with public and press attention fueled his motivation to think, “What else can be fixed?”

After six years, *Art Conspiracy* held its seventh annual festival in December 2011 along with many other events in the Texas Theater that attract artists from different parts of the city, the state, and the country who play their shows in the Oak Cliff neighborhood. Jason has used Social Media, especially Facebook, to promote Texas Theater’s ongoing events. By creating an event in Facebook alongside posting flyers around the neighborhood, the Texas Theater has maximized its audience in both online and physical spheres. In addition to Facebook’s feature allowing people to RSVP to public events that they are attending and to invite their friends, this

*to whom it may concern* characteristic of Social Media provides the opportunity for extended online personal networks to see who is going to which event and join the events even if they are not invited. Therefore, when Jason posts an event on his online social networks, it is not limited to his 1,793 friends on Facebook and 811 followers on Twitter, nor even to the 5,219 fans of Texas Theater or 5,778 fans of Art Conspiracy on Facebook. Everyone who responds to an event becomes an amplifier for reaching that specific voice *to whom it may concern* among his or her personal networks.

Since September 2007 when Jason joined Facebook, as well as announcing upcoming shows and events, he also has used his account to raise funds for the Theater and for Art Conspiracy by promoting the online donation website and announcing local fundraising events, and involve local volunteers in both ongoing events and repairing the building. In all these years, the Texas Theater has been a main hub for Jason to interact with neighbors, meet with local activists and active citizens, and bring his artist friends to his neighborhood.

#### 4.3 Jason Roberts as a Planning Activist

In this chapter, I introduced Jason as a planning activist because his work has had substantial effects on planning projects and processes in Oak Cliff, and I explained how Jason has used Social Media to raise marginalized voices in this neighborhood. Before going further with this discussion, it is important to notice two things. First, as explained in chapter three, one does not need to be a planner to play a planning activist role, same as one does not need to be a lawyer to be a human rights activist, nor a physician to play an activist role in fighting HIV around the world. Second, when I am talking about marginalized voices I am not necessarily referring to low-income citizens nor ethnic or sexual minorities. By marginalized voices, I mean those who have been ignored in planning and decision-making processes, that is “marginalization” depends on the context and existing power structure. For example, in a repressive regime, journalists who would be traditionally were considered among those who had the most powerful voices, might subsequently be considered marginalized. In Oak Cliff’s case, I

introduce Jason Roberts as an activist for marginalized voices, because he represents those parts of the population, whom are quieted, along with advocates causes that have been ignored in the dominant planning power structure. This chapter focuses on Jason's three main projects: 1) bringing back streetcars in Oak Cliff, 2) making a Bike Friendly Oak Cliff, and 3) creating a Better Block in Oak Cliff. In discussing each of these projects, I explain how Jason has used Social Media and Information Technology to educate people about existing opportunities for participation, advocate their causes in negotiation with the dominant planning structure, and mobilize direct action (praxis) on the streets.

#### *4.3.1 Bringing Back Streetcars in Oak Cliff*

*In 2006 we created OCTA to return OC's trolley. We were told it's a pipedream.  
Today the mayor requested a streetcar in OC <http://tr.im/Gfei>  
- Jason Roberts tweeted on December 1, 2009*

After the Texas Theater revitalization project, Jason started to notice other clusters of historic buildings around the neighborhood, and when he matched these clusters with old Oak Cliff maps, he found out that these clusters are located around the streetcar stops. *"The Stops were like transit oriented development of the time,"* he described, and he asked, *"What if we start reviving the streetcar in Oak Cliff?"* Following this question, Jason used his IT expertise to develop a website, named *Oak Cliff Transit Authority (OCTA)*. The goal was bringing back the streetcars in the neighborhood. In the beginning, OCTA was only a website and in the website he introduced himself as the president of OCTA. People started to get excited about the idea of having streetcars in their neighborhood (Figure 4.5), and a local newspaper picked up the story about a guy who is trying to revive the streetcar in the south Dallas (The Dallas Morning News 2006).



Figure 4.5 Oak Cliff Street Car Mural painted by high school students (Corrie 2011)

People from the neighborhood, including local engineers, activists, and even a person who used to work on streetcars, started to contact Jason to get involved in this project. Among them, Jason worked with local engineers to create the new transit map of Oak Cliff that included the old streetcar routes and with help of the interested and influential citizens, formed the board of OCTA, registered it as a nonprofit organization in 2008 with the same name and the same goal. After that, Jason and OCTA started to advocate their causes through negotiation with the dominant planning structure. During this process they learned that there is a transit map for Dallas that includes streetcars but for only downtown Dallas. Therefore, they focused on adding the Oak Cliff streetcar to those routes. They met with several local officials including the DART Street car team, State Senators, State Representatives, North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), and Dallas City Hall. As the results of these advocacy efforts, they were able to raise the streetcar issue among decision-makers at different levels from local up to the federal level.

In other words, based on Forester's definition, Jason, in the OCTA project, fulfilled a planner's role to "shape not only documents, but also participation: who is contacted, who participates in informal design review meetings, who persuades whom of which option for project development" (Forester 1989, 28). Finally, in February 2010, after four years of continuous efforts in educating and advocating both the public and officials about the

importance of bringing back the streetcar in revitalization of this part of town that used to be considered *the capital of crime*, this small group of talented and committed citizens managed to receive a \$23-million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grant for bringing back the streetcar to their neighborhood (Wilonsky 2010, Salcedo Group, Inc 2008).

It is important to remember that from the very beginning, the OCTA website has been a key facilitating tools for Jason to legitimize the project and get the public's and media's attention, and to inform them about the progress that has been made in different steps of the project. OCTA as an nonprofit organization started to use its website to encourage Oak Cliff citizens to become involved in this project as volunteers or members at different levels from supporter (with \$50 membership fee) up to underwriter (with \$5,000 membership fee) . After joining Facebook and Twitter in 2007, Jason used his Facebook and Twitter accounts to update *to whom it may concern* about the project's:

Official announcements about different phases of the project<sup>1</sup>;

The obstacles during the project<sup>2</sup>;

Local media coverage about the project <sup>3</sup>; and

Achievements <sup>4,5</sup>.

Jason also used Social Media to shed light on the complicated processes of decision-making. In the streetcar project, he updated his followers on Twitter and his friends on Facebook about every meeting that they attended, every presentation that they gave, and every accomplishment that they achieved. This helped them to build a sense of trust among the neighbors and to keep the momentum and support from the grassroots during these four years of advocacy work. In addition, he hold local officials responsible for the results of meetings that

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<sup>1</sup>April 26, 2008: OCTA just got its IRS 501c3 approval!!! We're official!

