Reframing Public Participation: Strategies for the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT   *This article makes the case that legally required participation methods in the US not only do not meet most basic goals for public participation, but they are also counterproductive, causing anger and mistrust. Both theory and practice are dominated by ambivalence about the idea of participation itself. Both struggle with dilemmas that make the problems seem insoluble, such as the conflict between the individual and collective interest or between the ideal of democracy and the reality that many voices are never heard. Cases are used to draw on an emerging set of practices of collaborative public engagement from around the world to demonstrate how alternative methods can better meet public participation goals and how they make moot most of the dilemmas of more conventional practice. Research shows that collaborative participation can solve complex, contentious problems such as budget decision making and create an improved climate for future action when bitter disputes divide a community. Authentic dialogue, networks and institutional capacity are the key elements. The authors propose that participation should be understood as a multi-way set of interactions among citizens and other players who together produce outcomes. Next steps involve developing an alternative practice framework, creating forums and arenas, adapting agency decision processes, and providing training and financial support.*

Introduction: Failures of Public Participation

It is time to face facts we know, but prefer to ignore. Legally required methods of public participation in government decision making in the US—public hearings, review and comment procedures in particular—do not work. They do not achieve genuine participation in planning or other decisions; they do not satisfy members of the public that they are being heard; they seldom can be said to improve the decisions that agencies and public officials make; and they do not incorporate a broad spectrum of the public. Worse yet, these methods often antagonize the members of the public who do try to work with them. The methods often pit citizens against each other, as they feel compelled to speak of the issues in polarizing terms to get their points across. This pattern makes it even more difficult for decision makers to sort through what they hear, much less to make a choice using public input. Most often these methods discourage busy and thoughtful individuals from wasting their time going through what appear to be nothing more than rituals designed to satisfy legal requirements. They also increase the ambivalence of planners and other public officials about hearing from the public at all. Nonetheless, these methods have an almost sacred quality to them, and they stay in place despite all that everyone knows is wrong with them.

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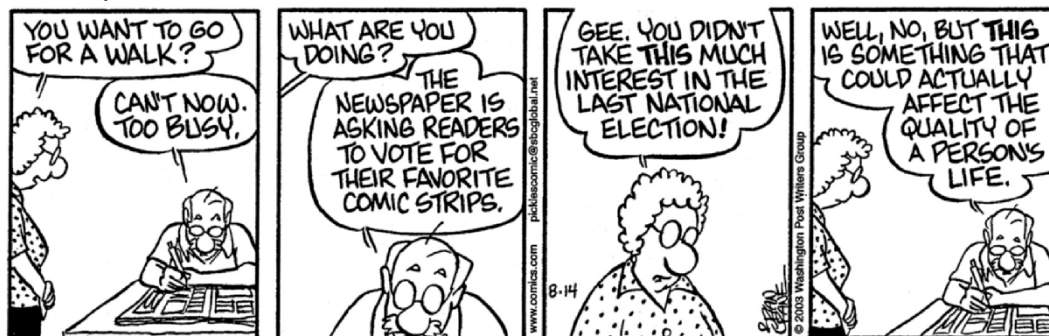
Pickles by Brian Crane

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In the meantime participation in the form of voting declines with each election in the US, as voters are increasingly alienated from formal government. The public, as many polls have shown, typically believes that government is unresponsive to their concerns or, even more to the point, is responsive to special interests that fund increasingly expensive campaigns (Nye *et al.*, 1997). Formal, legally required participation methods have not remedied the situation and may have aggravated it. Dissatisfaction with government and public involvement is mirrored in the popular press as comic strips poke fun at the participatory process. For example, the character in Figure 1 believes voting on his favourite comic strip has more effect on his quality of life than voting in the election.

Ambivalence in the Literature

A recent review article demonstrates that citizen participation in planning is a fundamentally contested concept in the literature (Day, 1997). Another says that the role of participation has historically been ambivalent in public administration (King *et al.*, 1998). In US planning literature perhaps the most referenced article (Arnstein, 1969) contends that the problem is that the public does not have enough power and measures the value of participation in terms of a ladder of citizen power. Davidoff's much cited article (Davidoff, 1965) articulates a role for advocacy planning—essentially providing professional assistance to the disadvantaged groups—and, speaking in the language of community organizing, also aims to increase the relative power of citizens. Much of the other planning scholarship on participation in the US since then has been devoted to discussing its problems (Baum, 1998; Hibbard & Lurie, 2000), how to improve it through better techniques (Crosby *et al.*, 1986; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2003; Rosener, 1982; Thomas, 1995; Watson *et al.*, 1991) or through being more culturally sensitive (Umemoto, 2001). However, even critics of participatory efforts (Tauxe, 1995) stop short of directly challenging the public hearing or review and comment process as methods. Most planning literature seems to assume the problem is just that we are not using the methods correctly.

