

# North Hobart Residents Action

## A Reflective Analysis of the Process of Informing and Working with Residents

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In the 1960s and 1970s the deficiencies in the 1945 Hobart city plan (Cook 1945) were clearly evident in Battery Point and North Hobart. Overly-ambitious transport plans, and over-zoning for industrial/commercial uses threatened houses and depleted the residential neighbourhood (Vincent 1984).

A Planning Scheme review commenced in the Hobart suburb of Battery Point in 1973 producing the first exercise in citizen participation. It was based on ideas of social justice in planning and a response to unrestricted height provision in a residential Zone. This led to residential urban activism in another inner suburb, North Hobart. The North Hobart Residents' Group was a social movement that went beyond mere protest to develop an alternative strategy for the area from 1979-1993. The activity, actors and outcomes in this strategic exercise were remarkable, leading to:

- Reversing a decline in residential population and slightly increasing the residential population;
- Reversing dwelling demolition;
- Amending road-widening plans to retain sound buildings, especially houses that had been acquired for road widening and proposed for demolition; and
- The revival of a flagging suburban shopping centre.

The earlier success based on community development has now been eroded by the recent conversion of a number of dwellings to Bed & Breakfast accommodation. This has resulted in housing being commodified at the expense of the permanent residents and local community, and there are now new and insidious threats to the residential environment.

**Keywords** — Hobart; Urban Planning; Battery Point; North Hobart; Community Action, Revitalisation.

### THE PLANNING CHALLENGE

In the 1960s and 1970s the deficiencies in the 1945 Hobart city plan (Cook 1945) were clearly evident in Battery Point and North Hobart. Overly-ambitious transport plans, and over-zoning for industrial/commercial uses threatened houses and depleted the residential neighbourhood (Vincent 1984).

### HOW CAN WE LEARN FROM URBAN COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE?

The theories of David Harvey and the French School of urban theorists were applied to North Hobart by the author in the 1980s. The original purpose was to address and resolve the conflict of over-zoning for industrial/commercial use and the overly-ambitious post war transportation plans (Cook 1945; Wilbur-Smith and Assoc. 1964).

This over-zoning threatened houses and depleted the residential neighborhood. The purpose of the current project is to focus attention on the period from 1977 to 1993 and provide specific methodologies for analysis, by utilizing activity theory to see how it can lead to an understanding of the process and outcomes (Bound 2007; Kaptelinin & Nardi 2012; Engstrom 1987; Engeström 2005; Engestrom et al. 2001; Bound 2011).

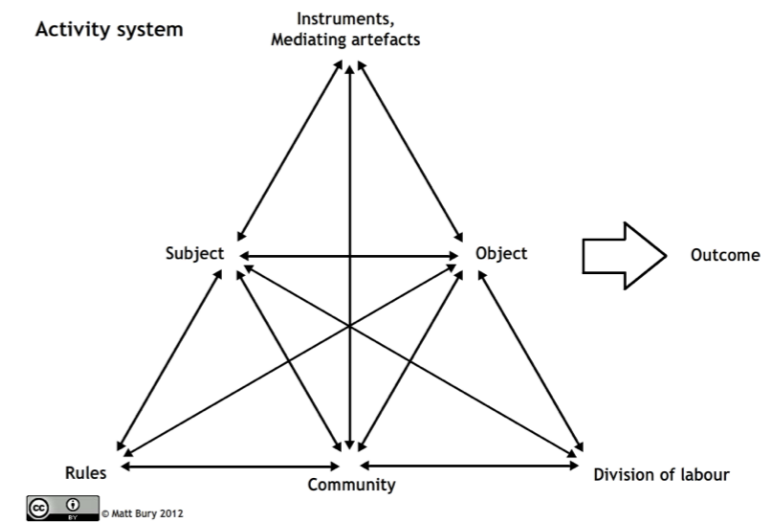


Fig 1: Illustrates relations in Activity Theory model. The major interest in this research is the top triangle formed by the subject, object and mediating between the subject and object. This is done by working back from the outcomes to object to see how the subject behaved.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEVELOPMENTS IN BATTERY POINT INFORMED NORTH HOBART ACTIVISM

The activism that arose in North Hobart was an extension of actions that go back as far as 1973. To put the situation in context: in the aftermath of World War 2, Fred Cook, a land surveyor and civil engineer from Port Melbourne, was employed in 1945 by the Hobart City Council (HCC) to prepare the City of Hobart Plan, (Cook 1945).