<sup>2</sup>September 18, 2008: *Our streetcar bill is in danger at Texas Legislature due to time constraints: <http://tr.im/kVlg> fingers crossed*

<sup>3</sup>August 6, 2009: *More press on our OC streetcar efforts: <http://bit.ly/vBEFJ>*

<sup>4</sup>July 17, 2008: *Our octa streetcar project just jumped to a regional priority project at nctcog! 20+ groups applied, we're in the top 4. Fw&oc teaming up*

<sup>5</sup>February 17, 2010: *We got half of our grant request for the streetcar!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Yay Oak Cliff!!!!*

were broadcast online to the local residents. Here are some of the examples of his tweets and Facebook activities during this project:

- Jan 14, 2009: is speaking on Streetcar redevelopment at the OC Lions' Club at noon.
- Jan 27, 2009: At city hall attending the transportation committee's mtg. Status updates on streetcar and lovefieldIt rail soon.
- Jan 27, 2009: *Elba Garcia* is promoting our recent OCTA streetcar feasibility study.
- Feb 26, 2009: met with the *head of DART's streetcar* project today. Great plans in the works...now just need money.
- Feb 26, 2009: Heading up a luncheon today w/our pro-streetcar/bikelane group. *Councilwoman Angela Hunt* is guest speaker. come out!: <http://tr.im/gO0r>
- Mar 04, 2009: Meeting with *state sen Royce West* to promote mmd's. Mmd = partial funding mechanism for southside streetcar
- Mar 05, 2009: Back to Dallas. Met w/*state rep yvonedavisre*:stimulus funds available for transit work. Fingers crossed dallas sees this
- Apr 24, 2009: just got off the phone with the chair of the *transportation committee* for the mayor's southern sector task force. They want to make our streetcar the priority for the OC
- May 01, 2009: Heading to a meeting w/*DART& the Southern Sector Task Force* re: OC streetcars
- May 13, 2009: NTX rail bill pared down in Senate (SB855). only left with .10 gas tax as funding mechansm. ironic since rail taxes in 1900's paid for roads.
- Aug 01, 2009: Lunched w/*SrDART board memberre*:OC streetcar. Next meeting @cityhall pitching complete street for Tyler using this model <http://tr.im/uYmG>
- Aug 05, 2009: At *city hall*...news about the oak cliff/downtown streetcar to be briefed to council. <http://short.to/lqxt>
- Dec 01, 2009: In 2006 we created OCTA to return OC's trolley.we were told it's a pipedream. Today the *mayor* requested a streetcar in OC <http://tr.im/Gfei>
- Feb 17: 2010: We got half of our grant request for the streetcar!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Yay Oak Cliff!!!!**
- Feb 19, 2010: *Head of US DOT* calls out Oak Cliff on his personal blog!: <http://tr.im/OTB6> #awestruck
- Feb 28, 2010: At the public streetcar meeting reviewing the line to oak cliff.

It is hard to imagine this project without Internet and Social Media considering the facilitating role of the OCTA website in initiating and spreading their goals. Even if we hypothetically assume that this project has been part of Dallas's transit plan in the first place, people were probably only hearing about the project once at the beginning in a public meeting in 2006. After four years they might see a short news piece about the grant on their local newspaper in 2010, and no one knows when they would see it really coming on the streets. This process is similar to many ongoing formal planning projects that are in progress, but that have been unable to receive this much public attention and support. Jason's work in OCTA is an example of what has been discussed in chapter three about the way that the planning activist can use Information Technology and Social Media to raise a marginalized or ignored issue in the existing plan, and advocate it with local officials and hold them responsible by broadcasting live the results of meetings to the local citizens who are also voters and taxpayers.

#### 4.3.2 Making a Bike Friendly Oak Cliff

*Dallas' staff transit planner: "as long as I work for the city, Dallas will never have bike lanes". That's what we're up against Jason Roberts tweeted on November 18, 2008*

During the OCTA project, Jason decided to travel to those cities that have working streetcars to study how beneficial they are for cities and communities. While he was in Portland, he became impressed with their comprehensive bicycle infrastructure, and started to think how bicycles and streetcars can work together to bring the walkability that he was looking for on the streets of his neighborhood. When he came back to Oak Cliff, he gathered his cyclist friends and created an initiative that advocates a bicycle infrastructure, naming it Bike Friendly Oak Cliff (BFOC). Despite existing professional cyclist groups, BFOC focused more on European and casual style of cycling for pleasure. *"The nice thing about bicycle group was to be part of it all you need to do was to have a bicycle,"* Jason described. BFOC's goal was to guarantee that neighbors are going to have a lot of fun if they own a bicycle as well as advocating bike infrastructures to ensure safety and increase the ridership of bicycles in the neighborhood.

Weblog has been the main means of communication for BFOC from the beginning. They started to post pieces on their weblog in November 2008, and now after four years it is still the main portal for communicating with and educating people, updating the press, and informing local officials. Jason also created a Facebook page and a Twitter account (@bikefriendlyoc) for BFOC to reach a broader audience both for blog posts and BFOC activities. By studying Jason and BFOC online activities, we can distinguish three roles of a planning activist that were discussed in chapter three: a) educating the local citizens (Inform); b) protesting against the dominant planning structure (Direct Action), c) advocating for a bike friendly Oak Cliff in negotiation with the dominant power structure (Advocate). It is important to note that these steps overlap with each other. For example, education processes never end, and mobilizing direct action to protest against dominant power structures always remains a viable option.

#### 4.3.2.1 Educating the local citizens

Educating local groups about marginalized interests and the existing opportunities for participation is one of the crucial roles of planning activists. Jason and BFOC used weblog and Social Media to educate the community about the benefits of riding bicycles for community and neighbors in two different ways. First, they raised the public awareness about this issue by writing and sharing related research and experiences around the world. From February 2009 to the end of 2011, Jason had posted around thirty articles on his Facebook and Twitter accounts about this issue. The following list includes some of the main issues that he covered in these posts.

Similar examples around the world: Copenhagen<sup>1</sup>, Portland, New York City<sup>2</sup>, Boston<sup>3</sup>,  
Memphis<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Feb 27, 2009: Jan Gehl discussing and showing how Copenhagen became the "Bike Capital of the World": <http://tr.im/gQla>

<sup>2</sup>Dec 8, 2011: NYC just announced they've doubled bike ridership in 4 years. How? By adding 260 miles of bike lanes in the same period <http://t.co/0CGz4Kba>

<sup>3</sup>Aug 9, 2009: Boston, who dallas replaced for worst bicycling city in US, making massive strides: <http://bit.ly/2dgerh> how can we replicate?

