THE BIG TENT OF GROWTH MANAGEMENT: SMART GROWTH AS A MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT—Growth management policies in the U.S. have failed to gain significant political support in many regions, limiting efforts to manage development patterns and protect natural resources. The Smart Growth movement has brought new voices into the debate over growth management and has provided a “big tent” under which transportation groups, environmentalists, advocates for affordable housing, and neighborhood activists have combined efforts to affect land policy. Although this has broadened political support for growth management, the Smart Growth movement still faces important challenges in unifying and mobilizing its diverse constituency.

Pinpointing the origins of the Smart Growth movement is difficult. Some argue that Smart Growth stems from the entire history of growth management efforts, going back as far as the Supreme Court’s legitimization of zoning (Burchell et al. 2000). From this perspective, Smart Growth is merely a label for a repackaged assemblage of previous growth management techniques and is an evolutionary stage in the development of growth management approaches. A competing perspective is that Smart Growth brings together existing strategies in a new way, under the banner of a different set of growth management objectives, and it claims a much greater constituency for those strategies than ever before. According to this perspective, Smart Growth redefines earlier efforts, combines a variety of land-based interests not previously aligned with each other, and provides a unifying theoretical and political framework for the entire package.

In this paper I adopt the position that Smart Growth is an important break with previous growth management efforts and can be usefully examined as a separate movement. In fact, I argue that using the frameworks for the analysis of social and political movements clarifies much about Smart Growth as a phenomenon and assists in assessing the importance of the issue and its likelihood for political success.

ORIGINS OF THE SMART GROWTH MOVEMENT

The movement emerged in the mid-1990s, as several large institutional actors in urban development began to promote an alternative growth paradigm they came to call Smart Growth. Burchell et al. (2000) identified two initiatives that broke ground. The first—a combined effort of the American Planning Association (APA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Henry M. Jackson Foundation—aimed at updating local land use controls to emphasize more compact development patterns. This led to APA’s “Growing Smarter” document, released in 1997. At about the same time, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) jointly developed what they called the Smart Growth Toolkit to assist local and state governments in producing walkable and transit-accessible development. In 1996, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) joined with nonprofit and government organizations to create the Smart Growth Network (SGN). Members of the SGN include a range of interest groups concerned with issues that range from the environment and historic preservation to real estate development and transportation. The ideas of these organizations were borrowed from the ideas of Peter Calthorpe (1993) and others about the benefits of compact development, transit-oriented urban forms, and what came to be called neotraditional neighborhood planning approaches.

The movement also was encouraged by the growing academic research on the issue of sprawl and the social and fiscal costs associated with sprawl (Katz 2002). A major study sponsored by the Transportation Research Board (Burchell et al. 1998) updated older work and pointed to a range of social and fiscal costs associated with sprawled development. Other academics and policy organizations also began to publish work on the costs of urban sprawl (see, for example, Beaumont 1994, Black 1996, Fodor 1997, Persky and Wiewel 1996).

Various policy-oriented and professional groups such as STPP, the Sierra Club, NRDC, and APA disseminated this new Smart Growth agenda by publishing reports and Web-based information. This emergent movement was able to accomplish a number of things in a relatively short period of time. The movement:

1. Defined a crisis by utilizing and synthesizing various research reports on the costs of sprawl.

2. Provided a framework for linking previously disparate concerns such as loss of farmland, traffic congestion, central city neighborhood decline, concentrated poverty, and even the growing problem of obesity.

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3. Incorporated existing growth management techniques, adapting them to a slightly new policy agenda—moving from a concern about the amount of growth to a policy agenda focused on the quality of growth.

4. Combined these ideas into a single public policy paradigm, offering a new way of thinking about these old issues.

5. Achieved legislative successes at the state level, providing instant legitimacy, and offering a trial run for many of the concepts described in the Smart Growth agenda.

In a short period of time, the Smart Growth movement has become quite broad. One can find statements of support and evidence of activities on behalf of Smart Growth by a range of interests, including environmentalists, farmers, housing advocates, labor organizations, businesses, public health advocates, and even federal agencies. At the same time, however, the Smart Growth movement is a very shallow phenomenon in that it has no central identifiable constituency. Although a coalition of supporters does exist, there is no group of persons or organizations whose sense of identity is centrally connected to the issue. More problematic, there is no common set of grievances across all the members of the coalition.

