

**A Sense of Place:  
Cooperative Housing in Providence, Rhode Island**

by  
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Thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
with Honors from the Center for Environmental Studies at Brown University

May, 1994

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the premise that limited equity cooperative housing enhances or creates a sense of community and stakeholderness, and that coop members are more likely to be involved or interested in local community or environmental issues, problems, or organizations in the neighborhood. The crucial components of this central question are:

- o Do coop members feel a sense of ownership in the coop?
- o Is there a sense of community that accompanies coop membership?
- o Do coop members feel rooted or do they feel that they have an investment in the community as a result of the ownership factor of the coop?
- o How does living in a coop affect residents' perceptions of the surrounding community or their role in the community?
- o Does coop housing have any direct or indirect impact upon members environmental behavior or awareness? How do they refer to or relate to the neighborhood environment?

This study is a qualitative analysis of the perceptions of members of three limited equity housing cooperatives in Providence. I conducted in depth, semi-structured interviews with thirteen coop residents and spoke informally with two other coop members. I also attended one of the monthly coop board meetings of one of the coops that was represented in this study. In addition, I conducted in depth interviews with nine "key influencers," in the areas of nonprofit housing development, planning, and finance in Providence.

My results have shown that coop members do have a strong sense of community and ownership. Self reported levels of activity in the coop were reported as very high, but many coop members also believed that others were not active. Most of the respondents believed that the coop both affects and is affected by the surrounding neighborhood. Many of the respondents were active in the community, and several others expressed an interest in becoming more active. Respondents considered the affordability of the coop as the primary attraction, but particularly emphasized the ownership and control aspects as well as the increased feelings of safety and security that corresponded with knowing and being able to select one's neighbors.

There was far more identification with the coop itself rather than with the neighborhood, but many of the respondents were very interested in working with others in the neighborhood in the future.