Cook was strongly influenced by the efforts of the Slum Abolition League's campaign between 1938 and 1943. Thus, the City of Hobart Plan 1945 (Cook 1945) addressed housing, land use patterns, communications, transport and recreation needs, amongst other development considerations in future infrastructure planning. His plan emphasized demolition of old rental-housing stock to make way for four and five storey residential development in inner Hobart. This was particularly the case in Battery Point. The plan projected expansion of existing suburbs and green fields along garden city ideals, based on private transport.

After World War 2 there was a push for street widening for private vehicles and car parks in the inner city, especially from 1954 onwards (Park 1954). These ideas are manifested in the Wilbur Smith Transportation Study of 1964, the first such international highway plan in Australia. This study used an unrealistic population projection for Hobart and its suburbs, justifying massive highway and major road widening plans (Wilbur-Smith and Assoc. 1964). Its analysis was challenged just two years later by George Clarke (Hobart City Planning 1966) and road widening plans were later reviewed and scaled down by the Public Works Department (PWD) in 1970 and again in 1980.

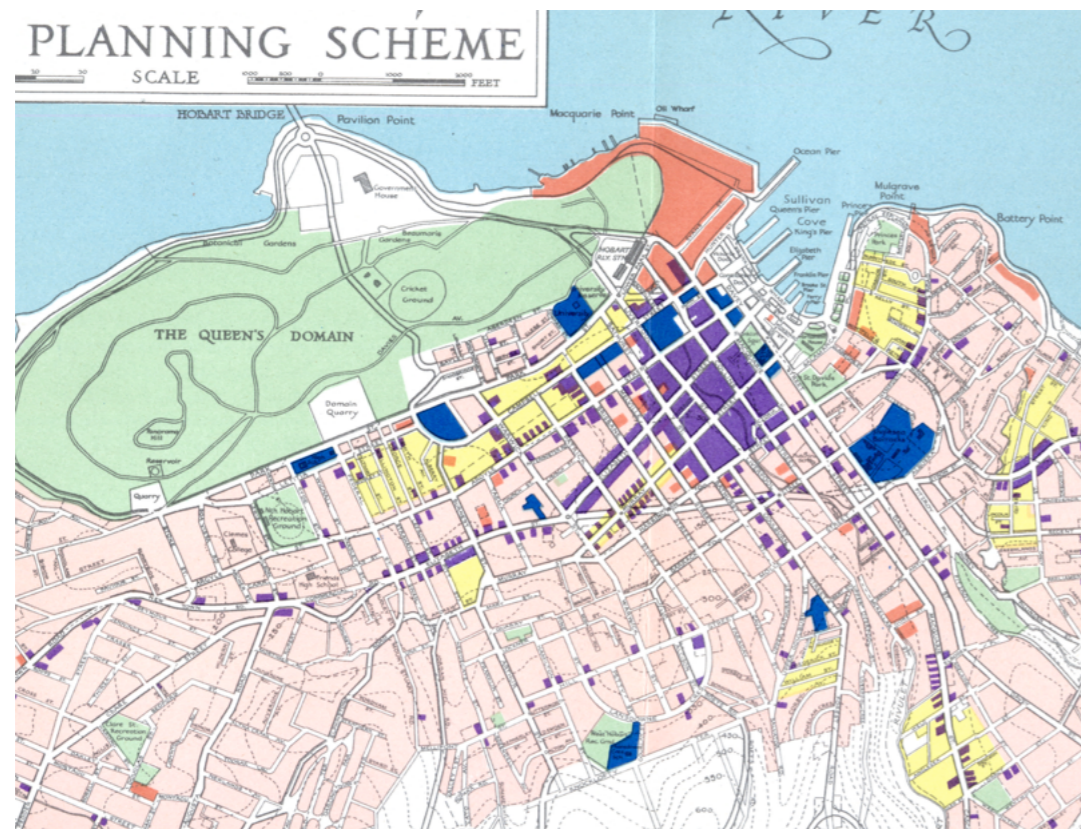


Fig 2: City of Hobart Plan 1945. Areas in yellow were defined as old and decadent. Most of these areas are now highly sought after as highly desirable accommodation, especially as B&Bs.