In contrast, in political science some theorists (Dahl, 1989) have argued that representative government by elites is appropriate and that direct (as opposed to indirect through voting) participation is unworkable in the modern bureaucratic state. Others in political science seem to have more respect for citizen capabilities and are working on developing theories about deliberative democracy (Benhabib, 1996; Bohman, 1996, 1998;

Bohman & Rehg 1997; Dryzek, 1996; Gutman & Thompson, 1996). Their approach argues for the value to democracy of public deliberation, but for the most part they leave open the question of how such deliberation can function within existing democratic institutions at a sufficient scale to be a practical alternative.[1] This literature largely ignores the public hearing or indeed any of the methods that public agencies use for getting public input.

Public administration scholars fall somewhere between political science and planning with some arguing for indirect participation, but with many agreeing that additional direct participation is needed (Roberts, 1997). Most recently with the advent of the 'new managerialism', which emphasizes running government like a business, relying heavily on the principles of 'reinventing government' (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), a debate has emerged on whether to consider citizens to be customers or owners of government. The former implies that the citizen is a passive recipient of services, and the job of the manager is to provide for needs and wants efficiently. The latter is more like a stockholder model where citizens set some direction, although not necessarily in a hands-on way. Public administrators and scholars are at best ambivalent about participation, with many finding it problematic (Kettering Foundation, 1989).

Dilemmas of Practice

The literature on participation in the US is dominated by dilemmas, paradoxes and ambivalence and the scare transferred to practitioners. Should citizens look after their self-interest or after the collective interest? In theory they represent the community, but de facto they speak for themselves. Should the planner or administrator apply collective interest criteria or be swayed by vocal special interests? Citizens vote for representatives of their interests so why do they need to keep being involved? The citizen as owner still begs the question of whether the citizen role should be active and engaged or not. The citizen as customer begs the question of citizen rights. Anyone can participate, but in reality the powerful and the organized drown out other voices and succeed in private deal-making processes. Planners and public officials may believe in democracy, but be sceptical about participation (Gruber, 1987; Schumpeter, 1942). The more open the process the more polarized an issue can become. Participation is the right thing to do, but it causes delays, and if citizens are listened to, it may result in bad decisions. Planners and administrators can be out of touch with communities and local knowledge, but citizens can be out of touch with political and economic realities and long-term considerations for a community or resource. Ultimately, Olson's argument that the broad but shallow interests represented by citizens will always be trumped by the narrow and deep interests represented by organized groups suggests that this whole approach to participation is doomed (Olson, 1965).

Purpose of the Article

When dilemmas dominate, it is time to reframe (Laws & Rein, 2003; Schon & Rein, 1994). This article proposes to reframe the issue of participation based on what has been learned from emerging practices around the world. These practices, this article argues, make moot many of the dilemmas and have the potential to provide satisfaction to all parties, even to serve the collective interest. Today we are trapped in seeing public participation as involving citizens on the one hand and government on the other. This simplistic duality underlies the debates and encourages adversarial participation. It also means that we do not unpack the black box of 'citizens' or of 'government' nor integrate

other actors into the model. The dualist frame ignores the pluralist system, which remains alive and well as 'special interests' influence elected officials using their power, money and access. Pluralism has a long tradition in US thought and practice, and is not about to disappear no matter how much is done to strengthen these highly ritualized participation procedures. The pluralist and participation models coexist uneasily in theory and practice. The first lacks legitimacy with citizens, but is often effective, and the second is seldom effective, but has considerably more legitimacy.

After detailing some of the pathologies of legally required participation methods in the US, the article will draw on practices that are emerging, not only in the US but also around the world, to propose a new way of conceptualizing participation and engaging the public in planning. This model is built on collaboration in many forms. In the contemporary context of growing complexity and rapid change, civic leaders, interest groups, citizens and even government itself are creating new venues for dialogue and pulling together stakeholders to address difficult problems (Bryson & Crosby, 1993; Hajer, 2004; Innes & Booher, 2003). While collaborative participation remains the exception rather than the rule in the US, there is enough experience, theory and documentation from both the US and elsewhere to provide insight into an alternative model.

The proposal here is that participation must be collaborative and it should incorporate not only citizens, but also organized interests, profit-making and non-profit organizations, planners and public administrators in a common framework where all are interacting and influencing one another and all are acting independently in the world as well. This is not one-way communication from citizens to government or government to citizens. It is a multi-dimensional model where communication, learning and action are joined together and where the polity, interests and citizenry co-evolve.