<sup>4</sup>Dec 13, 2011: Eerily similar set of circumstances in Memphis w/failure to implement bike lanes. Mayor stepped in and took charge: <http://t.co/rOobGOct>

Benefit of Bicycling for public health: children<sup>1</sup>, women<sup>2</sup>

Benefit of having bike infrastructure: safety<sup>3</sup>, creating jobs<sup>4</sup>, great streets<sup>5</sup>,

Benefit of using public transit and bike ridership over private car<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Gas costs<sup>9,10</sup>

Dallas rank among the US cities in bike related indexes<sup>11,12</sup>

Guides about how to build Bike Infrastructures<sup>13,14,15,16</sup>

Existing opportunity to develop Dalla<sup>17</sup>'s Bikeways: Flood Money<sup>18</sup>, Dallas youth and senior population<sup>19</sup> using yearly street budget for bike facilities<sup>20,21</sup>

Educating kid about how to ride a bike<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Placing cars over people in city planning has direct implications on the health of our children: [http://correspondents.theatlantic.com/richard\\_florida/2009/06/communities\\_for\\_healthy\\_kids.php](http://correspondents.theatlantic.com/richard_florida/2009/06/communities_for_healthy_kids.php)

<sup>2</sup> Oct 14, 2009: Build for women, and ridership will increase: <http://tr.im/BKNB>

<sup>3</sup> Nov 5, 2009: New report notes bicycle infrastructure safer than bicycling on streets: <http://tr.im/EdRm> via [@bikefriendlyoc](http://austintonwheels.com)

<sup>4</sup> Jan 25, 2011: Study: Biking Infrastructure Projects Create More Jobs Than Auto-Based Initiatives <http://tinyurl.com/49nzc4q> via [@fastcompany](http://fastcompany)

<sup>5</sup> Dec 14, 2011: What do all great streets have in common? <http://t.co/01n3BDkG>

<sup>6</sup> May 08, 2009: According to the APTA, using public transit in Dallas instead of a car would save you \$700 a month: <http://tr.im/kQkj>

<sup>7</sup> May 28, 2009: "cars are like cigarettes" <http://tr.im/mFpB>

<sup>8</sup> Jun 11, 2009: Building cities for people over cars <http://tr.im/ocmD> RT [@bikefriendlyoc](http://tr.im/ocmD)

<sup>9</sup> Apr 26, 2011: [Debunking Five Myths about Gas Prices](http://tr.im/ocmD)

<sup>10</sup> May 12, 2011: An interesting twist to the natural gas debate: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/12/natural-gas-revolution-overblown\\_n\\_861074.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/12/natural-gas-revolution-overblown_n_861074.html)

<sup>11</sup> Jun 17, 2009: DFW ranks second for road rage in nation. Portland ranks lowest. 88% of teens here text/use cell while driving... <http://bikefriendlyoc.wordpress.com/2009/06/16/dfw-home-to-angriest-drivers-88-of-teens-text-or-use-cell-phones-while-driving/>

<sup>12</sup> Dec 12, 2011: The top 30 US cities by population (including "Motor City") have leap frogged Dallas in installing bike infrastructure <http://t.co/6cCNL3FA>

<sup>13</sup> Oct 2, 2009: RT [@reconnecting A handbook for those who want to bring modern bicycle boulevards to their communities](http://tr.im/ocmD) <http://bit.ly/oQmM1>

<sup>14</sup> Oct 30, 2009: How to make Dallas Livable (Part 2): <http://tr.im/DAVv> RT [@Bikefriendlyoc](http://tr.im/DAVv)

<sup>15</sup> Jun 10, 2009: A Primer on Modern Bike Lanes <http://bikefriendlyoc.wordpress.com/2009/06/09/a-primer-on-modern-bike-lanes/>

<sup>16</sup> Aug 10, 2009: Love how they've built shade into their retail streetscapes. Something Jefferson Blvd should look into. <http://short.to/m8xf>

<sup>17</sup> Oct 8, 2009: Can floodway dollars be used to build a Dallas bikeway? That's what Boulder did: <http://tr.im/B43s> AND WE are on a floodplain

<sup>19</sup> Mar 24, 2011: 50% of Dallas citizens are either too young or to old to drive.

<sup>20</sup> Dec 8, 2011: If we transferred 2% of our yearly streets budget to bike Dallas could have 100 miles of bike lanes: <http://t.co/BNi7BK1X>

<sup>21</sup> Dec 14, 2011: 6 lane roads in Dallas cost \$1M/mile to resurface. Converting to 4 lane w/bike lanes reduces pothole area saving 20% (\$200K/mile).

<sup>22</sup> Oct 15, 2009: We're going 2 start offering free Learn2RideABike lessons 4 kids on Saturday mornings using this method <http://tr.im/BTKH> rt [@bikefriendlyoc](http://tr.im/BTKH)

Second, they organized different historic and leisure rides around the neighborhood to introduce bicycling as an entertaining way of getting to know their neighbors and their neighborhood. This helped BFOC to organize residents and mobilize social and human capital that they needed for further work in the neighborhood. The following list includes some of the events that they organized in the neighborhood.

JFK/Lee Harvey group bike ride, Jan 2008<sup>1</sup>

Bonnie & Clyde group bike ride <sup>2</sup>

Art Crawl: April 2009<sup>3</sup>, April 2010<sup>4</sup>

Bike-In Movie at the Belmont (June 2009)<sup>5</sup>

Cyclesomatic!: October 2009<sup>6</sup>

Tyler Street Block Party & Art Bike Show: September 2009<sup>7</sup>

Santa Ride: December 2009<sup>8</sup>

Valentine's Day Group ride: February 2010 <sup>9</sup>

History Group Ride led to the Blues, Bandits, and BBQ event: October 2011<sup>10</sup>

Jason used Social Media in order to announce the events, invite the neighbors, and share the photos and press coverage of these events *to whom it may concern*. Neighbors could RVSP to events on Facebook and by doing so their Facebook friends would be informed about the event, increasing the potential audience of BFOC group. In addition, by adding photos of the

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<sup>1</sup>Details on the JFK/Lee Harvey group bike ride here: <http://tr.im/53kk>

<sup>2</sup>Sunday's Bonnie & Clyde group bike ride is Sunday at 2:30PM. We're expecting 200+ this time. Belmont's providing \$2 shiners <http://tr.im/gKch>

<sup>3</sup>Running a million errands to prep for the art crawl. Hope to see you all there!  
[Http://bikefriendlyoc.wordpress.com](http://bikefriendlyoc.wordpress.com)

<sup>4</sup>We confirmed a petting zoo, and a couple of bounce houses for kid's on Sunday, April 11th at Tyler and Davis during the Oak Cliff Art Crawl. They'll be up between 12 and 3. Bring the whole fam, and ride your bikes!

