

“Holistic Democracy” and Citizen Motivation To Use a More Holistic Approach to Public Decision Making

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Abstract: The broad focus of this paper and the study about which it reports centre on the implications of applying holistic approaches to democracy, or more specifically to public decision making practices. This paper advocates that more complex and holistic methods be used to respond to the complexities of global issues. It describes how these processes take more time, commitment, and structure to use and it raises a question regarding citizen motivation to use such processes. It addresses this question in three ways: It presents a term 3D Democracy that highlights this complexity; it discusses why public processes need to address the task of decision making, and it reports on a small case study. Results of that study indicate that using critical reflection and deliberation on the adequacy of current methods of public involvement in decision making can stimulate citizens to be interested in and motivated to use such a holistic method. The paper ends with reflections and further questions.

Keywords: adult development, complexity, decision making, democracy, holistic, motivation, public deliberation.

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Introduction

If you ask any group of people anywhere in the world, "How many of you woke up this morning with the intention of destroying the world?" nobody would raise their hand. So if we're doing it without intention and yet we're doing it anyway, it means that it's imbedded in how we do things as opposed to being something that we want to do. And that tells me it can be reversed.

Paul Hawken, author of *The Ecology of Commerce*²

General Overview

The broad focus of this article centers on the implications of applying holistic thinking to democracy or, more specifically, to public decision-making practices. This paper advocates that if we are to make the best use of public insight and innovation in resolving the complex local and global challenges of these times, we need processes of public engagement that meet at least the following criteria, where they:

- Adequately address the full complexity of the issues involved, while avoiding a propensity for simplistic formulations, either/or polarities, and band-aid solutions.
- Engage the general public including the various diverse stakeholders at a level of competence that supports their contributions and renders them to be of optimal value.
- Motivate and enable such participation to accurately analyze, name, frame, and deliberate in order to make decisions about actions that may resolve issues.
- Accomplish this within the time, talent, knowledge, budget, and other constraints of resources and power inherent in the public situation, in the participants, and in the conveners of such processes.

In addressing these criteria three empirical questions surface.

1. Can members of the general public, with adequate support, deliberate collaboratively and competently enough to tap the diversity of experience and wisdom as they collectively have to offer, and gain such commitment and support for change as the issues they are addressing may demand?
2. Can the complexity of these issues be framed and presented in such a way that this competence can be adequately engaged to create relevant, useful, and sustainable outcomes?
3. Can the process itself be presented in such a way that supports understanding and justification of its use?
4. Will members of the public be motivated to take the time and put forth the effort needed to make such contributions as often as may be needed if the daunting public challenges, both local and global, are to be met?

² As quoted by Montagne, C. (2010, n.p.).

The first portion of the paper offers an analysis of the theoretical perspectives that inform these criteria, and a brief survey of the relevant literature. It then offers three responses to the empirical questions: (a) the conceptualization of the term “3D Democracy” to support participants’ understanding of the need for a holistic multidimensional approach, (b) the distinction of processes designed to support decision making, and (c) a report on the findings of a small scale public deliberation in which a facilitated method of critical reflection and deliberation based on holistic principles was used to test its impact on people’s motivation to subsequently consider using a more in-depth approach to public decision making.

To provide the context for this study, this next section will outline my own motivations and background and describe the challenges of current public decision making processes as well as the challenges of introducing a holistic method to the public.

Background and Motivations: Personal and Global

For many years, I have focused on trying to understand how we—humanity—could allow ourselves to destroy life through climate change and other related issues. Through my work as a psychotherapist for many years, I could see how some individuals could, with support, become aware of their personal issues and eventually change their patterns of perception and actions in a way that could alleviate many of those issues. But with growing awareness of social issues, it started to seem insufficient to continue working just on an individual level when total system change seemed to be necessary. However, transferring this awareness to a collective level, especially in the public sphere such as in our responses to climate change, seemed much more complex to undertake. Over the years I studied different theories of how social change occurs, sensing that our current ways of organizing ourselves, especially within the environmental or social justice movement, were obviously not adequate, as these situations were not changing for the better. How those in these movements viewed issues, set priorities, and made choices regarding actions did not seem to match the complexity of the challenges we faced as a culture. My experience in community development at a grassroots level revealed that people’s involvement often descended to the lowest common denominator of fighting to promote one’s own biased perspective, or blaming others for their perspectives. If solutions were presented, they often promoted simplified, short-term, band-aid actions.

Although I considered myself an activist and wanted to be part of positive responses to climate change or social justice issues, I found I could not keep attending those kinds of dysfunctional meetings. Even facilitated conversation café’s, where people at least were polite, left me feeling hopeless that we could ever develop the level of understanding and depth of decisions needed to create comprehensive change. Although I was trained in such techniques as consensus, mediation, and Bohmian dialogue, my own attempts at facilitating what I hoped would be more beneficial forms of engagement seemed to flounder. At that time I lacked the “container” I believed was needed to support the quality of talking, thinking, making meaning, deciding, and acting together. By “container,” I mean an intentionally planned discourse process designed to support interactions that resulted in more functional outcomes. Such a container or scaffolding is needed to generate effective approaches amidst the diversity of opinions and the complexity of issues.

This article is written in this context of complexity of social, economic and ecological issues, especially those under the banner of climate change, which are apparently increasing more rapidly than our collective capacity to effectively respond (Kegan, 2000; Rosenberg, 2002). This gap became overtly apparent to those who witnessed the proceedings of the UN conference on Climate Change at Copenhagen in 2009 (Randall, 2010) or in Cancun in 2010. Such systemic issues require systemic responses if we are to get beyond bandage interventions with their unintended and often disastrous results (Ross, 2006). Commonly-used civic engagement approaches such as voting, town hall meetings, or more recently popular, dialogue cafes, seem unable to support the level of issue analysis and decision making that systemic issues require. Although important civic events, they offer short term, fragmented glimpses of issues that need more from us. There are few, if any, participatory methods available through which we can collectively come to understand the complexities and implications associated with the whole issue before we are faced with making decisions about it (Inglis, 2007).

Awareness of this growing “gap” between the complexity of public issues and the simplicity of the processes available to address them (Inglis & Steele, 2005), plus my in-depth research and inquiry over several years, culminated in my studying a deliberative process for use in public decision making.. This process researched and developed by Sara Ross (2007) drew on research in complexity science, adult cognitive development and behavioural sciences as applied to analysis of complex public issues. More information regarding this process is provided in the literature review, below.

In the past six years, I have engaged with several pilot projects based on this method. In all cases, I observed that participants were motivated when initially engaged, but getting people to want to invest in a new and unknown process was a very difficult first step. Also sustaining their motivation throughout the lengthy and new process was often challenged by them losing the orientation regarding how what they were doing related to their initial motivation. A more comprehensive process such as this requires much more commitment to time, focus, and structure than typical public engagement methods (Inglis, 2008). Several progressive steps designed to assist people to see issues in a larger interconnected context are needed so participants can analyze causes, weigh out approaches to solutions, anticipate differences in viewpoints and consider trade-offs they are willing to live with. This larger context also includes recognizing that our personal attitudes, values, and actions as well as our institutionalized attitudes, values, and actions are part of how we create and maintain problems. Arriving at this level of systemic understanding and ownership is hard and often “messy” work that needs to be intentionally and effectively supported by the process design and facilitation (Ross, 2006).

