



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

## **Doctor of Philosophy**

**Matt Cohen**

Will defend his/her prospectus

### **Aligning Urban Public Participation Processes to Community Context**

#### **Abstract**

Meaningful public participation is treated as an essential process for achieving sustainability in urban development. In many instances, however, public participation is inadequately defined and processes are unsophisticated. In such cases, participation may not match the local context of the communities within which project partners engage. This thesis treats urban public participation as a collaborative decision making process between citizens, the business community, experts, public officials, and other key stakeholders. When these processes are not attuned with the community context (i.e. participant lifestyles, needs, interests, and capacities) key misalignments between process and contexts arise around living conditions and personal circumstances, stakeholder trust, civic engagement, collaborative capacity, and sustainability literacy.

This thesis studies the key misalignments between participatory process and community context, identifies coping strategies for overcoming these misalignments, and tests strategies for adapting both the participatory process and the civic capacity of potential participants. This body of research presents directives for designing meaningful collaborative decision making processes for sustainable urban development. Theoretically, this dissertation builds on the perspective that contemporary views of public participation are naïve and expands the conceptualization of designing participation to account for local contexts.

Monday, April 7, 2014  
2:30pm  
Wrigley Hall, 102

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:  
Dr. Arnim Wiek (Co-Chair)  
Dr. David Manuel-Navarrete (Co-Chair)  
Dr. Daniel Schugurensky (Member)