<sup>5</sup><http://www.facebook.com/events/86435732621/>

<sup>6</sup>RT @bikefriendlyoc Bike Friendly Oak Cliff and New Belgium Brewery are proud to present Cyclesomatic! A 10 Day Bike Fest in North Oak Cliff.<http://tr.im/u9Sr>

<sup>7</sup>shared an event: Tyler Street Block Party & Art Bike Show.

<sup>8</sup>BFOC Presents Dallas Santa Ride, Dec. 20th! Dress up like Santa, an Elf, or wear an Ugly Holiday Sweater. [@bikefriendlyoc](http://tr.im/GwWi)

<sup>9</sup>BFOC's Valentine's Day Group ride announced!: [@bikefriendlyoc](http://tr.im/KMgj)

<sup>10</sup>We just announced the BFOC History Group Ride which will lead to the Blues, Bandits, and BBQ event: <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=147784338650403>

events on the Facebook and tagging the participant in the pictures, other neighbors become interested to join the next events. Finally, sharing the local press coverage of the events has increased the legitimacy of group among local citizens and local officials.

#### 4.3.2.2 Mobilizing direct and indirect action (praxis) in protest to the planning structure

Jason's work as a planning activist to mobilize direct action among local citizens is based on citizens' right to the city, which includes their right to appropriate in addition to participate. Lefebvre argues that "appropriation includes the right to access, occupy, and use [existing] spaces, and create new space that meets people's need" (Lefebvre 1996, 174). While Jason and his friends in FBOC were trying to educate both their neighbors and local officials about the benefits of bike infrastructure, they noticed a major obstacle in front of their causes: Dallas Bike Coordinator. At the time, Dallas had a Bike Coordinator that belonged to a group of cyclists, Vehicular Cyclists, who were against any special facilities for bicycles and believed that a bicycle should be treated like a car in cities. "As long as I work for the city, Dallas will never have bike lanes," Jason tweeted Dallas Bike coordinator's response to their request.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the common belief that since "he has been the Dallas bike coordinator for a long time we should wait until he retires," Jason started to publicly challenge him by introducing him as the main reason behind why Dallas is one of the only large cities in the U.S. with no bike infrastructure. Therefore, BFOC and other bike groups around the city create a Facebook group name *Make Dallas Pedestrian and Bike Friendly NOW*.<sup>2</sup> Jason also started to contact other big cities' bike coordinators to challenge Dallas's position. He published the Portland's Bike Coordinator response to Dallas's coordinator on BFOC weblog in November 2008,<sup>3</sup> and he worked with the Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Oak Cliff Chamber of Commerce

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<sup>1</sup> Nov 18, 2008: Dallas' staff transit planner: "as long as i work for the city, Dallas will never have bike lanes". That's what we're up against

<sup>2</sup><http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=42095389342>

<sup>3</sup> Nov 14, 2008: Portland's bike coordinate responds to Dallas' coordinator's claims: <http://bikefriendlyoc.wordpress.com/>

to organize a speech for him in Dallas besides several meetings while he was in the city.<sup>1</sup> He also heavily used the BFOC weblog to educate both public and local officials about the consequence of Dallas's dominating attitude toward bike infrastructure influenced by the small group of Vehicular Cyclists that made Dallas the "Worst City for Cycling in the US."<sup>2</sup> Finally on April 2, 2009, he tweeted that "The mayor's a fan of bike lanes,"<sup>3</sup> and soon after, in May 2009, Dallas hired a new bike coordinator<sup>4</sup> and the initiative for new bike plan for Dallas had started.

#### 4.3.2.3 Advocating for bike infrastructure in negotiation with planning structure

As discussed before, planning activists can play the advocate role for those who are traditionally excluded, and encourage attention to those alternatives that might be suppressed by dominant interests (Davidoff 1965, Forester 1989, Hillier 2002). In BFOC case, after winning the battle of changing the Dallas Bike Coordinator, that was the time for negotiation. So Jason and other activists around the town started to play advocate roles in negotiating with the new bike coordinator about the details of a new bike plan and convincing other local officials about the importance of having bike infrastructure in the city. Similar to the streetcar project, Jason used Social Media to shed light on a complicated processes of policy and decision-making and exposing local officials' reactions to the request of already informed citizens. Therefore, he tweeted about every meeting he attended<sup>5,6</sup> every project that was being considered,<sup>7</sup> and every reaction that they received from local officials.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, he organized the first Bike-to-City Hall event to show the grassroots support for the ongoing projects.<sup>9</sup> He was able to convince four council members and a senator to join them in biking toward the city hall in

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<sup>1</sup> Nov 17, 2008: Pitching a collaboration with the Dallas Hispanic Chamber and the OC Chamber to bring this guy to speak: <http://tinyurl.com/yve7sb>

<sup>2</sup> <http://bikefriendlyoc.wordpress.com/2008/11/18/building-the-cause-for-change/>

<sup>3</sup> Apr 21, 2009: The mayor's a fan of bike lanes! <http://tr.im/jfpX>

<sup>4</sup> May 15, 2009: RT @bikefriendlyoc It's official, Dallas hired a new bike coordinator

<sup>5</sup> July 08, 2009: spoke to Danish city planner re:Dallas bike lanes. final recommendation for safety & higher ridership is 2 add cycletracks <http://tr.im/rm7J>

<sup>6</sup> Apr 15, 2010: Heading to city hall for the first bicycle advisory committee meeting.

<sup>7</sup> Jul 30, 2009: Met with the new bicycle coordinator at city hall today. Exciting plans in the works.

<sup>8</sup> Jul 21, 2009: Just spoke 2 Methodist Hosp rep re:partnershipopps in promoting bike/ped infrastructure projects in OC.They're interested in collaborating

<sup>9</sup> Sep 19, 2009: Official Dallas Bikes to City Hall announcement: <http://tr.im/z4cV> Host of Good Morning Texas may be riding a tandem with us

October 7, 2009. <sup>1</sup> On October 7, 2009, a large group of cyclists, including council members and a senator, biked toward city hall, and the event got a good amount of local media attention.<sup>2</sup> Jason organized another Bike-to-City Hall ride in October 2010. As the result of this collaboration between the planning department, local activists, decision makers, and public support, Dallas selected a Bike Plan Consultant in February 2010,<sup>3</sup> Dallas Bike Plan passed in the city council in June 2011,<sup>4</sup> bike and pedal facilities unanimously passed for Oak Cliff,<sup>5</sup> BFOC received a \$5,000 national grant from the *Bike Belong* to help Dallas in holding their first car free celebration (Ciclovia).<sup>6</sup>

From the beginning of 2010, the BFOC model has been used by several bike groups in the region and around the world, such as Bike Friendly Lakewood,<sup>7</sup> Bike Friendly North Dallas,<sup>8</sup> Bike Friendly Duncanville,<sup>9</sup> and Bike Friendly North Shore (New Zealand)<sup>10</sup> (Figure 4.6). All of these groups have one thing in common: high usage of Social Media in educating the public, advocating their causes, and mobilizing direct action on the streets.