The central contention is that effective participatory methods involve collaboration, dialogue and interaction. They are inclusive. They are not reactive, but focused on anticipating and defining future actions. They are self-organizing both in content and membership. They challenge the status quo and ask hard questions about things otherwise taken for granted. They seek agreement or at least build shared knowledge and heuristics for collaborative action (Innes & Booher, 2003). This framework is not based on the mechanistic imagery of citizens pushing on government, but on the complex systems imagery of a fluid network of interacting agents, gathering information from each other and the environment and acting autonomously based on their needs, understandings, and shared heuristics (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999; Kelly, 1997). This system can be adaptive instead of stalemated. It can build societal capacity and produce innovative responses to seemingly intractable problems. It can move us beyond the current dilemmas of practice and scholarship.

Purposes for Participation

Five purposes can be identified that encompass most of the claims usually made to justify participation. One is for decision makers to find out what the public's preferences are so these can play a part in their decisions. A second is to improve decisions by incorporating citizens' local knowledge into the calculus. Both purposes are increasingly important as government gets larger and more distant from its constituencies. Public participation has a third purpose of advancing fairness and justice. There are systematic reasons why the needs and preferences of many groups, particularly the least advantaged, are not recognized through the normal information sources and analytic proce-

dures. These needs may only come onto the radar screen during an open participation process. A fourth purpose is that public participation is about getting legitimacy for public decisions. If a planner can say "We held a dozen public hearings and reviewed hundreds of comments and everyone who wanted to had a chance to say his piece", then whatever is decided is, at least in theory, democratic and legitimate. Last, but not least, participation is something planners and public officials do because the law requires it.

This article contends that most of these purposes, other than the last one, are not being met with the legally required methods that are pervasive across the US. Collaborative practices appear to better address many of these purposes. Experience with these emerging methods suggests that a sixth and seventh purpose for participation can be to build civil society and to create an adaptive, self-organizing polity capable of addressing wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) in an informed and effective way.

Participation in the US

Several techniques are nearly ubiquitous in the US, most of which are enshrined in law as required 'steps' in a public decision process. These include public hearings, written public comments on proposed projects, as in environmental review, and the use of citizen-based commissions, such as planning and zoning commissions, and boards of directors for public agencies with quasi judicial, and/or quasi legislative power along with advisory committees and task forces, The hearing and public comment processes tend to be formalistic, one-way communication from members of the public to the agency or elected officials. The ordinary citizen is most likely to participate in public hearings in local arenas, where their interests are most clearly affected and where they are most knowledgeable. Typically these procedures are used after plans or decisions have been proposed, often in some detail. The citizen role is to react.

Citizen bodies do permit multi-way communication to some degree among their members prior to any plan or decision being made. The bodies that have quasi-legislative or judicial power typically use *Robert's Rules of Order* (1990) to frame and limit their own discussion to a series of motions and formal debate over these rather than a more free flowing dialogue. They usually hold public hearings, where they get citizen reactions to their proposals. Task forces and advisory committees can be informal and allow for more dialogue, at least among themselves. The biggest problem from the perspective here is that all of these bodies are, more often than not, made up of elites, and not representative of a range of interests and voices. Although these groups can provide valuable citizen input to public decisions, all too often the appointment of a task force is regarded by the public as a way of burying an issue. Unfortunately, there has been little or no systematic recent research on how these bodies work as ways of involving citizens in government. Thus most of the discussion here will be devoted to the more formal procedural requirements.

In many states so-called 'open meeting' requirements have become integral to participation. In California the 1953 Brown Act for local bodies and the 1967 Bagley Keene Act for state bodies and in the US the 1972 Federal Advisory Council Act (FACA) created rules essentially making it illegal for public officials to meet privately to discuss public issues. All these bodies must publish agendas days ahead of time and follow them in the meeting. These 'sunshine laws' are designed to assure transparency in government and give citizens the chance to be informed and aware so they can comment appropriately. It is not clear whether these laws have had the intended effect of getting rid of backroom deal-making, but it is clear that they constrain officials from engaging in timely and

detailed deliberation around complex issues (Bohman, 1996; Boxer-Macomber, 2003) or in using self-organizing collaborative dialogue.

Public Hearings

In practice these formal procedures work in perverse ways. Public hearings typically are attended primarily, if not uniquely, by avid proponents and opponents of a measure affecting them personally, by representatives of organized interest groups, and by a handful of diehard board watchers. Two- or three-minute time limits are often placed on speakers, with equal time for the highly informed or the person whose livelihood is at issue as for the rambling fellow who has little knowledge but enjoys the sound of his own voice. Citizens have to stand below the stage where board/commission members sit. They can speak only on the topic defined in the agenda. The programme typically does not allow for interchange, although occasionally a board member may ask a question. Citizens have no entitlement to answers to *their* questions. It is not surprising that citizens normally speak at public hearings only when much is at stake for them or when they have a passionate belief about an issue.