THE BIG TENT

In its short history, the idea of Smart Growth has attracted a wide range of supporters. At the national level, first as Vice President and then as a Presidential candidate, Al Gore strongly supported a range of Smart Growth initiatives, primarily from an environmental standpoint. His Livability Agenda, launched in 1998, included initiatives to ease traffic congestion, preserve green space, and pursue regional Smart Growth strategies. Yet notable members of the Republican party and the Bush administration also have Smart Growth credentials, from former EPA administrator Christine Whitman to former Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. The Bush administration's EPA has been a highly visible supporter of Smart Growth.

The business community also has become involved in Smart Growth advocacy. Business groups in Oregon, Kentucky, Georgia, Michigan, and Rhode Island have undertaken efforts to promote Smart Growth and curb sprawl (Seth 2000). These groups suggest that Smart Growth is a pro-growth strategy that allows regions to rationally develop and minimize the labor costs associated with rising housing costs and rising transportation costs and commuting times.

At the same time, labor groups also have supported Smart Growth. A 2003 study by the national nonprofit Good Jobs First found that regions with growth controls actually benefited from nearly a third more construction jobs than areas without such policies (Mattera and LeRoy 2003). Although these findings may reflect the fact that more economically dynamic (and therefore growing) metropolitan areas are more likely to impose Smart Growth controls than are stagnant regions, labor officials have concluded that growth controls do not necessarily limit jobs (Ritter 2004). “Union leaders also say Smart Growth enriches their members’ lives by producing less traffic, cleaner air, shorter commutes and more open space” (p. 2).

Historic preservation activists support Smart Growth for its emphasis on redevelopment and rehabilitation of older structures and older settlements. Environmentalists and transit activists are, of course, central actors in the Smart Growth coalition. Advocates for affordable housing support Smart Growth because they favor the redevelopment of older neighborhoods and the mixing of income within new residential areas. Central city neighborhood organizations support Smart Growth because they favor brownfield redevelopment and improvements to declining urban infrastructure called for by the movement. Farmers support efforts to preserve agricultural land, and public health organizations point to the health problems associated with sprawl. Even the Union for Reform Judaism has supported Smart Growth because of its potential to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, which, the organization maintains, is in line with Judaism's tenet of tikkan olam (repairing the world).^2

SMART GROWTH AS A MOVEMENT

How do we characterize the Smart Growth movement and therefore, how do we study it? Theory related to social movements suggests that a classic movement exhibits a set of characteristics that do not particularly match the Smart Growth case. The classic theory suggests the importance of spontaneous, collective action on the part of a group, emphasizing social change-oriented goals. Such action, according to the theory, arises from deeply felt deprivation or the existence of a social crisis. This theory assumes, then, a mass constituency for the movement, and ultimately, one that self-identifies as such (as exemplified, for example, by the civil rights movement, the labor movement, or the women's movement). The theory also emphasizes the extra-institutional actions of this mass constituency. That is, the movement emerges as a response to governmental or institutional neglect of core concerns of the constituency. Such movements are typically political outsiders restricted to outsider political strategies such as protest actions, sit-ins, marches, and the like. Such strategies build solidarity while creating greater awareness of group grievances.

It is difficult to align this model of social movements with the Smart Growth case. First, there is difficulty in identifying the constituency for this movement. Where is the group of people self-identifying as Smart Growth supporters? And where do we look for the evidence of their mass mobilization? We know, perhaps, that some Smart Growth supporters are commuters dissatisfied with the amount of time they spend in their cars. Some are farmers concerned about the encroachment of residential development. Some are environmentalists concerned about the loss of habitat and the degradation of natural resources. But there is as yet little, if any, degree of collective consciousness among these groups sufficient to produce a mass mobilization.

Second, there is no evidence that these groups experience the same set of grievances. To the contrary, the wrong that each group feels is quite particular to its situation. There is no common crisis, at least at the level of felt experience between farmers and advocates for affordable housing or between many of the other groups that support Smart Growth. Although one might generalize and argue that sprawled development and the costs of this development is the common experience, a social movement requires that the constituent members define their grievances in collective terms. Smart Growth supporters, even the most active, do not collectively define their grievances the way the labor movement could focus on working conditions or the civil rights movement could focus on discrimination and segregation. That is, farmers support Smart Growth for one set of reasons, while housing advocates express support for a separate set, and labor has a third set of reasons. Such a situation can broaden support for the issue, but it does not provide the basis for an active political movement. Indeed, such a situation might even impede the development of an active political movement to the extent that there are areas of conflict among the various groups in support of Smart Growth and their reasons for supporting it. One example of this is the potential conflict between environmentalists, on the one hand, who see Smart Growth as a means of protecting more environmentally sensitive lands, and housing advocates, on the other hand, who look to Smart Growth to provide more affordable housing opportunities.