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<sup>1</sup> Sep 18, 2009: Received confirmations from 4 council members to join us for the Bike to City Hall morning ride on Oct 7th. Working on the mayor now!

<sup>2</sup> Oct 8, 2009: Dallas Morning News video posted of our City Hall ride: <http://tr.im/B025> and Dallas Observer article: <http://tr.im/B025#cyclesomatic>

<sup>3</sup> Feb 26, 2010: Dallas Bike Plan consultant selected!: [@bikefriendlyoc](http://bit.ly/c5gfmy)

<sup>4</sup> Jun 9, 2011: The 2011 Dallas Bike Plan just passed the city council unanimously!

<sup>5</sup> Dec 12, 2011: Just had a great meeting w/Davis TIF board. Bike and Pedal facilities unanimously passed for Oak Cliff.

<sup>6</sup> Jun 29, 2011: Bike Friendly Oak Cliff just won a \$5K grant from Bikes Belong to help the city of Dallas pull off its first Ciclovia (car free street celebration)!!! Here's an example of one in San Jose <http://www.streetfilms.org/san-jose-hosts-inaugural-%e2%80%9cvelo%e2%80%9d-event-celebrating-cycling/>

<sup>7</sup> Dec 3, 2009: Just got an email from a guy starting up a bike friendly lakewood group! Yay!

<sup>8</sup> Feb 23, 2010: Welcome Bike Friendly North Dallas!: <http://bikefriendlynorthdallas.org/> RT [@bikefriendlyoc](http://twitter.com/bikefriendlyoc)

<sup>9</sup> Jul 8, 2011: Happy to welcome the newest BF member, Bike Friendly Duncanville! <http://bikefriendlyduncanville.wordpress.com/>

<sup>10</sup> Feb 17, 2010: Welcome the latest member of the Bike Friendly family...North Shore, Auckland, New Zealand! <http://bikefriendlynorthshore.wordpress.com/>



Figure 4.6 Bike Friendly Groups in North Texas, US, and around the world

#### 4.3.3 Creating a Better Block in Oak Cliff

*Amazing weekend. We installed Dallas' first complete street & people came out in droves. Cars slowed, kids' biked, businesses did great  
Jason Roberts tweeted on April 12, 2010*

While Jason was gaining more trust among his Oak Cliff neighbors and recognition among local officials, he and his team became more confident in changing their neighborhood. They started to think, what if we fix a block not just a building. In order to understand what allowed Jason reach to this point, it is important to see his sources of influence and inspiration. By studying his activities via Twitter and Facebook, we can see that he started to read about

Smart Growth,<sup>1</sup> New Urbanism,<sup>2</sup> the Creative Class,<sup>3</sup> and the history of Dallas and Oak Cliff<sup>4</sup> in the last months of 2007. Later on, he emphasized the importance of reading Jane Jacobs's book (1992), *The Death & Life of Great American Cities*, for all city leaders. As we can see, although Jason never had formal education in Planning, his interest in community development led him to become familiar with key planning literature on local and neighborhood scales. Later on, he attended Andres Duany's speech in Dallas,<sup>5</sup> and expressed his concern of seeing the Dallas mayor leaving halfway through the speech.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these theories, he also started to become familiar with the *Complete Streets* planning projects that planning departments were trying to implement in both Oak Cliff and other parts of Dallas. After attending several of these project charrettes and public hearings, full of new ideas and exciting projects, Jason started to ask "why don't we see that much change on the ground in our cities." He saw city authorities and engineers as the main obstacles for implementation of these projects because these experts are trained to think about the worst-case scenarios. "Whenever you build your city with a worst case scenario in mind, you will always make it stark, make it a place that is not humanized," Jason argues. For traffic engineers, traffic flow is the major concern, and they want to have cars in and out as quickly as possible. The safety of cars and pedestrians is the main concern of city authorities. Therefore, pedestrians are considered a main cause on conflict with cars, and engineers and authorities as the last step in the planning processes, are not in favor of putting them beside traffic flow.

After becoming upset about the planning processes, Jason started to work with existing human and social capital in the neighborhood to pursue their cause in making a better neighborhood outside the mainstream planning process. His work, and the Better Block project, was the result of these efforts. Better Block project is defined as "a demonstration tool that acts

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<sup>1</sup> October 7, 2007: studying smart growth zoning issues...wheeee!

<sup>2</sup> November 10, 2007: is reviewing the tenets new urbanism

<sup>3</sup> November 10, 2007: is reading the Rise of the Creative Class

<sup>4</sup> November 26, 2007: is excavating Dallas history, literally

<sup>5</sup> March 31, 2009: is excited to finally hear Andres Duany speak at SMU tonight. <http://tr.im/i0pU>

<sup>6</sup> March 31, 2009: can't believe the mayor left halfway through Duany's speech. Half the reason the NTX-CNU brought AD in town was so Leppert could hear him

as a living charrette so that communities can actively engage in the buildout process and provide feedback in real time” (BetterBlock.org 2011). In political terms, their work on the Better Block project can be considered a kind of civil disobedience to claim their rights in having a walkable neighborhood. Because of this, they started work with mobilizing direct action (praxis) in creating a Better Block, then educating public and local officials about the benefits of having more walkable neighborhoods, and finally they advocated their cause in the existing planning structure. Therefore, Jason’s work in the Better Block project can also be seen through the lens of the three roles of planning activists that were identified in chapter three. In the rest of this section, I use Jason’s Facebook and Twitter activities and my interviews with him to explain each of these steps and how Internet and Social Media are used in each of these steps.