The public challenges we currently face are immense, and decision making is hard work, and there seems to be no way around either of these facts. But bad news of immense challenges and committing to this kind of hard messy work are hardly attractive motivators to engage ordinary folk. Therefore the question of how to introduce a new, more complex process in a way that would make sense to citizens and motivate them to try it out has been a barrier I felt needed to be addressed. Below I present a term, 3D Democracy, define a hypothesis regarding citizen motivation, and present a small study used to test that hypothesis.

Throughout this article, I have turned to holistic science theory and action research by describing and reflecting on methods that are dynamic, relational, participatory, multidimensional, complex, emergent, developmental, and engage the whole by moving through the parts.

The Term 3D Democracy

To make the significance of a substantively different process for engagement more perceptible to the general public, I eventually developed the term *3D Democracy*. This term attempts to support citizen reflection by graphically highlighting why more dimensions for tackling their issues are needed than what the usual “flat” term of democracy offers: addressing the depth of interconnected root causes, the breadth of multiple perspectives and length (short or long term) of responses. This critical reflection on current often reductionist, two-dimensional processes (e.g., win/lose polarities and yes/no voting) may potentially seed the necessity for more holistic multi dimensional, multi perspective approaches to civic decision-making when dealing with complex issues. For those seeking the theoretical roots that underlies this work, the term *3D Democracy* also captures the need for three D’s: it is the **d**evelopmentally **d**esigned and **d**eliberative nature that can adequately support citizens to walk together through the complex steps necessary to arrive at well- informed decisions and to take effective actions.

The term is also useful to raise awareness of what we may call a “third dimension,” one that is beyond the two common dimensions of “public” and “private”, namely the dimension of the “commons.” Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Prize winner, explains this dimension in her seminal work, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action. About the significance of public process in the protection of shared resources*, where she said “if the community doesn’t have a good way of communicating with each other or the costs of self-organization are too high, then they won’t organize, and there will be failures” (Korten, 2010. n.p).

Many public engagement processes wish to support comprehensive actions but skip the step of making collective decisions that could result in those collective actions (Inglis, 2007). Therefore, it is sensible to use the next section to highlight this distinguishing component and surface its logic in relation to the public engagement criteria presented previously.

Why the Focus on “Decisions”?

Oil spills, sprawl of cities over agricultural land, migration policies, and water use all represent situations in which decisions are made that impact the public and the environment. We often miss the significance of these watershed points. To see ourselves as actively impacting decisions, either through conscious participation or not, can move us from viewing ourselves as victims of outside forces to active participants in co-creating our life situations. This is especially important when considering the choices facing us in relationship to climate change.

However, people are seldom aware of how complex the process of decision making is personally, let alone collectively. If we are to respond adequately to the complexity of climate change issues or any complex issue, we must make *collective* decisions, some of which will be quite difficult, about priorities, policies, and actions. It therefore is important to amplify the significance of this often-overlooked process of making public decisions, the very essence of democracy, and offer ways to observe, understand, and thus support comprehensive decision making.

Considering the severity of many of our local and global issues, it is no wonder that people want to take immediate concrete action. There is often impatience with sitting in meetings and talking. If people do not comprehend the sequential steps needed to develop sound public

solutions, there can often be a sense that simple solutions should just appear, as if dropped into the room. However, before taking action, there has to be decisions by several people (unless we are in a dictatorship) to take the action. Before these decisions can be made, there need to be relevant options available to decide upon. Before these options for solutions are identified or created, there needs to be shared understanding amongst those most involved regarding the diverse causes of the problem.

Problems are often labelled under big sweeping categories, so before these causes can be understood there needs to be agreements on which aspect of which “problem” we assume we are actually discussing. In addition, everyone understandably sees things through their own lens of experiences and values. Therefore all of these steps are influenced by diverse perspectives that need to be included. Taking actions will likely have implications that also need to be considered. If we attempt to shortcut any of these sequential steps, our actions may not get at the systemic roots of the issues and merely offer bandage treatments. To undertake these steps well requires patience, time, and structured processes to support our best selves coming forward. Decision making, if we want satisfactory results, will require more from us than many are used to giving and there seems to be no way to shortcut this investment if we do not want to incur unintended consequences or sabotage by those who feel their voices were left out. There is a tension between taking adequate time to deliberate on such issues, in our “business as usual lives,” and the realization that we are running out of planetary time, especially when facing pressing, rapidly increasing and catastrophic issues.

The Hypothesis Regarding Citizen Motivation

The focus of the rest of this paper is the following hypothesis: (a) shared reflection by members of the public on the usual approaches to and past experiences with public participation, and (b) consideration of other approaches, systematically presented, may (c) lead to new interest and willingness to exert the effort required to participate in more demanding but more rewarding participatory methodologies. The aim of the action research reported here, carried out with a small group of community residents, was to test in a preliminary way, whether a facilitated structured deliberative process designed to elicit critical reflection on current public engagement and decision making processes would indeed arouse the interest and motivation to use a more adequate, if more demanding, holistic public process.

Next, I provide definitions of the key terms used throughout this writing. Then, the remainder of this article is organized in the following sections: a description of the theoretical context, a literature review of significant materials, an outline of the methodology used in the study, and an analysis of the findings. Copies of the materials used in the public process are supplied in appendices.

Definitions

As orientation, I have provided a list of definitions I am using in this paper.

Civic Engagement: interactions in the local, regional, national, and/or international communities to which citizens and their chosen representatives belong, designed to identify and

address issues of public concern, as well as increase investment and ownership. Other terms commonly used are public involvement or participatory democracy.

Complex: made up of many interconnected or interwoven parts. In the realm of public issues, this would indicate the presence of many, often tangled elements that are usually not seen and, therefore, not addressed. A complex issue, due to these many aspects, is difficult to respond to by a yes or no vote, in response to a single simplified question, as are offered every few years through elections of referendums.

Deliberation: a method for deep consideration or weighing out of options and implications prior to arriving at a decision. Public deliberation is a specific form of civic engagement and can be referred to as *deliberative democracy*.

Emergence: coming into existence of a new property or properties due to the interaction of sub elements. The properties of the new phenomena cannot necessarily be predicted from the properties of the sub elements.

Holistic: philosophies and methodologies that support an integrated, systemic approach that includes context, complexity, emergence, and intrinsic qualities of relationships amongst the phenomena. These recognize that complex systems have “emergent properties” that describe their characteristics as wholes and that these properties are conditioned, but not determined, by the system’s constituent parts.

Perspectives: ways of perceiving or points of view influenced by life experiences and conditions. Different and valid perspectives both naturally arise from different life experiences and create different life experiences. These can be referred to as frames or approaches.

Systemic thinking: seeing interconnections of elements involved within a context. Systemic thinking includes awareness of cycles or networks, accepting counter intuitive effects and reducing unintended consequences by considering gaps and implications (Ison, 2008).

Literature Review

Included below is relevant material related to holistic science and democracy, deliberation and citizen motivation.

Holistic Science

As I have advocated the use of a holistic approach, I here include the relevant literature relating to the science underpinning that approach.