The board members, for their part, may make it abundantly clear that they are not paying attention, talking among themselves, reading materials or even leaving the room during the public comment period. While this behaviour can be criticized as defeating the purpose of public involvement, it is a rational reaction to the situation where public comments are likely to be sound bites, extreme statements or the same refrain over and over. If the preponderance of public comments is on one side or another of an issue, this may sway the board members, despite their recognition that it may not represent a cross-section of the community, because they see that the group is capable of organizing and pressuring decision makers. If the comments go in opposite directions, the board has no way to learn the reasons nor resolve the differences.

Observers of public hearings have documented some of the perverse patterns of discussion that occur in these settings. Thompson (1997) contends that a public hearing is itself a 'frame' for a structure of expectations of behaviour and of interpretation of what is said. The distribution of power is evident in the physical layout and the rules for speaking. These differ from ordinary conversation, where speakers have equal entitlements to bring up topics or to get responses. Citizens want to be listened to and may express anger to get an audience riled up or make extreme statements. They often speak in terms of war metaphors referring to 'battles' and 'coming out in force'. They cannot afford polite speech, which could be misinterpreted. They are engaged in one-way communication with no opportunity to clarify.

Campbell & Marshall (2000) confirm Thompson's findings, noting on the basis of their interviews and observations of public hearings in Berkeley and Oakland California "in all the meetings observed, there was a palpable sense of individuals feeling they were engaged in a battle". A local consultant told them that "If you stay passive you become a victim" and a planning commissioner said "there was no sense of '… everyone working together on the same problem … it's 'us' and 'you' ". They found that planners had concerns about the representativeness of the players and a sense that home owners were able to define themselves as the community to the exclusion of tenants. Respondents believed that interests were working behind the scenes. A consultant working with the poorest groups said, "Whoever is most persistent—they will get the outcome they desire … but that's not what's best. Money, relationships and deals, that's what wins". Their respondents contended that large sections of society were disempowered by this

process. They also noted that planners were subject to a great deal of hostility as 'bureaucrats' and that those working with disadvantaged groups felt planners were not skilled in participation methods (pp. 329–333).

A study of public hearings on an environmental review of a proposal to build a waste transfer station in Brooklyn New York researchers (Anonymous paper submitted to *Environment and Planning A*, 2002) illustrates additional participation pathologies that come from the inequality of power and information of citizens and public agencies. Disadvantaged groups said they had not been notified and were unequally represented. The lawyer from a real estate firm got a 10-minute response to his question whereas the environmental group was referred to documents. The authors found that a dialogue with other non-designated speakers was not permitted, even if their questions were pertinent. Citizens could get no information about rejected alternatives and were allowed only to react to the proposed site. They were told "The proposal represents the best design for the site". The focus was on technical data, and citizens who wanted to speak of fairness and justice were ruled out of order. Officials would not change the agenda in response to citizen requests to address the environmental impacts they already suffered in their neighbourhood. The authors note that this situation was one of "distorted communicative action" due to the inequalities in treatment of speakers, lack of muliti-way dialogue, and control of the agenda.

Review and Comment Procedures

Procedures for review and comment are common in the US. The federal government issues regulations which do not become law until after a period of comment. In environmental review potential impacts of a project are documented in a detailed technical report. There are public hearings on the report, and comments are made in writing by agencies, stakeholder groups and citizens and eventually published with responses. If these reports use faulty data or assumptions, they may have to be revised. Some comments may force project modifications. If a sponsoring agency balks at making changes a lawsuit may force them to do so. Comments may come from all directions, but there is no dialogue, and the procedures allow no way to resolve differences other than the judgment of the sponsoring agency. Even though agency staff have to respond to comments, they can be unresponsive or dismissive. They may declare comments off point, just as in public hearings. The citizen does not know who wrote the responses, much less have the opportunity to confront the individual or have an interchange on the topic. On the other hand, well-funded interest groups are capable of making comments that get responses because they know the law and they are capable of bringing lawsuits. Comment processes are difficult to learn about and not readily accessible to the ordinary citizen. Commentors do not have an opportunity to discuss or resolve issues among themselves.