In 1966 the Hobart City Council had a policy of doubling the population of Battery Point and this formed part of the brief to the firm Clarke Gazzard. Clarke reviewed the development of Battery Point and upper Sandy Bay between 1967 to 1969 and the first sealed Battery Point Planning Scheme came into being in 1972. The proposed Scheme had three different residential zones, one of which involved unlimited height development to accommodate the increase in population. George Clarke was instrumental in reversing much of the road widening proposals in Battery Point and upper Sandy Bay, instead recommending traffic calming. This was a complete reversal of the HCC policy of road widening that threatened 15 to 25 percent of all the houses in Battery Point.

In 1973 there was a huge backlash against the implications of high-rise developments in Battery Point and upper Sandy Bay, in response to a single 12-storey apartment block, Empress Towers, in Battery Point.

Clarke had contended that the development of the Battery Point Planning Scheme had involved ‘active widespread participation... sought and considered the opinions, ideas and proposals of people and organizations with interests in the future character of Battery Point...continuing a process of discussion, refinement, elaboration and amendment...’ (Duckett 2014; Clarke 1969).

This claim was tested in a survey undertaken in 1973 of residential areas zoned for *unlimited height development* in one of three residential zones in the Battery Point Planning Scheme 1972, Zone 3. The results of the survey were presented to the Australian Institute of Urban Studies (AIUS) and they demonstrated that over 60 percent of people affected had no idea of the Scheme or its provisions. Of those who were aware of the provisions of *unlimited height*, a large number disagreed with the zoning (Newton 1973). One explanation for the situation was that a number of the residents covered by the Scheme did not have a Battery Point postal address but a Sandy Bay address with a separate postcode, 7005.

The events sparked a lively activist tradition in Hobart regarding public involvement and participation in urban planning, a tradition that still continues today.

Battery Point and later North Hobart were both informed by drop-in-planning centres. These information centres provided a planning exhibition space and made available research data on the changes that were planned for the areas. The project team in Zone 3 Battery Point consisted of three planning students and an advisor from the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education, School of Environmental Design. They used the centre as a base and office inviting locals to drop in and discuss their preferences for the future planning of the area.

The residents of the high-rise designated zone were surveyed by door knocking and asked to zone themselves. They were given four density options and the results were quite conclusive. They wanted little or no change (Dawkins, J; Newton 1977). As a result, against the earlier intention of the 1967 HCC brief to Clarke to double the population in the area, the heritage of the suburb was preserved rather than substantially demolished for high-rise residential development.

The Scheme was then reviewed and revised, largely restricting buildings to single-storey with attics, or encouraging retention of existing buildings. This one residential zone provided incentives to retain existing residences while allowing modern amenities to be added. There were specific provisions in the reviewed 1979 Scheme to allow renovation and improvement of the existing buildings and a virtual prohibition or halt to demolitions. (Hobart City Council 2012).

This scheme operated successfully for 36 years (Dawkins 1977; Dawkins, J; Newton 1977; Dawkins 1996). Barry McNeill a prominent Tasmanian planner, noted that the Scheme as being *very advanced for its time and it probably still is* (Duckett 2014; Ridder 2000).

## THE IMPLICATIONS FOR NORTH HOBART

The implications of the City of Hobart Plan 1945 were profound for North Hobart where a large proportion of houses were zoned commercial/industrial. In 1945 a large number of residential areas had been labeled as: “old and decadent and it is believed that in the course of time ...not many years... the old insanitary dwellings will be replaced by modern factories” (Cook 1945 p27; see Figure 1, yellow areas).

Thirty years after the City of Hobart Plan was first published the transition to modern factories or warehouses in North Hobart had still not occurred. This was due to a number of factors:

- over optimistic and inaccurate population predictions of the plan;
- a highway passed the are, that opening up commercial land in the adjoining municipality of Glenorchy, 5km to the north, leading to a cluster of industries related to the Hydro Electric Commission workshops, the Public Works Department stores and the Housing Department’s workshops and day labour force;
- a large number of manufactured goods were imported to Tasmania requiring just warehousing, rather than manufacturing premises.