Holistic science is often defined by how it differs from reductionist science³, but its particular definition differs according to the scholar. Henri Bortoft (1986), Rudolf Steiner (1998), David Seamon (2003), and Margaret Colquhoun (1996), for example, expand on the 18th century work of Wolfgang von Goethe, who emphasized a science of qualities, relationships of “intrinsic necessity” and the importance of coming to know the existence of the whole through the

³ See Schumacher College: What is Holistic Science <http://www.schumachercollege.org.uk/courses/why-holistic-science>

understanding of the parts. Goethe, in his exploration of colour understood that perceiving colour was really a perception of relationships, as no colour exists separately but always in a context, a contrast to Newton's sense of separate colours. In addition, he emphasized how the attention to distinguishing the detail of parts, such as leaves of a plant, served the understanding of how they functioned as an expression of the whole. To understand a plant both in its wholeness and its distinctions we can look for repetitive patterns that will help us answer the inquiry: "How do you grow?" Based on our detailed observation and inquiry we are able to move beyond a sense of fragmented bits of concrete stems and leaves to construct a meaning of the dynamic whole. I apply this as a useful metaphor later when describing the study group's process.

Holistic science has its basis in the natural sciences. However, holistic scientist Fritjof Capra indicates that systems thinking develops when we see patterns and connections in biology, a capacity which can be applied to social sciences. In exploring the implications to learning and communicating in both the biological science and social sciences, he builds on the work of biologist Humberto Maturana and social scientist Gregory Bateson. Both articulated a connection between perceiving difference and the development of cognition (Capra, 1996). Maturana felt it was the perturbations in relationship to the environment that triggered structural changes in an organism. Bateson indicated that the differences associated with these "perturbations" could be defined in terms of a hierarchy of logical types involving orders of abstraction in which higher levels are defined by the ability to organize lower levels and overcome the "contraries" or unresolved contradictions of the lower level. He expanded on these levels to create an organization of logical types as a way of noting how classification is used in all perceiving, thinking, learning, and communicating (Bateson, 1972). Bill Torbert (2004) built a bridge between types of logic commonly used, and ways we commonly structure talking. He proposed and researched the possibility that by reflecting on, and consciously structuring our ways of talking, we could transform personal actions, organizations, and politics.

Concepts from complexity science such as self-organization and emergence have created a vital connection between the natural sciences and social sciences (Francis, 2009). In relating complexity science to how people organize, Eoyang and Olsen (2001) suggest there are three interconnected conditions that influence a system to self-organize: (a) creating a container e.g., the intent and support for interactions and deliberation; (b) surfacing diversity and differences that stimulates creative response; and (c) increasing the frequency of transforming exchanges so feedback loops can reveal the consequences of our choices and also inform us as to who "we" are.

Although differing in some emphasis, all of these holistic scientists indicate that holistic science encompasses a non-linear approach that does not attempt to precisely predict, separate, or control information, knowledge, or outcomes. There is loose agreement that holistic science methodologies that support an integrated, systemic approach need to include understanding of context, complexity, emergence, and intrinsic relationships amongst the phenomena. There is recognition that complex systems have "emergent properties" that describe their characteristics as wholes and that these properties are conditioned, but not determined by, the system's constituent parts. It is understood that people's perceptions, especially those of scientists, impact what is being seen and interpreted and are, therefore, part of the whole. Therefore, the subjective realm of interior beliefs, values, and motivations are considered to be as necessary to include in scientific

observations as more objective external data. Bateson promoted a subjective approach but also cautioned against the often sloppy definitions which can occur in behavioral science: “in scientific research you start from *two* beginnings, each of which has its *own* authority: the observations cannot be denied, and the fundamentals must be fitted[otherwise you] add to the existing jungle of half baked hypothesis” (Bateson 1972, p. xxi).

Democracy, Deliberation and Public Motivation

Central to the question under investigation here is the extent to which the public is, or can become, both willing and able to engage in public discourse at a level complex enough to make real contributions to the solution of public problems. Two organizations in particular have pulled together a substantial body of practice addressing public engagement processes: the National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation, and the Kettering Foundation. There are also several individual researchers and practitioners proficient in this field including Atlee (1999), Bohman (2000), Delli Carpini et al (2004), Fishkin (1991), Gastil (2008), Rosenberg (2002), Ross (2006), and Yankelovich (1991). They point out the difficulty of current public decision making whilst describing the need for, as well as challenges of, public discussion.

Tom Atlee refers to holistic politics (1999) or integral politics (2010) defining holism as the need for inclusivity and coherence of the parts and the wholes. He advocates that politics, where one part is fighting against another part, cannot achieve this holism. In response to a building disillusionment with democratic practices, Bohman (2000) argues that deliberation can support democracy by improving responses to the complexity, pluralism, and inequalities of society. He challenges assumptions that the public is “unreasonable,” by saying that people are often not supported in discursive situations where they can use their reason, or, as Kant would say their “enlarged capacity for thought.” Both Fishkin (1991) and Yankelovich (1991) have argued for and demonstrated the potential for the public to successfully deliberate issues before arriving at a decision. Yankelovich has shown that when people are presented with complex issues to consider, they can change their views over time, with the right forms of support for doing so. From his research he observed that people’s views regarding an issue will, through focused engagement on an issue, progress through predictable steps from spontaneous, re-active individual opinions to more considered deeper public judgments.

Developmental psychologist Shawn Rosenberg (2002, 2007) has applied an adult developmental lens to public decision making and especially deliberation. He argues that the reason we have challenges in public engagement is that the requirements of participatory democracy are beyond the developmental capacities of many citizens. The ability to collectively analyze a complex public issue, reflect on and communicate one’s ideas, understand and be concerned about the perspective of others, are all necessary skills in order for people to engage effectively with each other around complex public issues. He suggests that these requirements are simply beyond the developmental capacities of many individuals and social groups. At the same time he also holds out the hope that well facilitated public deliberations can potentially support the development and engagement of these capacities and thus offer citizens a better chance at responding to the complexities facing them in the 21st century. Although Rosenberg’s (2002, 2007) theories address an area close to that of my inquiry, they do not however appear to have yet been translated into descriptions of, or research regarding, applied methods for how that

facilitation would be implemented or how citizens might be motivated to use such methods (Rosenberg, 2009).

The key to effective engagement of diverse participants then is good design and facilitation. Deliberative processes can shake people out of the cognitive shortcuts typically used to frame day-to-day problems. As a result of moving out of this comfortable pattern, anxiety and frustration can be provoked, especially if the process that participants are using does not seem to be providing any new short cuts and simple solutions (Ryfe, 2005). To be willing to engage with this kind of frustration people would need to be highly motivated. At the same time, frustration itself, when tied to high stakes and handled properly, can increase motivation. Thus, Stephen Tyler, when discussing multi stakeholder deliberations has pointed out

Cognitive and cultural theory suggests that when the decisions are important and the participants have a meaningful stake in the outcome (that is, stakes are high and the stakeholders are at the table), they are likely to be more motivated. In addition, motivation is enhanced by accountability to others, by a sense of threatened interests and by engagement with others who have different perspectives. All these factors are socially and culturally constructed, therefore the nature of deliberative processes must match its social and cultural context. (Tyler, 2009, p. 5).

A case study was done regarding the progressive effect of deliberation on the public's views of priorities in health care (Dolan et al, 1998). The researchers concluded that “The public's views about setting priorities in health care are systematically different when they have been given an opportunity to discuss the issues. If the considered opinions of the general public are required, surveys that do not allow respondents time or opportunity for reflection may be of doubtful value” (Dolan et al, 1998, p. 916). Due to the discussion, participants saw the complexity of the issue that then caused them to change their original sense of priorities. However, participants did not go the next step and resolve their differences regarding these priorities. The methodology was not a holistic one by my definition, nor did the facilitators offer the group any structure to guide their deliberation or to arrive at decisions that could potentially transform the old perceptions and actions.