The Consequences of Flawed Participation

Experiences with flawed participation can lead to lawsuits, wars at the ballot box and stalemates. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, a social movement of environmentalists and transit users formed to challenge the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's (MTC) planning. They packed public hearings, held media events and pressured the agency. They held up federal certification of MTC's planning process (Innes & Gruber, 2001, pp. 325–335) for more than a year. Environmental groups rely

heavily on the opportunity to file lawsuits as a way to cause unacceptable delays to developers or to hold up public projects they deem environmentally unfriendly. For example, widening of Interstate 80 in the Bay Area was held up for years by a lawsuit contending that MTC was not meeting requirements of the Clean Air Act. No dialogue or problem solving took place while the freeway congestion just worsened. Farming interests in California's Central Valley have held up water management and habitat conservation planning through lawsuits because they felt their voices had not been heard in earlier processes.

In response to the failures of participation, public agencies increasingly employ techniques of education and outreach. For example, MTC sends out newsletters and holds workshops with presentations on what the agency has been doing about transportation problems. Staff appear on TV and radio and employ professionals to conduct public information campaigns (Innes & Gruber, forthcoming). These are one-way processes from the agency to the community, designed to say 'We are doing a great job' rather than actual participation though many agencies list such techniques as participation. While education of the public is essential it is not participation if it does not include the education of the agency.

Collaborative Participation

Many of the new participation models have been created in response to the anger of citizens (Susskind & Field, 1996), to deadlock over issues (Susskind & Cruikshank, 1987) or to leaders' initiatives (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Chrislip & Larson, 1994). These approaches differ from legal participation requirements in the US in that they are inclusive of stakeholders and that dialogue is at their core. These seek to address the interests of all, allowing time for these to be explored. Participants—public agencies, powerful private interests, and disadvantaged citizens—are treated equally within the discussions. In these processes learning takes place, and sometimes conflicts are resolved and innovations emerge (Connick & Innes, 2003; Healey, 1993, 1997). The process is one of give and take and joint problem solving (Straus, 2002) so long as best practices are followed (Lowry *et al.*, 1997; Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution, 1997; Susskind *et al.*, 1999).

For example, administrative rule making for the environment in the US has been highly contentious, with agencies proposing rules and industries or environmental groups challenging them in court or Congress. Creating a rule could take decades, and it might not produce the desired outcomes. Instead of proposing regulations and waiting for comments, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began to pull together stakeholders, including representatives of the regulated industry, of the consumers and of the larger public to jointly recommend regulations (Susskind & MacMahon, 1985). The EPA discovered such collaborative dialogues could often work out a rule satisfactory to all (Ryan, 2001; Weber & Khademian, 1997).

One of the biggest issues in participation is information, who controls it and whether it is trustworthy (Hanna, 2000). In collaborative participation joint fact finding is conducted in which the parties can question data (Ozawa, 1991) and present their own. Citizens and stakeholders have information that can improve the quality of decisions (Fischer, 1993, 2002). For example, in a water planning process in Sacramento, California (Connick & Innes, 2003), stakeholders uncovered a massive error in a federal agency's calculation of available water and forced much more accurate modelling. Fisheries

scientists have discovered that the fishers' knowledge is crucial to an effective management process (Wilson, unknown date).

Budgeting is increasingly a focus for collaborative dialogues. In conventional budgeting citizens and interests make demands, but are not accountable for where the money will come from. Dialogues enable them to see what the trade-offs are and work through the choices (Yankelovich, 1991). In processes in Eugene, Oregon and Sacramento, California, citizens were engaged through workshops and community surveys in making choices for spending and revenue producing (Weeks, 2000). These led to agreements that were otherwise politically impossible. Davis, California faced a multimillion-dollar budget deficit after voters rejected a tax increase. Some proposed targeted budget cuts, others across-the-board cuts, while others pushed for a modified tax increase. In response, the City Council appointed a Citizen Budget Commission composed of proponents of cuts and of taxes.[2] The Commission engaged leaders from city departments, along with representatives of seniors, youth, conservationists, recreational interests, taxpayers, unions and business. They all interacted in a joint learning process about the city's budget, programmes, practices and services. Unanimous agreement was reached on a proposal crafted by the Commission and participants and ratified by the voters.

Collaborative participation has defused racial tensions and built social capital. For example, in 2001 riots broke out in Cincinnati's Over the Rhine neighbourhood after a black man was killed by a policeman. A year-long set of facilitated dialogues involving all the stakeholders, including the police, city agencies and hundreds of citizens, resulted in a historic agreement for how to proceed. This process has so changed the climate and practices that when a similar incident took place in 2003, the Mayor immediately released a videotape of the incident and called together stakeholders. Trust had been built and channels of communication were open so that no riots or protests took place. Various forms of collaboration are recommended for community problem solving (de Sousa Briggs, 2003; Potapchuk & Polk, 1992) because they help to build social and political capital.