#### 4.3.3.1 Mobilizing direct action to make a Better Block

“What I prefer is to get rid of all those drawing and planning, and get people on the block, and have them tell you what is needed in their area” Jason explains. And he continues, “This is our block, our neighborhood, our city, our state, our country. Why do we need somebody else to come and say what is better for us?” The idea was to turn a block into an ideal, European style block with bike lanes, trees, landscaping, coffeeshop, bookstore, and food stands, similar to what Oak Cliff already has in the Bishop Arts District, in a weekend. For the first project, they decided to do the project at an old streetcar station surrounded by historic buildings. However, they soon realized that there are several ordinances that prohibited them from doing what they were planning to do. For example, it is illegal to put flowers on the streets or have fruit stands, and it costs thousands of dollars to put up sandwich boards. Therefore, in order to make it happen, they needed to break a series of laws that had been on the books for more than six decades. Jason decided to use his art background and look at the entire project as an art installation project. “So I can say it is a real coffeeshop but my artistic version of what coffeeshop would look like for here, same thing for flower, fruit stands, and kid arts studio,” Jason explains. Therefore, they were fully aware of possible consequences of their efforts, but

they decided to do it as a kind of civil disobedience against the existing ordinance and obstacles that prevented them from having a better neighborhood (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7 Planning a Better Block Project (Roberts 2010)

It took a weekend to paint bike lanes, pedestrian crosswalks, put in street parking that left only one line for traffic flow. In addition, they worked with the community to open a two-day coffeeshop, a two-day flower market, and a two-day kids' art studio in the same block. "We took out all the ordinances that we were breaking; we printed all of them and put it by each of them to show what are the problems," Jason continues. They even invited city staffs and the members of city council to show them that it does not take that much time and money to have a great area that can have a massive effect on the perception of safety, and economic development of local businesses in their neighborhood. They also challenged some of the social and cultural perceptions that prevent people from asking for more walkable neighborhoods in Dallas, namely that since Dallas has a very hot weather, no one likes to walks. "My point was we are lacking the environment, not temperature. People friendly environment, walkable environment that people want to stay," Jason describes.

Although this project hit the ground on March 17, 2010, its organization and preparation started a few weeks before in the online sphere. Jason and community members started to

raise money for a new project in addition to the mural project on Seventh Street in the last week of February 2010,<sup>1</sup> and they continue broadcasting their efforts online before,<sup>2</sup> during,<sup>3</sup> and after<sup>4</sup> the project. Through the already established online and offline networks, the project was successful in gaining public, media, and local official attentions. Based on this support, they repeated the complete version of their project during the Art Crawl event one month later,<sup>5</sup> and that was the beginning of their work in increasing awareness about the ignored right of the citizens to have a better neighborhood.

#### 4.3.3.2 Educating about the importance, the obstacles, and the process of creating a Better Block

The process of educating both local citizens and local officials started from the first day of the Better Block project. From the beginning, this project had an underlying assumption that there is a common sense in preferring more walkable urban areas that makes people to spend their leisure time in those cities that have these kinds of public spaces. The Better Block project provided this opportunity for local citizens to have similar experiences in their neighborhood and challenged the existing perception that the high temperature is the main reason people do not walk on the streets. The Better Block team also produced a short YouTube movie about *How To Make a Better Block*, which has been widely distributed via Social Media, and has gained local activists' attention around the US. This led Jason to mention "if I want to refocus my efforts now, I would probably do a heavier video and blog presents. That was where I get the most bang for my buck."

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<sup>1</sup> February 23, 2010: We've started the fundraising for the 7th Street Mural Project! <http://bit.ly/8YVqGD>  
Help us meet our goal to beautify the corridor

<sup>2</sup> March 11, 2010: Prep work for the first mural on Seventh Street begins today! We're still in fundraising mode. Donate here: [www.oakcliffartcrawl.com](http://www.oakcliffartcrawl.com)

<sup>3</sup> March 14, 2010: Kids At Work On The Murals <http://twitgoo.com/kbux2>  
March 14, 2010: Some of our amazing artists for the Seventh Street Mural Project:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E32liC3fufg>  
March 18, 2010: Brian's Mural, Day 2 [#7thStreetMuralProject](http://twitgoo.com/kue7a)

<sup>4</sup> March 20, 2010: Working on getting some portable food vendors setup in the OC (a la Austin and Portland): <http://www.flickr.com/photos/joellee/4394985832>

<sup>5</sup> April 12, 2010: Amazing weekend. We installed Dallas' first complete street & people came out in droves. Cars slowed, kids' biked, businesses did great

In addition, as mentioned before, they broke several ordinances to make a Better Block and they illustrated those ordinances on site, to show local officials, who were invited to the event, what are the main obstacles in having a Better Block. Jason also posted a list of Dallas ordinances that need to be overturned on BFOC weblog (Roberts 2011). As they had projected, however, they were faced with some resistance in the city hall. That Better Block project was implemented in Dallas District 3 that at the time had a council member, Dave Neumann, who was, as Jason described, against this project, and any urbanism and walkability in the neighborhood. When they failed to convince him about any change, they decided to run against him in the next election in Spring 2011. One of the members of Better Block team, Scott Griggs, ran for the office. They were fully aware of this fact that running against a sitting council member is a risky decision because "if we lose we are going to be totally screwed," Jason said. Jason and other local activists launched a campaign. They created a Twitter account (@griggs4dallas) and a website (www.griggsfordallas.com) to integrate their online activities.

On December 8, 2010, Jason announced the Griggs candidacy in his Facebook wall, "*Scott's announcing his candidacy for District 3! He's one of the smartest people I know, and a co-organizer for most of the Better Block, streetcar, and bike projects I've taken on in the community. He would be an amazing representative for OC!*" They also used their already established online and offline networks to spread the word. In terms of the campaign appearance in physical spaces, because of limited human and financial resources that they had, they focused on a very small area. "When we have an election that 2000 people vote, if we focus on a small area and bring a thousand people out to vote, we will win," Jason explained the campaign strategy in the neighborhood. At election time, their strategy worked, and they had 80 percent participation of the area they focused on. At the same time and during the campaign, Jason increased his online activities in raising awareness about the importance of having a more walkable and vibrant neighborhood. As the result of all these efforts, on May 15, 2011,

Jason announced on his Facebook page "*BFOC'er Scott Griggs is our newest Council Member!*"

#### 4.3.3.3 Advocating the Better Block in negotiation with planning structure

After the first disappointing attempt in working with the city to make a Complete Street, Jason and the Better Block team returned to play a negotiator role after implementing the first Better Block project. Although they broke several city ordinances to make the Better Block, the city and especially Dallas Complete Street team welcomed the idea, and started to invite the team to their meetings and ask them to implement similar project in other parts of the city.<sup>1</sup> Dallas Living Plaza was the result of this cooperation. Their plan was to use the Better Block model to convert the City Hall Plaza to a living plaza in a weekend with temporary equipment such as recycled pallets. They continued their cooperation with the city, and the most recent project was implemented in Southern Dallas, in an area where the City was planning a Transit Oriented Development. Gospel BBQ and Better Block was the result of this recent cooperation that was implemented on November 23, 2009.