The research of Sara Ross was closest to my own focus. In her doctoral dissertation, Ross (Ross, 2007) addresses citizen hope and motivation to work on specific problematic issues as a result of going through several steps of issue analysis and deliberation. Whereas my question was more related to how citizens might come to understand the need for engaging in such a time consuming and comprehensive process to public decision making

Ross (2006) offers a methodology for public deliberation that specifically takes on the need for complex thinking when responding to complex public issues, and the realities of the developmental differences that such deliberations must support if a wide enough diversity of publics are to be engaged. Her method addresses both the need for progressive steps as well as the need for structure and facilitation that supports motivation. Based on the work of Commons et al (1998), she defined the precise progression of steps involved in supporting citizen deliberation. The progressive steps are drawn from research in adult development, behavioral sciences, and complexity theory. Her preliminary research, summarizing and integrating these sources, suggest

that there is a recurring pattern in the steps people go through in confronting complex issues, one that is fractal in nature and occurs across different scales of decision making from personal to organization to cultural (Ross, 2008, 2009).

To illustrate these steps, here is a simple example, regarding buying a car. A would-be purchaser moves from *thesis* (e.g. “I will buy a car”), *antithesis* (“I can’t afford a car”) to *oscillating* (“I have to choose between being carless or being poor”), to a *chaotic* or “smash” state (Commons & Richards, 2002) where new options are tested and adjusted to see if they can possibly fit to satisfy the initial need (buy a used car, high maintenance fees, borrow friends car, feel beholden). When carried out fully, such a sequential process can lead eventually to a more coherent state of synthesis expressed by an often unexpected solution that satisfies all of the presenting conditions (joining a car co-op - ta da!). This solution was not even among the options initially considered available, but emerges due to the focused consideration of the parts.

Such a process may repeat cyclically and with more complexity. With each repetition, as new information is encountered, the synthesis becomes the new thesis and the cycle repeats, but now at a higher level of complexity. This progressive repetitive pattern of decision making operates over various scales, topics and situations. Ross argues strongly for the benefits and challenges of these decision steps, and their essential role in well-designed public discourse. As she has shown in her own empirical work, such a design provides the structure that can hold the tensions that arise between competing views, and support the process to move through a complete cycle, towards resolution or synthesis. Synthesis is possible only when the new option or approach successfully addresses the inadequacies of the other options. This theoretical model presents a detailed and developmental understanding of what occurs in the phenomenon of emergence resulting in new solutions to old issues. Ross’ (2006) preliminary research on this process that she calls The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues (TIP) would meet several of the criteria I defined as a holistic approach.

In contrast to this holistic approach, pioneer in decision analysis, Howard Raiffa went as far as saying “The spirit of decision analysis is divide and conquer: Decompose a complex problem into simpler problems, get one’s thinking straight in these problems, paste these analyses together with a logical glue, and come out with a program for action for the complex problem” (Raiffa, 1968. p. 271). Later, in a post-retirement article, he said he had been so enamored with the certainty he felt was offered through his earlier mathematical approach, that he had completely missed the boat regarding the many other aspects which underpin making complex decisions (Raiffa, 2002).

However, I find that the simplicity and reductionism of this divide and conquer mentality still pervades many of the conventional approaches to public decision making. The foregoing has provoked me to research the motivation for people to consider using a more holistic approach discussed below that can include and synthesize, not divide and conquer.

In summary, although there are rich fields of theory and research regarding (a) how individuals make decisions, (b) how these decision are impacted by reflection, (c) how public deliberation that includes reflection can support public decision making, and (d) how challenges occur in democracy, there is little about the public themselves reflecting on their current forms of

involvement in decision making to see how that might impact their motivation to use a holistic process. My study was intended to fill that gap by showing how a holistically designed process for public reflection on decision making prior to participants involving the public in decisions, might motivate them to use a holistic approach.

Study Methodology

A community group from a coastal city in England faced with the challenges of engaging their community around contentious public issues participated in the study. Using materials I designed for the study, I engaged this group in an intensive four-hour deliberation regarding common but different perspectives regarding how to engage a community.

Research Methods

I used a holistic method, including critical reflection and deliberation, to conduct a small, non-experimental preliminary test of my hypothesis that these experiences would increase interest and motivation to use a holistic approach to public decision making. The process I used was holistic in that it was designed to maximize interactions, support a comprehensive and integrated consideration of the diverse perspectives, contexts and layers of complexity of an issue, engage both subjective views and objective detail, stimulate shared inquiry and systemic thinking, and promote a new synthesis or whole to emerge through the detailed consideration of the parts. I hope that describing the step by step progression involved in this methodology will be helpful to other practitioners in the field of community engagement and social change.

I used a two-phase process of applied social research: a four-hour participant group session and follow-up interviews with individuals. As my research was based on non-numerical data, I used a qualitative analysis of qualitative data using empirical observation, and semi structured interview techniques (Bernard, 1999). My research findings should be viewed as preliminary due to the small convenience sample and the fact that I did not use a control group. All observations are my own, based on information I collected and analyzed, and reflections I made.

Group Selection

When considering my research project I was hoping to find an existing community group of about 9-12 members who were currently facing some community issues. I wished it to be an ongoing group versus an ad hoc group for two reasons. One was that an ongoing group would more likely be dealing with a real issue, common to all participants, instead of a more “armchair” conceptual issue created just for the research process. Also for integrity reasons, I wanted the process to be useful to the participants and did not want to raise issues where there was no ongoing process by which these could be addressed. In addition, a group with a defined boundary and identity would have more contained and continuous interactions. The group was composed of city and district councilors and community group representatives. They had been meeting for several months and had co-developed two documents regarding strategies and action plans. Their focus was to find ways to engage the whole community when facing community issues as there had been a history of fragmentation, competition, and bad feelings that was making coordinated

planning very difficult. This group and their concerns perfectly matched the focus of my research.

Although it fell on the first warm Saturday of the spring, nine members were committed to attending including the mayor, three councilors, and five community representatives. The town clerk indicated support by arranging for a room to be booked and snack food to be available.

Development of Materials

Prior to the session, I talked with six participants by phone to make sure I understood the nature and context of their specific concerns. I wanted to hear the potential differences in how those concerns might be framed amongst the group participants and to hear how they felt involvement in community decisions could occur.