More than 20 Collaborative Regional Initiatives (CRI) (http://www.calregions.org/) in California have been working for the last few years to build civic capacity. These clusters of linked stakeholders have focused on improving the economy and the environment in their regions through collaboration on projects filling in vacuums where government is not acting. For example, the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Communities has spent six years in dialogues among economic, environmental and equity stakeholders over how to have smart and equitable growth. They have agreed on a set of principles and practices and are working with civic leadership to change opinions about what makes for good growth patterns. Dozens, if not hundreds, of cases of collaborative processes have been documented on topics from affordable housing, hazardous waste, resource management to ethnic conflict and building civil society (Chrislip, 2002; Connick, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2003; Innes *et al.*, 1994; Susskind *et al.*, 1999; Thomson, 2001).

Experiments in collaborative dialogue abound as well in Europe. For example, in Portugal and Sweden, Local Agenda 21 has resulted in new forums for local stakeholders who have built social, intellectual and political capital (Khakee, 2002; Vasconcelos *et al.*, 2002). In Italy, experiments in participatory planning increased satisfaction (Balducci, 1999). In the UK it has been said that collaborative processes constitute new governance forms (Healey, 1999). A recent paper published by the UK's Deputy Prime Minister, after extensive research on practice, recommends reforming the planning system to assure all

parts of the community have their voices heard through consensus building and participatory engagement (UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003).

Keys to Success: Dialogue, Networks and Institutional Capacity

Much of the reason for these successes is what has been called the transformative power of dialogue (Roberts, 2002a; Yankelovich, 1999; Forester, 1999, pp. 115–153). When an inclusive set of citizens can engage in authentic dialogue where all are equally empowered and informed and where they listen and are heard respectfully and when they are working on a task of interest to all, following their own agendas, everyone is changed. They learn new ideas and they often come to recognize that others' views are legitimate. They can work through issues and create shared meanings as well as the possibility of joint action. They can learn new heuristics. This power of dialogue was amply demonstrated in a research experiment called Choice Work Dialogues, which the authors observed. Randomly selected citizens met in groups of 30 for a dialogue on growth policy in San Diego. These people, over the course of a day, talking only to each other and following the principles above, started by opposing growth and ended by agreeing that regional management was needed. They also came to see themselves as people who could make a difference as their end-of-the day testimonials made clear (Yankelovich, 2001).

   Collaborative processes also build networks. The one outcome participants almost universally cited (Innes *et al.*, 1994) was that they built new professional and personal relationships. They came to understand each other's perspectives and in most cases build considerable trust. This social capital translated into new networks that they could and did use for many other issues outside the collaborative process (Innes & Connick, 1999). These networks often proliferated as participants learned the power of the processes and transmitted the ideas and practices to associates. Booher & Innes (2002) have argued that this phenomenon creates a new form of power as players develop shared heuristics and as information flows through the network and results in new forms of distributed, self-organizing action.

   Finally collaborative, networked processes contribute to building what Healey and others have called institutional capacity, which is a combination of social, intellectual and political capital (Cars *et al.*, 2002; Chaskin, 2001; Gruber, 1994; Khakee, 2002). As this capital grows and spreads through collaboration into interlocking circles and networks, the civic capacity of a society grows and participants become more knowledgeable and competent, and believe more in their ability to make a difference. In a study of four Los Angeles community collaborations, for example, researchers found citizens became more competent, increased their expectations for services, and were no longer seen by agency staff as 'unreasonable' or 'irrational' but rather as an experienced group to be reckoned with (Mandell, 1999). In a Brookings study of civic infrastructure researchers found similarly that "In Cleveland a multifaceted and overlapping network of CDC's urban development funds, and foundations fosters a vibrant market place for community development projects" and brings in massive private funding, whereas in another comparable city where a major foundation dominates and a third where the public sector dominates, far less funding has been generated. The study attributes the contrast to the relative strength of their community building institutions (Bogart, 2003).

A New Paradigm for Participation

Instead of seeing participation as citizens and government in a formal, at most two-way,

interaction where citizens react to proposals from government, this article contends that participation should be seen as a muliti-way interaction in which citizens and other players work and talk in formal and informal ways to influence action in the public arena before it is virtually a foregone conclusion. This framing is based on the observation first that governance is no longer only about government but now involves fluid action and power distributed widely in society. The authors share Hajer & Wagenaar's view that "A new range of political practices has emerged between institutional layers of the state and between state institutions and societal organizations" (2003, p. 1). Effective participation requires a systems perspective that supports and builds on the interactions among public sector agencies, non-profits, business organizations, advocacy groups and foundations which make up the complex evolving reality of contemporary society.