In 1976 the Hobart City Council attempted to implement a new City Plan devised by Urban Design and Planning Associates (UDPA). It initially reviewed the projections of the past 30 years, and attempted to create some certainty for the future pattern of development, by rezoning industrial/commercial to residential.

During this period Hobart was hit by massive economic restructuring as a consequence of the United Kingdom’s entry into the European Economic Community, particularly in the exportation of primary produce such as fruit. Orchardng was in chaos, and this reduced the need for traditional commercial/industrial infrastructure, especially in North Hobart (Hewat 1988; Hudspeth, A; Scripps 2000).

## ZONING IN NORTH HOBART

In the 1970s the over-zoning of North Hobart partly reverted back to residential from industrial-commercial in areas that remained predominantly residential. This caused an acrimonious debate in the press and division amongst HCC Alderman. This debate took place in late 1977 with the Chamber of Commerce supporting the businesses and opposing the residents which coincided with the formation of the residents' group (Broadby B 1977; Ellsmore 1977; O'Connor 1977).

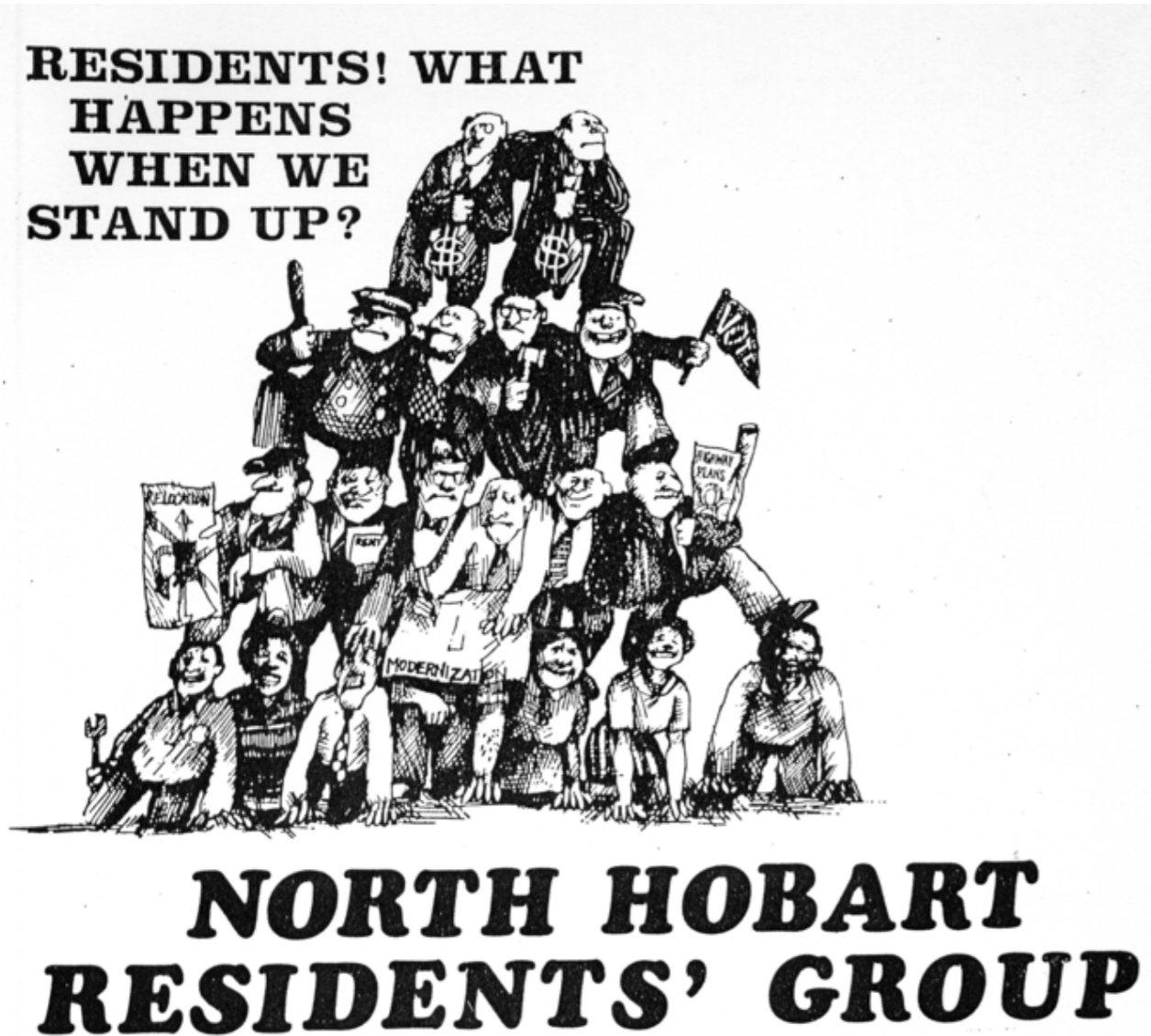


Fig 3 Based on a graphic from *After the Planners* (Goodman 1972 p.53). Artwork by G Harris 1980.

## FORMATION OF THE RESIDENTS' GROUP

The North Hobart Residents' Group (NHRG) was established in late September 1977 and immediately began campaigning for clarity and certainty about zoning, with the objectives of researching, educating, elucidating and advocating for a

improved residential and living environment. The Group had a large cross section of the community, with over 60 people from the area. It established a conventional constitution with an executive committee who met between meetings and generally operated on the basis of a monthly meeting. There were students, architects, urban planners and a range of experience with a wide range of organizing skills. It was all based on voluntary input.

The first action that sparked the group was a petition opposing spot rezoning to industrial/commercial in Wignall Street, an area previously rezoned to residential by the HCC. This got support from 50 people in the street, with only one resident not prepared to sign the petition. This result was far beyond the expectations of the organizers. Immediately, there were a number of other polarizing conflicts that arose around the suburb and the NHRG gained broader support as a result of these polarizing issues.

The issue quickly focused on problems of perception and definition. Was North Hobart an *industrial slum* or *inner city housing*. This became the title of a later urban planning study (Vincent 1984). This post-graduate study followed a number of specific case studies of events prior to 1983. The same author is currently undertaking a PhD study on *Hobart Urban Change 1973 to 1993.*, reflecting on the outcomes over a longer time period, and applying activity theory to analyse community action.