Based on this information, as well as on previous background research into this issue, I created an “issue booklet” to guide their deliberation. An issue booklet provides a thorough and neutral way by which participants can consider the whole issue through looking at the multiple layers and perspectives associated with the issue. Since deliberation supports the deep consideration of an issue, it is helpful to have common, legitimate perspectives of what might be solutions to the issue in question clearly articulated for this consideration. The question that I used to focus the deliberation was *‘How should citizens be involved when important public decision need to be made?’* I used the template format for creating an issue booklet for deliberation created by Sara Ross (Ross, 2006) whose theoretical model and research I described in the literature review. It sketched out four common but very different (and potentially contentious) perspectives that could motivate people’s approaches to community involvement in decision-making. These perspectives are developmentally sequenced in the issue book.⁴ The main headings are as follows (See Appendix 1 for complete issue booklet):

- Approach 1: We advocate for the rights of our group when our needs are threatened
- Approach 2: We do our civic duty, vote for leaders, and assume they are accountable for making fair decisions
- Approach 3: We can make decision by being strategic and efficient in order to maximize opportunities
- Approach 4: We reach out and include as many people as possible to work together as a whole community

These differences, gathered from their concerns, illuminated the tensions that I assumed lay unresolved within the group, possibly blocking them from moving forward in their discussions on community involvement. Like the Goethian method of understanding the details of a leaf in order to understand how a plant grew, I was offering them a way to see the specific details of their communities’ viewpoints so they might have a more comprehensive understanding of how their issue grew. Each approach offered the underlying logic that motivated the differing actions people might choose to take in relationship to community decision making. The usual underlying logic, or orienting idea, becomes more explicit. This provides more information as to why people

⁴ For more information regarding the developmental sequencing see Inglis (2009).

might think and act differently and therefore the differences make more sense. This method offers a way for participants to consider differences in a focused, less fragmented manner without the threat or defensiveness that often arise from fearing differences. More energy can then be focused on inquiry and reflections regarding the impacts that different choices may incur. The group's consideration was supported or "scaffolded" through the presentation of very detailed observation of the "parts," or different natural perspectives, with the hypothesis that the sorting, critiquing, and comparing of these would help them consider their adequacy and co-construct their own synthesis or "whole," and more adequate approach.

Session Process

The issue booklet as well as an agenda (see Appendix 1) was sent to the group several days before the groups met. When we met, I clarified my role as facilitator: I would guide them through a structured process but I would not influence the substance of their discussion as that lay within their expertise. I also clarified the limitations of the process and the implication of the brevity of this session, emphasizing that the intent was not to magically "fix" the issues that day but to support their discussions. Based on a prior agreement the session was audio taped. We did an opening round in order to hear people's motivations regarding focusing on the question of public involvement in decision making and what they hoped to get out of the day. People were very eager to talk and it was difficult to stick to the "taking turns" format of a round or to staying on topic. Next, I gave an overview of what deliberation was, comparing their experiences in personal deliberation to public deliberation. To increase sensitivity to diverse viewpoints, I led participants through an experiential warm up exercise of assuming different perspectives. I presented a set of general group process guidelines regarding qualities of talking, listening, and taking turns and asked if they were in agreement to respect these, and this was affirmed.

Then we proceeded step by step through the issue booklet. Like a jury, giving each approach its just opportunity to be presented, fairly heard, and considered, they spent time focusing on each approach separately. At the beginning of each new approach, a different volunteer read out the descriptive information for that approach. Then they all took a few minutes of silence to allow for reflection on the implications of taking this approach before voicing their responses. This allowed for more considered responses and the breaking of a habitual behavior of immediately reacting in an opinionated way that can often happen in community groups. Then they each spoke saying what they felt about the benefits, concerns, and trade offs that might arise with each approach. I captured their thoughts under each of those headings by writing notes on a flip chart for all to see. This allowed them to see how they were building their own understanding of the parts. It allowed their thinking to be transparent to each other as it evolved, and documented a record of their progress. I later typed and emailed them these responses. I have included the table of their transcribed responses for each approach in the results section further below. It reflects their thoroughness and deep consideration, as well as indicates that none of these approaches appeared to be considered as being satisfactory on its own. This is important to note since, without this kind of reflection, people often take absolutist stances that indicate their own point of view *is* satisfactory and needs no further consideration.

After considering each approach, and facing their own reality that all of the options had benefits but also had some negative consequences, the group was asked to create some statements

of what conclusions they had reached. These comments were also written on the flip chart. The summary of these comments are described in the results section with details in Appendix 2. In general, without any prompting from me, the participants arrived at statements that described a comprehensive “whole” approach to how they wished involve the community in decision making. It was whole in that it included the implications of the other approaches.

People were very engaged, and it was difficult sticking within the time frame. The last portion of the deliberation of all of the approaches was pressed for adequate time and the next steps of planning how these conclusions would be carried forth into their next meetings and implemented unfortunately did not happen. We did an abbreviated closing round to capture reflections on the day. Participants, as well as I as facilitator, worked hard and ended the day being both tired and appreciative.

Follow Up Interviews

Between four to five weeks later I emailed the same six participants I had spoken to prior to the meeting and sent them an outline of interview questions (see Appendix 3). I was able to reach only five participants. I set up dates for the interview and recorded their input. The purpose of my interview was to gather their perceptions regarding the process to ascertain if they perceived it as having value, and, if so, in what way. I specifically wanted to see if, based on their experience, they would express motivation to reuse such a process.

After the session, I compiled data using interpretations of qualitative analysis based on several aspects: my observations of individual participation and group relations during the session, content of material developed in the session, and interviews with individuals before and after the session.

Limitations of this Study

My case study findings were limited by the small group size. The length of the session and participant fatigue, which I discuss in more depth later, may have limited the quality of participant engagement and integration of their experiences. Time, location, and finances also limited my ability to extend the study to include control groups across several diverse communities. It also limited ongoing sessions with the study group in order to observe if or how the awareness and motivation present after the study session, continued to develop and inform their ongoing interactions.

Study Results

This section reports on the impacts that participants’ critical reflection and deliberation had on their interest and motivation for using holistic methods for public decision making. I will particularly highlight changes in their interactions, their consideration of the diverse perspectives, contexts, and interconnected layers of complexity regarding their issue, and the emergence of a new synthesis or holistic approach. As the process is developmental in nature, meaning that the

nature of participation changes through the stages of the session, I report on it sequentially. I begin with the various aspects of the group session and then the post session interviews.

Group Session

Why does this Matter?

The question in the opening round “why does considering this question today matter to you?” provides a baseline for the motivation to proceed into the session. It allows people to say why this topic matters and to hear why it might matter to others. It allows the inquiry to move from the topic as an abstraction to one that embodies their experiences. In response to the question, I observed that participants were very eager to talk about the frustration of civic life and the hopes for how a group such as theirs might make a difference. Some spoke of competing needs between the desire to gather community input, which was at times uninformed or wishful thinking, and the demands of getting on with making pragmatic “realistic” decisions. Some talked about times in which community consultation had been done but was not inclusive of everyone, or the results were not listened to by council. These frustrations with community decision making are common to civic life and can often block citizen’s motivation to continue to engage. Several participants found it easier to focus on what wasn’t working in their community than what was or might work.

Although I had clearly indicated and repeated that the purpose of the rounds was to do a short two to three minute statements of interest in the topic just to get us started, several people had difficulties keeping their remarks within that time frame or on that topic. Some also had difficulties taking turns and listening to others without breaking in and making side remarks, or even personal affronts. I observed that many comments were absolute statements about people or situations “out there” advocating generalizations of what should or shouldn’t have happened, with fewer offering more contextual and personal reflections. I could tell that these kinds of more open participatory process skills were a challenge for this group and the facial expression and body language indicated frustrations were being triggered. There also was laughter and positive energy. These types of interactions are also common to public meetings and impact citizens’ motivation and ability to inquire, reflect, and see the interconnecting patterns of their issues effectively. I felt I needed to be very active and firm as a facilitator to keep to the time, structure, and purpose of the session with the assumption that this would support their interactions while not stifling their very significant expression and input.