This framing is also based on extensive research, such as that cited above, which demonstrates that when the conditions for authentic dialogue are met, genuine learning takes place; trust and social capital can be built; the quality, understanding and acceptance of information can be increased; jointly developed objectives and solutions with joint gain can emerge; and innovative approaches to seemingly intractable problems can be developed (Innes & Booher, 1999b; Innes, 2004). Even when the conditions are not all met, social capital and trust begin to develop through inclusion, deliberation, social learning and co-operation (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2001). These in turn can lay the foundation for further outcomes. At the very least results are more satisfactory in terms of the objectives of participation than the polarization and anger that so often emerges from non-collaborative methods.

Finally, this framing is based on the reality of the globalized network society (Castells, 1996). In contemporary times hierarchical authority is increasingly less effective. Instead, authority and power are fragmented, and information flows through networks. If actors have worked collaboratively they are able to develop shared heuristics, joint objectives and shared knowledge and meanings. These provide the basis for building and maintaining new networks which create their own forms of power and action (Booher & Innes, 2002). In the model citizens must be part of such networks and thus be part of the action themselves.

The new model does not look much like the one enshrined in US institutions. This is a model where citizens participate in public choice and action in many arenas. They participate as individuals or through representatives of their interests. All sectors of the community are represented rather than just the most organized or the angriest or those with the narrowest interests. If this dialogue is done well, even when someone does not like the final result they may accept the fairness of the decision if they have had some impact on the final package. They can see what their impact is because of the transparency of the dialogue and openness of the conclusions (Roberts, 2002b). In Davis, for example, the final budget proposal, which would not have been acceptable to almost anyone prior to the dialogue, was widely accepted by all parties and the larger community. In Cincinnati too, while everything was not solved in the first year, the dialogues changed the climate and the potential for dealing with later issues in constructive ways.

Collaborative participation is an ideal which will never be fully attained, any more than is the ideal of participation embodied in the public hearing and review and comment procedures which depends on an informed citizenry and responsive bureaucracy, but it has more promise for dealing with the dilemmas of participation in contemporary society. It is a model where participants often say "you leave your guns

at the door". In dialogues the war metaphor is replaced by more peaceable language (Thompson, 1997). Participants live and act in two worlds, those of dialogue and the external partisan world. Collaborative participation can be more representative than other methods, but to assure that it is, it may be necessary to help disadvantaged groups organize into groups and select representatives to speak for them. These groups often need technical assistance so they can have equal voice with the more experienced and better funded interest groups. They may also need financial assistance so they can afford to attend meetings. Only a limited subset of citizens will ever participate in a full-fledged way, spending months or years in meetings, but many more can participate in one-time workshops and large dialogues. Larger groups can develop visions, sense of direction and priorities. Many techniques deal with large groups of citizens, including town meetings, interactive cable and web-based dialogues, citizen panels, workshops and focus groups (Lukensmeyer *et al.*, 2004; Susskind & Zion, 2002). These can be used in combination with smaller representative groups which follow-up to produce workable proposals.

Collaborative participation thus dissolves many dilemmas of theory and practice. For example, there is no need for citizens or planners to choose between the collective and individual interest. In these dialogues the effort to meet individual interests produces a collective interest, unlike the pluralist model, where individual interests are packaged without being integrated. In collaborative participation, interdependencies are uncovered and participants can discover how all may benefit from improving a resource (Innes, 1996). The issue of whether citizens know enough to be listened to also disappears as they become knowledgeable, and as agencies or other players work with them on participatory research and joint fact finding. Planners and citizens are far more likely to enjoy rather than hate this sort of participation as it can be an interesting learning experience. It is still fraught with emotions, but these methods allow venting and then moving on. Even when issues are not fully resolved, as in Cincinnati, they become less polarized as participants find common ground. Finally these processes help planners and administrators to become more in touch with their communities and citizens to understanding political and economic realities.

Ultimately the differences between the methods legally required in the US and collaborative approaches include: one-way talk vs. dialogue; elite or self-selected vs. diverse participants; reactive vs. involved at the outset; top-down education vs. mutually shared knowledge; one-shot activities vs. continuous engagement; and use for routine activities vs. for controversial choices. The authors believe that practice will increasingly be defined by the collaborative model because it better serves the purposes of participation. These methods allow decision makers to learn more accurately about preferences because participants are more representative and have more opportunity to provide thoughtful, informed input than in the standard required methods. They can incorporate citizen knowledge into the collaboratively arrived at recommendations because citizens can place their knowledge in the larger context of what the experts and planners know and vice versa. The collaborative approach is more likely to advance fairness and justice goals if process designers and collaborative groups make sure that the dialogue is inclusive and that weaker stakeholders are given assistance to assure their effective representation. The authors believe this method has more legitimacy than the legally-required methods because it does so much better on these purposes.