In response, Smart Growth advocates have attempted to create a common understanding of Smart Growth that bridges the often wide gap between coalition members. Much of this work is aimed at substituting the concept of “sprawl” as a unifying concern for various other problems (traffic congestion, loss of habitat and farmland) that tend to emphasize more particularistic problems. Such a collective consciousness might well strengthen the movement, but it is not clear the extent to which these efforts have been or will be successful. In any case, this collective consciousness is one of the objectives of the movement, not its genesis.

McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1976) broadened the analytic field in social movements to include what they call “professionalized” social movements. As Staggenborg (1988: 585) wrote,

In contrast to what they term “classical” movement organizations, which rely on the mass mobilization of “beneficiary” constituents as active participants, “professional” social movement organizations rely primarily on paid leaders and “conscience” constituents who contribute money and are paper members rather than active participants… “Entrepreneurs” can mobilize sentiments into movement organizations without the benefit of precipitating events or “suddenly imposed major grievances”… and without established constituencies.

This formulation gets closer to the Smart Growth experience. It does away with the need for a mobilized constituency group or for a triggering event or grievance. It also identifies the role of “professionals” or “entrepreneurs” in generating a movement. Yet, at the same time, the McCarthy and Zald theory does assume that the work of the professionals is to induce a mass movement, to induce a constituency with a collective consciousness. In this respect, the professional movement is a type of first stage that gives way at some point to mass politics.

Perhaps most useful to an understanding of Smart Growth as a movement is what Rochon (1998) called a “critical community.” Critical communities form around a particular issue or problem and provide the foundation for further development of a movement. Specifically, Rochon argued:

The creation of new ideas occurs initially within a relatively small community of critical thinkers who have developed a sensitivity to some problem, an analysis of the sources of the problem, and a prescription for what should be done about the problem. These critical thinkers do not necessarily belong to a formally constituted organization, but they are part of a self-aware, mutually interacting group (p. 22).

Critical communities are composed of scientists, academics, and social and policy analysts who provide a new or unique analysis of a social problem that serves as the basis for a new movement. As Rochon (1998: 23) argued, “critical communities seek acceptance of a new conceptualization of a problem—they want to make sure that other people ‘get it.’”

Although seen as the first stage in a nascent political or social movement, critical communities can have direct impact on cultural values, public policy, or both. Depending partly on the political and cultural status of members of the critical community and in part on the receptivity of the political system to new policy demands (Rochon 1998), critical communities may quickly succeed in pressing for new public policy. This is a fairly accurate description of the dynamics surrounding Smart Growth. The critical community that emerged around the issue of Smart Growth in the 1990s included groups with both high status and significant political influence. This led to the relatively quick adoption of Smart Growth solutions in a number of states and the continued dissemination of Smart Growth information.

Godschalk (2000) claimed that more than one-half of the state-of-the-state addresses by the nation’s governors in 2000 discussed Smart Growth. Sarkin (2002) documented gubernatorial action on Smart Growth in over 30 states, involving both Republican and Democratic officials. Republican governors in Florida, Illinois, Arizona, and elsewhere created executive branch initiatives to study and coordinate Smart Growth activities. Legislatures in Colorado, Iowa, and Wisconsin enacted Smart Growth bills of one type or another in the early years of this decade.

In Michigan, for example, established land-based interest groups such as the Michigan Land Use Institute (with more than 2,500 member-families, organizations, businesses, and local governments) and a statewide interdenominational congregation-based organization played key roles in establishing a Smart Growth approach. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has funded research that led to the publication of “Local Smart Growth Actions to Combat Sprawl,” a guide to local governments interested in implementing Smart Growth.
In some states, much progress was made in the 1990s. In Maryland, the declining health of Chesapeake Bay, as documented by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, was the triggering mechanism for statewide planning legislation in 1992. A subsequent assessment of the 1992 legislation led to a statewide series of public meetings and forums in 1996, organized by the office of then new Governor Parris Glendening. These meetings resulted in the landmark Maryland Smart Growth Initiatives, enacted in 1997.