Perspective Taking

With some coaching and modeling, I observed that people were able to participate in the perspective taking exercise, telling personal stories of times when they had experienced a particular perspective that arose due to certain life conditions at that time. This exercise was intended to invite people to progress from single solution advocacy regarding external events, to being able to consider several approaches, a skill needed for the next stage. It can seed self-reflection as well as the possibility of realizing that ones internal perspective, as well as other peoples’ perspectives, can differ due to different circumstances. This realization potentially transfers to an openness if not awareness that there will naturally be different perspectives in the

community as well regarding public issues such as the one being deliberated that day: i.e. different approaches to community involvement in decision-making.

Critical Reflection and Deliberation of Different Approaches

The results of this section were derived from two aspects: the information created by the participants in response to their deliberation and my observations regarding their interactions and responses to the perturbations of being presented with distinctly different perspectives to the same issue.

Once we moved into the next steps, participants were focused on the joint task of analyzing the different approaches to the question of community engagement outlined in the issue booklet. I observed that their interactions indicated a sense of shared conversation and listening with interest to what others were saying. As by design there was no “right” answer expected, or no winners or losers anticipated, the tendency towards competition and defensiveness, apparent in the opening round, relaxed. As the different views were already voiced equally in the issue booklet, I interpreted their relaxation as meaning that individuals in the room did not feel they had to spend time defending certain views. People were given equal opportunity to talk and this seemed to build trust to engage more fully.

Figure 1 displays transcriptions of their deliberations of the four approaches, provided at this juncture because these provide context for further reporting on results.⁵

<i>How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?</i>	
Approach 1: We advocate for the rights of our group when our needs are threatened	
Benefits	Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This approach builds solidarity which feels good when you belong - It focuses peoples energy and thinking, provides safety for some - We find our voice, increase articulation - Learn how to make issue popular, provides skills in marketing, communication and engagement increases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The issue gets lost in the group dynamics - Increases emotional tension, attacks get personal - We can create long terms negative effects: creates outsiders, alienation, exclusion - There can be a mob energy, fear of hostility, suppresses many voices - People hijack process, circumventing decisions becomes habitual - People react before seeing the whole picture
<p>Trade-offs we would need to consider if this was our only approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We may increase our sense of belongingness but at a price of producing deep distrust and chronic negativity. - The more we use this approach the more repetitive it can become...we get in a reactive pattern. - We need to find our voice but after listening not before <p>Circumstances We might consider doing this if we could ensure conditions that could be positive, constructive, realistic and produce quality</p>	

⁵ See the full issue booklet in Appendix for the full context of the transcriptions. This context is not necessarily self-evident from Figure 1’s headings.

Approach 2: We do our civic duty, vote for leaders and assume they are accountable for making fair decisions	
Benefits	Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ordered, prevents chaos, I know what is expected of me. - Tried and trusted over a 100 years history of using this in which it has more or less worked - There is a clear manifesto. It does provide a system and gets something done. - We know that every 4 years there is a debate and a vote - It is a platform for us to have good leaders - We know who is accountable. - We know who we can blame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We don't get as much responsiveness or innovation, as quickly as we may need - Lack of motivation, flexibility - We do not include all voices, not include diversity - Subtle differences and culture nuances not reflected in a vote - Vote only 4 years, gives us no input into implementation of what we voted on, no way to make sure of follow through. - Focus is too much on one person, one leader - We do not chose who the civil servants are but they have influence - Only a few people vote so who really is represented (can fall into approach one) - Boundaries impact representation and so impact the issues
<p>Trade-offs we would need to consider if this was our only approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If we have "good" leadership this approach works well but if we do not then there is little we can do. (and there would be different views as to what "good" leadership was) - We get a majority vote but what happens to the minority (which could be 49%) Please some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. 	
Approach 3: We can make decisions by being strategic and efficient in order to maximize opportunities	
Benefits	Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We could have the best information, best experts and the best decisions - Strategic approaches help us form outcomes - When people are involved it increases - "our" expertise first then agreement and comfort - We get more "buy in" - There are people who are specialists or experts who can help us, bring in another view - Decisions which are evidenced based provides us with proof - Consultations can provide quality thoroughness and objectivity - We do need a decision making body that is strategic and efficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For approach 3 to work well we would need to have a good approach 2 in place - Marketing can be used to promote a bias - Some "scientific information is supposed to be sound" but holds a bias - Consultations take a long time and meanwhile peoples views may change making the consultation less useful - There is no guarantee that the experts cannot be bought or biased by those who fund them, done behind closed doors - There may be opportunities that we lose by taking this time - The consultant may not ask the right questions or deep enough questions in their surveys...we may miss saying what we need to
<p>Trade-offs we would need to consider if this was our only approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We may intend to do a lot of good consultation but the distrust or ".....city..... disease" may still prevent us from working together - We want the support of the expertise and evidence, but do not necessarily trust experts or evidence quality or objectivity. - Consultation can increase engagement but what happens if it does not get to the depth of our community issues that underlie our divisions or distrust. - We like the efficiency and possibilities but not to the point of cutting funds that support important public services - We may increase the community buy in but how do we know it has integrity and not been bought with a 	

bias Circumstances “Realpolitik”.... Keep the focus on the practical relevant issues and less on morals or ideologies	
Approach 4: We reach out and include as many people as possible to work together as a whole community	
Benefits	Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This approach could address so many of the concerns of the first three. It connects representative democracy with participative democracy. Without this approach, we can beat each other up all the time. - We get to hear more people, and get a broader concept of what is wanted other than just one source - This is fundamental to representative democracy - We will hear each others fears, and possibly decrease the fear of the unknown - If done well (would need to define what that means) we could heal the “...city... disease” - When we know our opinion is valued we are more willing to participate, then community has a sense of being valued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would depend on an effective Approach 2 (a representative government), and effective Approach 3 (getting people informed) - In an individualistic society we are not as concerned about how we all work together - We may be too busy to engage like this, and learn about the issue. And if we don’t engage and learn we may sabotage other decisions - We would need to really see the broad picture and the complexities to participate well. People differ in their ability to do this. - Lots of us take a stand on issues so would manipulate these participatory processes leading to more distrust - We may not see, or want to accept the realities of the options before us and the limitations that come with all options. Want a simple wish list and not want to deal with priorities, consequences, tradeoffs etc. - Do decisions actually get made in those processes? or do we just sit around and chat and get too self absorbed to deal with the issue? - Our city has to grow up, engage in consultation and be willing to live with the decisions that were made and not sabotage (or revert to Approach 1)
Tradeoffs we would need to consider if this was the only approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potentially more people can be involved but it works only if we are informed - Potentially more people can impact decisions but it works only if people know what they really want and can reach agreements - We can do a lot to attempt inclusion but it will not be perfect (and we have to live with that frustration) - We can include many people but cannot provide people with everything - We want more involvement but do we actually trust the vast majority of people to make good decisions? or trust our own engagement processes. - If we want a trustable process we would have to define and agree on principles and a design of what we think would make a process trustable. - Processes have to be done so that people can see the possible consequences of choices. 	
Circumstances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The size and importance of the decision and how if it concerns the whole community needs to be considered to see if this approach is necessary - How processes are designed makes a difference 	

Figure 1. Transcription of Group Deliberation of Four Approaches

Deliberation of the first approach: “*We advocate for the rights of our group when our needs are threatened*” was given a great deal of attention. Approach 1 captures the “us versus them” nature that characterizes and stalls many civic interactions. I observed that participants recognized the sentiments, benefits, and challenges of this approach, but in their spirited

discussion actually were falling unconsciously into demonstrating it. At times, the discussion looked like it could slide into taking sides and needing to air resentments about old issues. I could have stopped the discussion right then, focused on this element, and used it as a real time reflection point, regarding how their own interactions might mirror the difficulty with community interactions. However, I did not feel that I had established adequate trust with this group and nor had created adequate structure to support that discussion, so in the moment I did a quick internal deliberation, weighing out the options I could take as facilitator. I chose to go on with the agenda hoping that from the experience of reflecting on several more approaches they might recognize that their concern was in fact included fairly in the issue booklet. I also hoped that the structured shared reflection might be of benefit. I attempted to be transparent on how I arrived at the choice I was taking, stating that their frustrations and history were obviously important and needed to be addressed, but in order to do so satisfactorily we would need the support of a different meeting, designed for this purpose. This seemed to make sense to the group and we proceeded. There seemed to be motivation, interest, and energy to move onto deliberating the next approaches.