Legitimacy of the collaborative methods, however, will remain contested until they have proved themselves more widely. In the US, institutions have been in place for decades supporting the old methods and actually equating participation with public

hearing and comment procedures. The two approaches will coexist, and public sector decisions made through collaboration will continue to be reviewed through these conventional procedures (Marshall & Ozawa, forthcoming). If collaborative methods have been properly implemented however, it is likely that few members of the public will turn out at hearings to complain.

Collaborative participation can help build civic capacity at least among community leaders and they can spread it to their circles of associates. This capacity in turn has the potential to create a more intelligent society, better able to adapt quickly to changes in the conditions and more competent to address controversial, difficult issues (Innes & Booher, 1999a). Dryzek (2000) contends that collaborative processes could co-opt the citizenry and argues that the polity and civil society should remain distinct and to some degree oppositional to preserve democracy. However, in our model the contention is that this too is not a dichotomy. Some citizens become more integrated into the polity while others develop skills and knowledge to challenge the powers that be in more sophisticated ways. Both are needed.

Next Steps

In the US there are many obstacles to implementing collaborative participation, including:

- open meetings laws;
- *Robert's Rules of Order*, which forces votes, divisions and partisanship instead of the seeking of common ground and building social capital (Susskind, 1999);
- the hubris of elected officials who fear loss of their authority;
- the limited time citizens can give to collaboration;
- the disadvantaged groups who lack the resources to participate;
- the lack of collaborative skills among planners and citizens;
- the lack of opportunity for genuine dialogue among competing stakeholders;
- the costs of staffing collaborative efforts, and
- the well-entrenched institutions of public decision making which many will resist changing.

Political interests want to retain control as they did when a collaborative growth management effort among major stakeholders in California failed to produce results in great part because of a simultaneous and competing effort in the Governor's office (Innes, 1994). However, by contrast, the governor of New Jersey in the late 1980s announced he would support a state growth management plan, provided it was arrived at by all key stakeholders. A five-year collaborative process involving representatives of all interests, along with engagement of 50 000 citizens, resulted in a plan which was adopted by the legislature and implemented by agencies (Gualini, 2001; Innes, 1992).

The obstacles to collaborative participation are considerable, but they can be overcome. The most basic starting point, however, is to recognize that many situations are not appropriate for collaborative methods in the first place. Before undertaking a collaborative effort, planners must make sure a conflict assessment is done (Susskind *et al.*, 1999, Ch. 2) to find the obstacles and determine whether they can be overcome. This identifies the potential stakeholders and their interests and resources. It then looks at the costs and at the potential political opposition or support for such an effort and assesses the likelihood that agreements reached will have an impact. Such a study must make a comparison between a realistic estimate of staffing costs and technical assistance in a

collaborative process with the costs of litigation, delay and continuing conflict. While properly done collaborative methods may seem costly (for example, the 4000-person workshop conducted for planning for the World Trade Center site in New York cost $400 per person for recruitment of diverse participants, preparation of balanced information for participants, technical equipment for recording discussion and networking the groups, and the staffing),[3] the costs of not using such methods can be even greater (developers were planning investments of many millions of dollars that were being delayed by seemingly intractable conflict over the plans and the citizens were deeply divided over this emotional issue).

Public agencies now mired in conflict with stakeholders or other agencies can explore changes in procedures that encourage deliberative processes, as has been done in California, where 28 state and federal agencies now collaborate among themselves and with stakeholders to manage the state's precious and limited water resources after generations of conflict. They can provide resources and structure to assure inclusion of disadvantaged groups (Verba *et al.*, 1995). These groups themselves can build their own countervailing power by a variety of means to create what Fung & Wright (2003) call "empowered participatory governance." Government or private organizations with the power and desire to prepare plans, solve problems or implement development ideas may create the spaces—the forums and arenas—where dialogue can take place (Bryson & Crosby, 1993). They may design and sponsor dialogues or simply make clear that they will take seriously the work of widely representative collaborative efforts as did the Governor of New Jersey. Foundations, government and private sector actors can provide staff and funding. Educators should provide training to planners and public officials in designing and managing collaborative methods. Scholars should do more systematic research to demonstrate how, when and why collaborative methods work or do not work.

Ultimately, institutional change will be needed which will be neither rapid nor easy. It will require creativity as situations must be addressed one at a time. The authors believe that through the agency of planners and leaders who want to establish new practices, over time the structures will evolve. Citizens need to make a difference and planners need to believe their work is professionally responsible. Both need to feel that participation is fair, representative, well informed and transparent. Collaborative participation can help in all these ways.

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Notes

1   One notable exception is James Bohman's *Public Deliberation* (Bohman, 1996).
2   One of the authors served as the neutral chair/facilitator of the Commission.
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