Although the City recognizes the Better Block model as an appropriate way of involving citizens in the planning project, the result was not as satisfactory for the Better Block team. Jason describes two main problems in working with the City. First, the City wanted to determine specific areas for doing the Better Block project, and that was not what the team liked. Jason argued that their team has two main factors in selecting the location for their projects: a) it needed to be surrounded by neighbors that can be mobilized, and b) there needed to be an open space for the project. Both projects that they did with the city were lacking the first factor, and that led to the second problem that Jason identified in working with the city: "Unwillingness of the city in recognizing that the people and neighborhoods are their main assets," Jason describes. Jason explains, however, that working with the City has also its own benefits

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<sup>1</sup> March 24, 2011: We're on the Dallas Complete Streets team! At the kickoff meeting in City Hall.  
March 25, 2011: Reviewing potential Better Block projects with the Complete Streets team.

especially in finding local partners, among nonprofit organizations and other activists that work with the city hall for similar causes. In the end, Jason raised an important issue that is the underlying difference between planning activists who work with local citizens and planners who work for cities. "We are afraid to get paid because the more you get paid the more likely you be afraid to fight the system."

#### 4.4 Summary: Oak Cliff as a Communihood

According to the second chapter, Communihood is defined as a critical thirding for existing binary approaches in making an absolute distinction between community and neighborhood based on their mutual interests or attachment to place and defining a deterministic role for Information Technology in escalating this distinction. Communihood is about current forms of social groups that have been formed based on mutual interests and been affected by location. Communihood includes different kinds of communications from handshaking local interactions to distant conversational communications that have been facilitated over time by development of digital communication and mechanized transportations. Based on this definition of communihood, what Oak Cliff citizens have experienced in the last six years is an example of living in a communihood in the twenty-first century. Where Information Technology and Social Media have been widely use by local activists and active citizens to pursue their interests in promoting location-based identify, recognize hybrid diversity, and challenge the existing power relations.

As what discussed in this chapter, in Oak Cliff there is no distinction between identity of citizens and activists in physical space and online sphere. People keep their identity in both spaces, and used online communications to expand their social networks and local social interactions to deepen and expand them. In addition, living in a close proximity provides mutual interests and concerns such as safety, walkability, and quality of life, and provides this opportunity for people to start their social communications in online spheres and continue them in physical spheres or more likely vice versa.

Losing cultural diversity is one of the biggest concerns in forming community only based on mutual interest, but in Oak Cliff Communihood, neighbors have this opportunity to find mutual interest based on their location, not only based on their personal preferences. These mutual interests based on location “can foster the kind of tolerant postmodern sensibility, which welcomes, values and even celebrates difference and otherness, and tries to build upon them in positive ways” (Day 2006, 193). According to chapter 2, “[i]n a communihood as a Thirdspace, people celebrate the cultural differences in physical spaces, and use Social Media to share information about their culture and to know other cultures that exist around them. Therefore, people instead of playing a passive role by being consumers of traditional media, can play an active role by producing and distributing information and raising awareness in physical and online spaces via social media, and that is what has started to happen in Oak Cliff following the increasing usage of Social Media.

Working, influencing, and confronting the location-based power structure is one of the most important characteristic of communihood that has been widely used in Oak Cliff to raise marginalized voices in the existing planning structure. As what discussed in this chapter, Jason and his friends in Oak Cliff have creatively used Social Media and Information Technology to influence the existing planning structure through educating the public and local officials, mobilizing direct actions, and advocating the marginalized interests in the negotiation with power structure in planning projects.

Like many other projects that aim to create a more walkable and vibrant community, Oak Cliff is suffers from controversial discussion pro or against gentrification. Gentrification happens as a result of spatial displacement of low-income residents by new middle income residents (Smith 1996 ). However, in compare to some other physical planning project (e.g. New Urbanism projects) that a large population of new residents is injected to a low-income neighborhood, Oak Cliff has experienced gradual changes by local residents that can reduce the possible conflict between new comers and current residents. In addition, planning activists

always have their options to mobilize local resistances to maintain diversity and identity of their communihood.

Existing online social network services and Social Media are mainly person-based. Developing more location based social networks through online spheres and integrating existing online contents (such as YouTube video, Flickr pictures, and weblog posts) and online activities (on Facebook and Twitter) within predefined geographical boundaries can enhance the cognitive picture of communihood. Location-based social networks can provide an opportunity for both neighbors and visitors (or simply to whom it may concern) to have a better picture of what is happening around them in specific locations, and to choose those activities that they want to support. It can provide opportunity for having one of the main characteristics of communihood to meet stranger in both online and physical spaces.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I entered into two main discussions among planning scholars: 1) issues of community and neighborhood and how they have been changed (or will be change) by the development of Information Technology and Social Media, and 2) planners' roles in complicated systems of decision-making processes and planning power structures. The underlying idea behind the theoretical foundation of this dissertation is rooted in Lefebvrian critical thirding perspective that is developed by Soja's Thirdspace and Bhabha's hybridity. Based on this perspective, I avoided entering into any either/or discussions about community and neighborhood and prediction about the way that each of them has been (or will be) changed in the so-called Information Technology Era. Instead, in the second chapter, I introduced the idea of communihood as a hybrid concept that incorporates both social and spatial characteristics without privileging one over another, and the way that it can explain identity, diversity, and power relations in everyday life in the twenty-first century.

Furthermore, I criticized some debates among planning scholars that aim to identify the 'best' role that planners can (or should) play in an associative society. Instead, I argued that it is important to recognize that similar to many other professions there are different roles in society for planners to play in both the public and private sectors. It is important to recognize that in the complex power relations between the public and private sectors, interests of some powerless/voiceless groups are marginalized because of their lack of access to financial capital, political power, and traditional media. In other critical issues such as human rights, women rights, etc. activists try to fill this gap through advocating and empowering marginalized voices in different ways, from negotiation with power structures to mobilizing direct action on the streets. In the third chapter, I identified the role of planning activists outside formal planning

power structures, and explained how they can help empower marginalized interests based on local citizens' right to the city inside or outside the dominant planning processes. In the fourth chapter, I introduced Oak Cliff and Jason Roberts as a case study of how a planning activist can influence and change the planning process a communihood by using intertwined social and spatial capital in intertwined online and physical spaces and through intertwined personal, social, local, and online networks.

This work can continue in further academic and professional research in developing an online framework for communihood that integrates existing online social contents within physical boundaries since most of existing online social networks are currently person-based not location-based. Most online social networks are now recording the location of online data that users want to share with everyone and they have a system for other websites to integrate their data in other framework. Therefore, an online framework for communihood can integrate all publicly available and location-based online contents, from websites such as Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Flickr, Yelp, etc., within a specific boundary.