Relevance is connected to motivation and based on their discussion it seemed that participants saw the material in the issue booklet as relevant to their concerns: they recognized the values and actions of each approach and found validity in naming and discussing the benefits and challenges and trade offs of each. In addition, they related the approaches to specific examples that happened in their community. The time restraint of the four-hour session meant that the discussion regarding each approach had to be curtailed in order to move on. However, it did appear that they were using critical reflection regarding the context, interconnected layers and complexity that came with each approach and the adequacy of different approaches to meet their needs for community decision making.

In general, people appeared to like Approach 4: “*We reach out and include as many people as possible to work together as a whole community*” as it seemed to address the concerns they raised about the previous three approaches. They also saw the difficulties inherent in using it, which would need to be resolved for this approach to be satisfactory for them (taking too long, never making decisions, potential of manipulation, etc.). By the time we reached Approach 4, the quality of discussion had changed amongst most participants. There were voluntary silences in which people seemed quite pensive. This was a very different quality than the more assertive and reactive statements being made without deeper considerations noted at the beginning. People in general were building more on each others’ points or looking to fill in gaps they noticed amongst their exchanges, than looking to declare and defend their own statements. Overall, they appeared to be more in relation with the issue and with each other. However, it also was getting late, and the analysis had taken a lot of focus. Some people may have been getting fatigued and potentially “losing the plot” or overview of what we were attempting to do as they at times reverted to trying to focus on the details of their concrete “what’s,” i.e., recounting stories of distrust regarding old contentious issues, instead of looking at some of the process “how’s” i.e., ways this present session could be used to co-develop approaches so those issues could be better addressed.

This attitude seemed to reflect a deeply entrenched assumption that some things could not be trusted, and that one had to always maintain a vigilant stance. It created frustration in the group. This dynamic can commonly develop in public life when people do not feel themselves a part of

public agreements to take actions. I realized that this stance introduced another sub issue for the group that also might need to be addressed. I will report the implications of this on the study results in the section on post interview questions.

An Emerging Synthesis

As we had adequately deliberated four approaches, we moved on to the task of seeing what, if any, conclusions they had reached to address the question *How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?* The focus of my observations was on whether this consideration of the benefits but incompleteness of these different “parts” or approaches would stimulate them to design something that would feel more complete. This step ascertains whether they can move beyond “smash” or the messiness of considering these several different, legitimate, but often competing approaches. Several summary statements were made that indicated a need to include the legitimacy of the previous approaches but also transcend the limitations that they had discussed. Examples include:

“We need to find a way that there is a two way street between an active engaged community and responsive elected officials. There needs to be mutual responsibility for this relationship otherwise issues and perspectives cannot be understood, our decisions cannot work or be trusted. We next need to find ways to put this principle into action.”

“We need to consider what combination of process will be good enough that all (community organizations, representatives, elected officials and the community) will engage with it.”

“If we did a good job of combining the best of 2, 3 and 4 we could reduce the need for, and problems which arise from # 1.”

It is unfortunate that time and energy limitations prevented further work together. With more time, participants might have fleshed out the details regarding actions that would operationalize these statements and developed specific agreements on what they wished to do next. However, the concluding statements they created indicated that a new *whole* had emerged from their consideration of the parts. It seems important to underline the fact that the points quoted above were not present at all in their pre-session interviews or in the deliberation of the separate approaches. The statements made hold the complex layers of their deliberation and arose from the interaction. This stage demonstrated their ability to create a synthesis, a new, more coherent, holistic option that they felt would more adequately meet their needs for public decision making.

Post Session Interviews

Although I emailed the questions ahead of time and used them as a guideline in my phone interview, the actual conversation was less linear or on topic. Of the five participants I interviewed, all were generally positive about their experience of having participated in the session, feeling it had been useful. They all indicated it was an energizing experience that held their attention. One person stated, “I left refreshed, feeling we had accomplished something.” All of them affirmed that it was a benefit to hear diverse views, saying it allowed them to know each

other better and know where they were coming from. Most felt this process would be beneficial for other community members and for other issues, stating that a broad group of the community would need to be involved to be representative of the community's voices. Two indicated it was a "high level discussion." Some said, although their group was motivated, they were concerned as to whether the community at large would be motivated or be able to talk at that level. Some recognized that this way of discussing was very different from how communities usually interact in public discussion. One person said: "People don't usually look at issues, discuss, or analyze. It just does not happen that way. People tend to make statements, they may seem like they are asking questions or want to discuss, but they are just statements. They are entrenched [in their views]." This could infer that being entrenched in one perspective impeded a more satisfactory holistic approach being created.

One participant said that most community meetings have an agenda and a chair who asks people to vote and there is no discussion or hearing of different viewpoints. In comparison this process "allowed people to be thoughtful of things they had not thought of before ...and it took us to a new place." One person said that "we could see after going through the different approaches that it was complex, no one approach is going to give us what we want...and we have to knit [them] into a coherent whole, we can't just mix and match."

Some remarks, gathered anecdotally from a participant, were made by two city officials who had wanted to attend the session but were unable. Based on what they read in the summary notes, what they heard from some participants, and what they experienced in the subsequent meeting, they were quoted as saying "they had missed something highly valuable." This same participant said that the process was too brief and needed two more sessions. She felt that right after the session there was motivation to commit to more sessions. However, in checking back with the group two months later, I understand that without facilitation, they have not been able to sustain their momentum or continue developing ways of implementing the holistic approach they had co-created during the session.

The stance of distrust taken by some participants during the session was mentioned in most of the interviews, seeming to divert them from being able to focus on what else was experienced in the session. Although these challenges were distracting and uncomfortable, one person said "I actually felt relief that the session showed the negativity: it was obvious." This seemed to infer that there had been an unnamed elephant in the room that, once surfaced, might now be dealt with more directly than was possible before. When further questioned, there did not seem to be a sense yet as to how this "negativity" came about (other than two participants attributing it to those individuals' personal failings) or how it would be worked with. Focusing on the challenge of how to respond to this distrust might have taken precedence for the group and put the outcomes of this sessions' work on the back burner.

In summary, the results indicated that based on their critical reflection and deliberation about current public decision making processes, participants were interested in and motivated to use a more holistic approach both for their group and for the community. They did see that both the conclusions they reached, and the process we used, were different from, and, for some, significantly better than, usual public interactions. However, the motivation did not translate into the group independently taking the next steps of further developing and applying this approach.