## THE APPLICATION OF DAVID HARVEY'S ANALYSIS

From 1977 to 1981, a group of students and council interns researched the applicability of David Harvey's theories to the analysis of the interests of stakeholder groups, to see if it could explain events in North Hobart and make sense of activities and outcomes between 1955 and 1978. The work demonstrated that commercial and industrial/commercial interests had superior bargaining and purchasing power over that available to residential interests. David Harvey's work defining roles, interests and actions was used in conjunction with a series of rate roll and ABS census data and the ensuing modeling was used to explain tensions in North Hobart (Harvey 1973).

<p><b>Use Value</b></p> <p>The value from daily convenience -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to shops, schools, health services, employment, entertainment, transport.</li> <li>• The convenience of dwelling - how pleasant it is to live in an area.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Exchange Value</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What you get when you sell a property market value in dollar values.</li> <li>• This value is not directly related to use value, though may be influenced by use value.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Groups who get Use Value</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Residents,</li> <li>2. Tenants,</li> <li>3. Retailers and Service providers.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Groups who are interested in Exchange Value.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Landlords,</li> <li>2. Developers are partly interested in the generation of new use value, creating interactive commercial interest.</li> <li>3. Real estate agents,</li> <li>4. Financial institutions, e.g. Banks, Superannuation Funds</li> <li>5. Government institutions.</li> </ol>

Fig 4: Summary of groups and interests as defined by Harvey (1973) in *Social Justice and the City* p 163-194

This diagram of interests and values was tested for consistency with land uses and prevailing interests in North Hobart. It created a rich body of intelligence. This is now being further analyzed via the application of activity theory as an analytical technique.

The exchange value data of individual properties was available at five-year intervals over a 25-year period. It was



and attempts to reestablish the group have not yet been successful.

## PLANNING WITH INTERACTIVE APPROACHES

Planning certainly has moved a long way from the concepts embedded in the garden city movement that were followed by town and country Practitioners such as Cook (Cook 1945; Forshaw J & Abercrombie P 1943). It is no longer a static exercise, with formulaic SCHEMES? projecting 25 years ahead onto such matters as land use, zoning and pollution control.