This integrative framework can be used by visitors, local residents, and planning activists. This framework can be a one-stop center for visitors to see the story of the place that they are visiting written by local residents and other visitors to decide what, where, when, and how to go, see, eat, hike, bike, etc.. Visitors can also contribute to this ongoing story of the communihood by writing about their experiences, posting photos and videos, and rating the places in their favorite online websites. Planning activists can use this framework to educate local citizens about existing problems in their communihood, advocate for marginalized interests by promoting their concerns and shedding light on existing local decision-making processes by posting planning officials' reactions to their causes. Finally, planning activists can use this framework to mobilize direct action in online sphere or on the streets of communihood. Local residents can use this framework to know the communihood that they live, and to know their neighbors. This framework can revitalize some part of social communications that have been

missed in physical spaces after the development of Information Technology. Residents can also use this framework to decide to attend which public events, or to participate in which local projects based on their personal interests. In addition, other activists can also use this framework to reach a specific location in order to promote their causes. Despite few other existing location-based online social networks such as i-Neighbors,<sup>76</sup> this framework does not force users to use a specific service in order to get involved in online frameworks in their communihood. People can use their favorite Social Media sites in their everyday life, and this framework integrates all the location-based information that users have decided to publicly share.

Before finishing this dissertation, I would like to once again clarify some of the controversial terms that I used in this research, which are Social Media, Planning Activist, Marginalized Interests, and Communihood.

*Social Media:* Social Media is often confused with the corporations that provide online service to produce and distribute online contents such as Facebook and Twitter. In this dissertation, whenever I use Social Media, I refer to publicly available online tools that ordinary people can use to express, distribute, and echo their voices that might be ignored or marginalized by traditional media and/or power structures. Therefore, it does not include the way that news agencies (e.g. CNN and FOX) or governmental agencies (e.g. White House) use Twitter and Facebook to expand their audiences, nor relations between governments and corporations that provide these services to monitor and restrict these services. Based on this definition of Social Media, we can protest for Social Media and against Twitter policy and its relations with different governments to monitor and restrict Social Media.

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<sup>76</sup> i-Neighbors.org is designed as part of a research project by Keith Hampton, and it is introduced as a “social networking service that connects residents of geographic neighborhoods...to help individuals and their communities organize, share information, and work together to address local problems.”

For example, on January 26, 2012, Twitter announced that they can now remove tweets from users' feeds in specific countries based on "historical or cultural reasons [that] restrict certain types of content" because "countries ... have different ideas about the contours of freedom of expression" (Twitter 2012). Therefore, it is important to differentiate between Social Media and corporations that provide these services.

*Planning Activists:* I did not introduce planning activism as an alternative for existing planning roles in public and private sectors, but as an ignored one. In this dissertation, whenever I used Planning Activist, I refer to those who work outside the dominant planning power structure to raise marginalized interests based on local citizens' rights to the city by raising awareness about their rights and opportunities to participate in existing planning processes, advocating their rights in negotiation with existing planning structure, and mobilizing direct actions to pursue their rights outside planning processes. Therefore, instead of trying to reach a consensus about the 'best' way of doing planning in an associational space, I introduced planning activists as important players in existing agnostic spaces where the interests of powerless people are often ignored when they conflict with the so-called public interests that favor the power structure in planning. Based on this differentiation between planning roles based on who they work for, planners can decide where to work based on their personal interests and values, but it is important to recognize whose interests they advocate, and whose they ignore when it comes to a conflict among different interests.

*Marginalized Interests:* In this dissertation, I focused on marginalized interests and local citizens instead of minorities and powerless groups because I wanted to

emphasize on those who have been ignored in existing planning processes and power structures rather than necessarily low-income citizens or ethnical and sexual minorities. The concept of marginalization is highly dependent on the societal context and existing power structures. For example, in a repressive regime, journalists who traditionally were considered among those who have the most powerful voices might be considered a marginalized group because of lack of freedom of the press. In the Oak Cliff case, interests in walkability, bike ridership, and vibrant neighborhood are introduced as marginal voices that had been ignored in the existing planning projects. These interests in some other areas, such as San Francisco, may not be considered marginal.

*Communihood:* In this dissertation, I did not introduce communihood as an alternative to community or neighborhood, but rather I criticized the existing discussions that differentiate between social communities and spatial neighborhoods, and argued that since community and neighborhood by their definitions, privilege social or special characteristics one over the other, we need a hybrid term that incorporates both spatial and social characteristics without privileging one over another. Therefore, we can have local, regional, national, and international communihoods, and in all of them social and spatial characteristics play important roles, and they cannot substitute each other. In addition, I discussed why communihood could provide a powerful explanation about personal identity, cultural diversity, and power relations in everyday life in the twenty-first century that has been influenced by development of Information Technology and Social Media.

Based on these definitions and clarifications, this dissertation explains how planning activists can use Social Media to raise the marginalized interests in communihoods, and it fills the existing gap in the binary approaches that distinguishes neighborhood from community and defines planning's role inside the dominant planning structure.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Ali Tayebi came to the US in August 2008 after finishing his Bachelor and Master Degree in Urban Planning and Design at University of Tehran (Iran). Back in Iran, he worked as GIS Consultant and lecturer in several organizations and institution. In the US, he started his doctoral education at University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). In May 2010, he successfully passed his comprehensive exam, then he set his dissertation committee under Dr. Arvidson's supervision, and started working on his dissertation proposal during the Summer and Fall 2010 semesters, and successfully defending it in January 2011. In his dissertation, which follows the three-essay format, he considered the use of Information Technology and Social Media in facilitating local planning and political actions, drawing on Lefebvre's idea of Critical Thirthing and Habermas-Foucault debate on Communicative Action and Power Struggle. During his doctoral research, he attend to several conferences and workshop to present and develop his research, and he spend one semester at University of California at Los Angeles to work with Dr. Soja on the theoretical foundation of his research.

Beside his doctoral education at UTA, he has been a Graduate Research Assistant. In the first two years, he worked as the project manager in a joint project with University of Texas at Austin for Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and he finished the project in August 2010 by developing a GIS model, as part of a bigger land-use/transportation model for midsize metropolitan areas. From September 2010, he started to work on another project on demographic, employment,, and economic changes in top US metropolitan areas. For this research, he created a GIS database for the top 100 US metropolitan areas that includes population, domestic and international migration, GDP, employment, etc. data from 2000 up to 2010. In addition to these official positions, he voluntarily worked as a GIS consultant in several projects, and served as the president of UTA Persian Academic and Cultural Society in 2010-11

academic year. In Spring 2011 semester, he raised a discussion about having a Ph.D. Colloquium at SUPA for providing an opportunity for both Ph.D. students to present their work in biweekly meetings, and discuss their experiences during their research. With help of two other Ph.D. students and support of few faculty members, the first meeting of SUPA PhD Colloquium was held on September 13, 2011, and the biweekly meetings continuing after that.