Despite the ability of critical communities to have immediate impact, they too exist as a prelude to a more mass mobilization in the development of a social or political movement dynamic. Although critical communities offer innovative ways of thinking about social problems and solutions, they give way ultimately to a grassroots activism in what Rochon (1998) called a two-stage process of value generation and value diffusion. If the first stage is the redefinition of social problems and solutions by the critical community, the second stage is the introduction of those innovations into wider society. In the second stage, “the ideas of the critical community are reshaped by leaders and activists in social and political movements, in accord with the demands of mobilization and the experience of movement struggle. Once the issue becomes public, the movement takes center stage and the critical community fades to the background” (Rochon 1998: 95).

This suggests that the transition from the actions of a critical community to the emergence of a bonafide political or social movement is of vital importance. At least two conditions make such a transition easier. The first is the degree to which there is unity within the critical community, and the second is the degree to which there is a basis for group identification among activists. The Smart Growth movement may be deficient on at least the second criterion.

As Rubin (1994: 14, quoted in Rochon 1998: 23) noted, “agreement that there are problems does not mean there is agreement on what those problems are, or on what makes them problems, or on what to do about them.” This is particularly a potential problem in the Smart Growth movement because it attracts such disparate interests. The wide range of Smart Growth supporters is not a cohesive group, nor are they entirely comfortable with each other. Environmentalists and advocates for affordable housing often clash at the level of specific projects because they may represent a tradeoff between affordability and environmental protection. Obviously, business and labor have antagonistic interests that hinder their ability to coalesce around Smart Growth. There is even significant disagreement within some of the groups, notably agricultural interests, about the wisdom of Smart Growth.

As a result, even the common identification of sprawl as a problem does not guarantee a unified movement or agreed-upon policy response. As Gearin (2004: 293) found in her study of southern California, even though “Southern California jurisdictions, policy bodies, and politicians have hopped on the smart growth bandwagon… [the] different proponents articulate different interpretations of smart growth” that have inhibited the development of a coherent policy movement.

Thus, in spite of specific legislative and administrative accomplishments, in spite of a wide range of interest groups expressing support for the idea of Smart Growth, the Smart Growth coalition may not be able to make the important transition from critical community to political/social movement. Can the Smart Growth movement sustain itself? This question is made all the more important by a pattern of declining media attention. Figure 1 presents data on print-media news stories about Smart Growth.

Two patterns emerge from the data. First, media interest peaks in the early part of this decade and then declines. Second, regions vary in the salience of the issue. The metropolitan area of Atlanta, one of the most sprawling in the country, is the setting for an extensive discussion of Smart Growth as judged by the frequency of news stories in the region’s leading newspaper.
Denver had the second most frequent mention and preceded Atlanta in its interest in the topic with over 100 stories already printed between 1995 and 1998. The other metropolitan areas have shown a much lower level of interest in the topic.

To this point, I have argued that Smart Growth has little potential for emerging as a broad-based social or political movement. Following Iyengar and Kinder (1987), it is unlikely that Smart Growth will emerge as a movement because the issue is not experienced as both a personal and a group predicament. This is due primarily to the low capacity for this movement to create strong solidarities (Rochon 1998: 128). Such solidarities are more easily created when group members share ascriptive traits that easily communicate membership status or form the basis of a common social experience to which members react. For Smart Growth to emerge as a real political movement, it needs to make the transition from the critical community’s value generation stage to the value diffusion stage identified by Rochon in which the principles of Smart Growth are translated by leaders into the concerns and the work of citizen activists. In the next section, I examine one way in which this might occur. I use the Smart Growth Organizing Project (SGOP) of Minnesota as a case example of a community organizing around the principles of Smart Growth.

THE SMART GROWTH ORGANIZING PROJECT

The Smart Growth movement, to date, has largely been an insider campaign involving high-status governmental and private sector organizations. Furthermore, the movement has been political in a narrow sense, focusing on altering governmental actions in the area of land use regulation and regional development policy. The Smart Growth Organizing Project (SGOP) of Minnesota is a conscious attempt to move Smart Growth activities beyond the fairly self-contained policy circles in which most of the debate has been located. In the process, advocates in Minnesota are pursuing a tiered approach to Smart Growth objectives, by complementing the work of insider groups at the level of policymaking with an organizing strategy aimed at mobilizing a broad range of supporters at the community level.

In 2001, the McKnight Foundation (a member of the Smart Growth Funders’ Network) sponsored a series of Smart Growth Dialogues that brought together representatives from a number of local and statewide organizations and public agencies working on growth issues. Over a number of months the group created an advocacy strategy aimed at both achieving policy changes in the state and building a movement around Smart Growth principles.