Planning now involves assessing activity involving international communication and providing personal connectivity by developing intelligent systems, so that approaches can address current circumstances, especially in terms of opportunities. The rate of change is often dynamic, traumatic and dramatic. Institutions and management processes have to be able to respond to the unexpected. What could once have been predicted as probably happening some time in the future can now be unpredictable, or accelerated as a result of a turbulent states of affairs elsewhere (for example the world financial crisis of 2008).

Thinking has to consider the immediately foreseeable, the likely indications in the predictable and budgeted future, as well as the long-term alternative possibilities, and it must be nimble enough to adjust according to changing circumstances. For example, the Internet and Web driven Air B&B movement, has had a major disruptive effect on communities, particularly with regard to local access to long-term accommodation. This is now having an insidious effect in Hobart through the displacement of traditional renters. It is also a product of the failure of a housing tenure model that discriminates between the haves, and the have-nots, and the absence of alternative models for housing access.

All these matters need to be embraced simultaneously in a modern approach to planning. This produces challenges beyond deterministic solutions to collective consumption (Kerr J 1994). Activity theory can provide real time analysis of places like Hobart. Because of its size and location Hobart could act as a test bed for novel approaches to urban planning and local government (Mayer 2006; Castells 1976; Dunford & Pickvance 2007; Engeström 2005).

## CONCLUSION

The zoning of the City of Hobart Plan from 1945 has been modified at the edges, especially in regard to areas once designated as old and decadent. These locations are now highly sought after, because they are no longer blighted by inappropriate zoning or road widening schemes. But the actual pattern of the 1945 Plan has only changed in terms of the transition of industrial zoning to more tertiary uses, and it does not provide incentives for mixed use that includes residential activities. The significant changes in Hobart are concentrated between 1973 and 2015. Yet there is no comprehensive study on how the city has been shaped in this period.

The purpose of this paper? Thesis? is to focus attention on this period by providing reflective methodologies for analysis. Community engagement is essential in the face of inappropriate development pressure. It is important to provide real participative engagement strategies for action and involvement at the local level. A social license is required for both processes and reviewing potential outcomes. Certainty and agreement need to be established for people to have reasonable expectations about future actions. This relies on an informed public discussion at the start of planning process, one that effectively allows for negotiation and appreciation of various interests and the potential impacts. This discussion needs to be provided at the appropriate local level in a highly accessible and interactive form. It should not overwhelm people with meaningless planning jargon, with death by power- point and by simply going through the legal motions. It requires genuine and realistic community engagement.

The challenge is to separate out strategic planning intentions from prescriptive development control processes. Currently, development control does not inform people of neighbourhood implications or environmental consequences. The underlying processes of intervention in the social and economic environment are fundamental to urban planning. This is opposed to establishing specific parameters for development proposals and imposing formulaic outcomes without regard to specific context and impact on neighbours.

Planning is part of everybody's domain. It has to be made to work in a positive environmental and cultural manner. We have to adapt and effect positive and sustained change taking into account environmental and social imperatives or collectively face the law of diminishing returns.

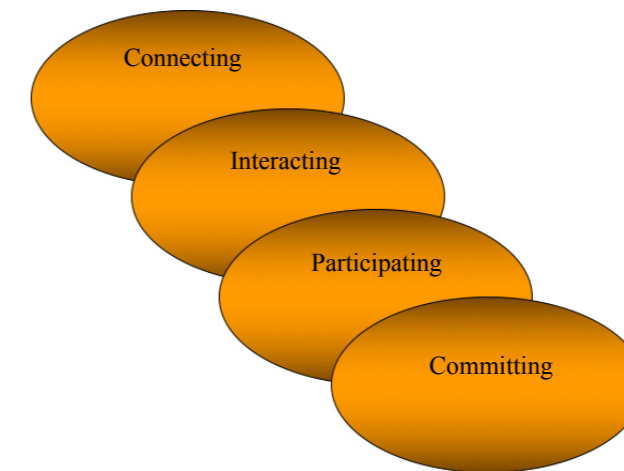


Fig 6: The essential steps of combining Activity Theory as a planning process involves these critical steps (Bound 2007 p182).

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