The group split into four Smart Growth sectors, each dealing with a separate domain of Smart Growth issues: transportation, open space, land use regulation, and housing. Within each of these sectors, the participants were asked to strategize around three different approaches: a policy and regulatory approach that focused on necessary changes to state and local policies, a demonstration projects tactic that identified specific development projects that could be pursued and used as examples of successful Smart Growth, and finally an education and engagement emphasis to build grassroots community support for Smart Growth. Finally, specific actions needed for each of the approaches (policy and regulatory, demonstration projects, and education and engagement) were identified at three scales: state, regional, and local. Thus the sector groups created a matrix to identify specific action steps necessary at the intersection of these three scales.

The pursuit of the policy and the demonstration strategies largely could be carried out by the same group of organizations, specifically those that were lobbying organizations or operational agencies already oriented toward the work of making, changing, and implementing public policy. This group made up the State Policy Group, which later became known as the Minnesota Smart Growth Network. The other group of participants, those whose organizations were more membership-based and focused on grassroots efforts, formed the Organizing Project (SGOP) to work on the education and engagement strategies. These two metagroups constituted a conscious attempt to follow a two-tiered approach to building the Smart Growth movement. The Smart Growth Network would continue to focus on transmitting the Smart Growth message to policymakers and public officials, while the organizing project would engage in grassroots mobilization of residents throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan region and, to a somewhat lesser extent, statewide.

SGOP was charged with turning Smart Growth into a grassroots political movement, something that had not been achieved yet in any region of the country, even in those regions that had produced the landmark legislation. Short of that, SGOP was responsible for at least finding a consistent grassroots source of support for specific Smart Growth issues and demonstration projects.

SGOP hired a professional organizer and located its staff member at the offices of the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, a membership based organization working on regional equity issues. The SGOP organizer conducted more than 50 individual meetings with community group leaders throughout the metropolitan area and convened roundtable meetings for organizers. These meetings were, according to the SGOP organizer, “a place to come and talk to each other about organizing, and to build skills.” These meetings were also meant to communicate the principles of “Smart Growth as we define it.”

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3 The transportation group consisted of Minnesotans for an Energy-Efficient Economy, Transit for Livable Communities, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, and the Center for Neighborhoods. The Housing sector was the Family Housing Fund, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, Minnesota Housing Partnership, Minneapolis consortium of Community Developers, Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and Metropolitan Interfaith Coalition for Affordable Housing. The Open Space group was the Minnesota Land Trust, Friends of the Mississippi River, Friends of the Minnesota Valley, and 1000 Friends of Minnesota. The Land Use group, which renamed itself the Metropolitan Growth Strategies group, was made up of the Design Center for the American Urban Landscape, the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities, and the North Metro Mayors Association.
The distinctive way in which SGOP defines Smart Growth is laid out in the organization’s statement of principles. While attempting to increase public understanding of growth issues and enhancing the capacity of local organizing around growth issues, SGOP chose racial and class equity as a central value in its work. The organization states that a central value in its work is:

Confronting issues of race, privilege, culture, and ethnicity and developing a strong understanding about how these issues and disparities manifest themselves within growth and development policies and decisions throughout the region. This includes: Developing greater comfort and skill in confronting issues of race, privilege, culture, and ethnicity. Ensuring that low-income neighborhoods and communities of color are decision makers about growth. Embracing growth strategies that promote racial, economic, environmental and ethnic equity.

Although race and class equity is only one of seven different values identified in the SGOP document, it is a cornerstone of the group’s work. SGOP understands that this approach takes Smart Growth in a new direction. But, the SGOP organizer says, “the traditional Smart Growth movement has not addressed the race and class issues, but we have some common cause with these groups.” SGOP sees itself as “the edgier” side of the Smart Growth movement. “We don’t connect much with the Smart Growth Network. I don’t have much success meeting with those people. They do work on a broader policy level. I work on building a power base.”

SGOP attempts to build that power base through campaigns that focus on specific issues throughout the metropolitan area. Initially, the SGOP steering committee identified four campaigns to become involved in. The first was to create a grassroots coalition to support the creation of a dedicated fund for transit in the state. This issue had been circulating among “policy wonks” for some time, according to the SGOP organizer, and SGOP wanted to create a political base for the idea. The transit trust fund is modeled after the fund for highways that exists at the federal level, and like the highway fund it is aimed at providing a steady stream of revenue dedicated for a single purpose—the development of transit throughout the state. In this effort, unlike the three that follow, SGOP is the lead organization, working with one of its member groups to pressure the legislature to act.

The second campaign was an attempt to prevent the demolition of high-density low-cost housing in a Minneapolis suburb. This effort was a reaction to the creation of a “density reduction taskforce” in Brooklyn Park that recommended the demolition of more than 700 units of affordable rental housing in a single neighborhood. The city had tried to remove this housing in a redevelopment project some years earlier, but the financing for the deal had fallen through. SGOP was attracted to this issue because of the avowed purpose of reducing housing density in one of the few places where high-density housing can be said to exist in the suburbs of the Twin Cities and because of the unstated objective of eliminating low-cost housing inhabited primarily by people of color. SGOP joined with several housing advocacy groups to mobilize residents to attend public meetings and to contact local officials and the news media in an effort to stop the demolition. The advocates ultimately prevailed when the citizens of Brooklyn Park defeated a ballot referendum to raise the revenues necessary for the demolition and redevelopment.

The third SGOP campaign was to join a battle in another northern suburb over a proposed transit-oriented development (TOD) at a proposed commuter rail stop. The North Star commuter rail is a proposed line running from Minneapolis through its northwest suburbs to St. Cloud, Minnesota. The project has been the subject of much debate at the legislature and has had inconsistent support from the legislature and the governor’s office over the past 5 years. Nevertheless, planning is underway for the proposed stops along the route. One of those is the Riverdale stop in Coon Rapids, Minnesota. A shopping center already exists on the land, which is owned by the county. Advocates are working with the county redevelopment authority on a TOD that would include affordable workforce housing. The City of Coon Rapids, on the other hand, is offering density bonuses for upscale housing. SGOP’s objectives in this campaign are not only to ensure a high-density TOD at the site, but also to get as much affordable housing built there as possible. SGOP is helping suburban organizers influence the Coon Rapids city council.

The last of the four campaigns also involves a possible TOD along a proposed rail line, this one a light-rail stop in St. Paul. Here the city has professed a willingness to create a TOD in what is now a low-density commercial area. The developer, however, is threatening to go in a different direction, and SGOP is working with a local community organization to pack the public hearings and demand a “smarter” development plan.

THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING A SMART GROWTH MOVEMENT

Smart Growth advocates in Minnesota have taken a distinctive approach to building a Smart Growth movement. They have in one sense acknowledged the structural imperative of supporting the work of the critical community (the Minnesota Smart Growth Network) with a mobilization effort aimed at translating new policy solutions into the concerns of a grassroots movement. They have pursued a two-tiered approach that includes roughly parallel efforts at both of these levels. Yet, according to SGOP itself, there is little communication between these parallel movements. SGOP has come to its own definition of Smart Growth and shaped an organizing strategy around that definition. The two tiers of this movement work in relative isolation from each other. Whether this is sustainable in the long run depends in part on the consistency of vision between SGOP and the Smart Growth Network.

SGOP’s focus on racial/class equity, although a part of the Smart Growth agenda as defined by most national organizations (see, for example, EPA, NRDC), is nevertheless, one of the more contentious political elements of that agenda. SGOP has chosen a difficult issue around which to frame its organizing work. In the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, as in most metropolitan areas, there is political tension on issues of...
race and class equity. The organization has eschewed a strategy that might have identified a less contentious common grievance related to unplanned development (such as declining quality of life).

The SGOP mobilization model is an attempt to connect Smart Growth with existing organizations by using a campaign approach. Whether this approach can build a consistent constituency across issue areas is yet to be determined. For its part, SGOP admits the potential for turf battles between groups that are part of the larger Smart Growth coalition. Conflicts between the agendas of environmentalists and advocates for affordable housing, for example, “crop up a lot in the work we do,” she said. She argues, however, that their organizing efforts, built around specific issues, are the best way to work on turf issues and barriers to working together. “We want to reduce those barriers, to be the movement’s therapist,” said SGOP’s lead organizer. “In specific instances people can work through their issues [with each other]. That is one of the benefits of the trust that was established in the working roundtables and skill-building sessions we ran early on.”

The structure of the Smart Growth movement in Minnesota is one means of facing the movement’s challenges and could, if effective, serve as a national model. As in other places, a critical community emerged during the late 1990s, led by policy groups and funded by interested foundations. The bridge between that community and a grassroots mobilization is represented by the work of SGOP. It is too early to judge whether this two-tiered approach can accomplish its goals. For now, advocates are gambling that it can.

LITERATURE CITED