From these research results, it is inferred that further facilitated sessions may have been needed to incorporate this motivation and institutionalize a new praxis for their involvement in public decision making. In addition, another designed deliberative session, structured similarly to the one we used but using different content, might have been needed to assist them to create an approach for responding to the question “how to more effectively work together.”

Conclusions

This small research project used a holistic method of facilitated structured deliberation that supported critical reflection on current public engagement and decision making processes. The results indicate that the process did support the emergence of a more holistic approach and did positively influence the interest and motivation of participants to use a more holistic process again. This section provides a discussion of the key results offering reflections, interpretations, and implications.

Support for Reflection, and Transformational Learning

As suggested both by my literature review and by my observations, reflection is a capacity that cannot be taken for granted. However, it is a necessary capacity if more systemic holistic approaches to complex public issues are to be developed. The initial, more loosely-structured opening round of my research group showed that even basic capacities for interaction, let alone reflection, became strained in that unstructured context. Nevertheless, with structures such as the issue booklet and a trained facilitator supporting their reflection, they were able to interact in ways that allowed them to consider different perspectives and co-generate new ideas. Through the back and forth dance as Mezirow (1991) described, participants were able to reach coherence, between parts and wholes, current events, and habitual perspectives. Their resulting increased capacities to listen to each other and consider multiple perspectives appeared to be a primary motivator for them to have interest in using holistic process for future decision making. Based on observations, information from interviews, and anecdotal evidence, I believe that if I had been available to continue to facilitate this group, their motivation and interest would have been adequate to support their participation in the next steps.

This conclusion resolves a question about a “Catch 22” dilemma I have faced and described in part in the introduction: people cannot commit to using a new, more time-consuming method without experiencing what it entails and they cannot experience what it entails without committing time to do so. My study suggests that arranging a single session to work with a core community group that has influence in the community, and giving them a chance to experience the process through focusing on a motivating question, is a useful method to introduce a new process for public decision making. Once introduced to the process, people had the basis needed for committing to further steps. By deliberating multiple perspectives and trade offs for developing methods of public involvement in decision making *prior to* actually involving the public in a contentious decision, one may anticipate that unforeseen consequences could be decreased and involvement improved. Further research would be needed to indicate if reinforcing feedback loops would occur and more learning and motivation could result. The research results might support Habermas’ (1991) advocacy that increased ability for communicative action can provide the basis for a theory of social evolution and Ross’ (2006, 2007) research that political

development is fostered through developmentally structured analyses that culminate with designed public deliberation for systemic action. The results touch on further implications beyond the scope of this paper regarding social construction, namely that the developmental capacity to reach higher levels of thinking rests as much in the group as it does in the individuals that have participated in the group. (Vygotsky, 1978). The research results are consistent with Friere's (1993) emphasis on the significance of experiential learning. Holistic processes are not ones that can be taught or talked about just conceptually. They need to be experienced as they involve embodied internal transformations that cannot be attained when only described through abstract language (Reason, 2005). Telling most people that "by using deliberation based on an issue booklet of multiple approaches to decision-making they might see the complexity of their issues and arrive at more satisfactory methods for the group to move forward" has no context for most to understand. This has to be experienced. Shifting one's perspectives based on deeply considering the validity of another person's or group's perspectives, especially regarding a contentious public issue which holds many complex layers of values and habitual ways of behaving requires an embodied, internal transformation.

The Importance of Distinction and Articulation

When talking with participants I did not use the terms "holistic approaches" or "facilitated structured deliberation." I intentionally did not reduce the description of the process we used to an abstract label under which to pigeonhole the experience. However, from my observations I realized that participants had no quick way to describe their experience other than "what we did on Saturday morning" or "the group we did with Jan." Since the process entailed many aspects that were experienced differently by different members, I avoided describing it as one "thing." A trade off is that by not having a quick way to name and classify something, the experience may not be able to be retained, or promoted. There was no easy "branding." Possibly the use of the term 3D Democracy would have been helpful.

I saw that there are both benefits and concerns in reducing phenomena to abstract labels. As Bortoft (1996) said, categorization required for labeling something makes us focus too much on *what* we see, not the *act* of seeing itself. And it especially, I would add, makes us miss the co-action of seeing with others. If participants focused only on the written materials we created on that day, but not on what was involved *in the act* of creating them, then the process might not have been as useful and potentially replicable for them. This points to the need for reflective rounds at the end of such processes in order for participants to articulate this co-action of working together and co-developing a new way of seeing. Although I did have a closing round, it was very rushed and was a new experience for several participants. As Bortoft indicated, something significant happens when an experience is described or distinguished: "the act of distinction 'there's it'. We come to see what we previously could not" (Bortoft, 2009, n.p.).

Integrating the Rational and Experiential Gap

Theory in holistic science is often attempting to respond to the perceived divergence between the rational world of objective detail and the subjective world of experience and intuitions. This relates to a question that was posed in the process of my writing about this study: "Can citizens make informed decisions before they have integrated, detailed scientific (rational) and

experiential (intuitive) knowledge?” (Harding, 2010). Based on my literature review and study, my conclusion is that they can reach informed decisions not before or after but *through the process* of integrating these two aspects *if supported* through a holistically designed process that enables that integration. Support was provided through articulating this gap between the details of the known, and the experience that the known was not working, and through identifying and facilitating the participants’ real motivation to resolve this gap. Support was also provided through voicing, in the issue booklet, the “contraries” or discomforts that arise when experiencing this gap. Thus the distinct details that constituted the discomfort could be seen, deliberated, and potentially resolved at a higher more holistic level as Bateson (1972) predicted. If we assume that citizens will need to gain this necessary integration *before* they can even take on the task of making crucial decisions, especially those involving climate change, it may take too long as this ability to integrate is an advanced capacity.

Goethe said of this stage of knowledge, which is beyond dualism, that the enhancement of our mental powers which it requires ‘belongs to a highly evolved age’. In other words, we have to develop the capacity for this to take place.....

The development of participative consciousness takes us beyond the metaphysical attitude, i.e., one-sided Platonism, and allows us to see that this is simply a consequence of the onlooker mode of consciousness. (Bortoft, 1996, p. 275)

This “participative consciousness,” if it relates to the capacity for placing oneself in the system one is observing, is described by theorists and researchers in adult learning and development as being one which is reached over many years, and by only a small percentage of the population based largely on their life conditions (Commons et al, 1998; Torbert & Associates, 2004).

Meanwhile, considering the dire circumstances on the planet, vital decisions need to be made now, and by diverse populations with different values and capacities, analogous to those encountered in my research group. However, if the process is holistically designed, as my research indicated, this diversity can be used as a tool for integration, not an obstacle: it can potentially reduce the gap between the onlooker mode of consciousness (rational) and participative consciousness (experiential). As Bortoft said: “The intuitive mind is moving right into the concrete parts in order to encounter the whole. This encounter leads to perceiving the dynamic and living multiplicity of the whole” (Bortoft, 1999, n.p.).

Elephants on the Path

Another reflection I have is regarding surfacing the “elephants” or unspoken tensions in the room. This raises another Catch 22 dilemma. Many social change organizations want to make a difference out in the world but have their own internal dynamics that prohibit them from making decisions and taking action as effectively as possible. Instead of using collaborative inquiry to explore how they may have co-created and maintained dysfunctional patterns, they may develop patterns of blaming and sub grouping that eventually overtake their otherwise well intended purposes. They are not likely to respond to the elephant until they have consciously experienced it and safely articulated its presence. As my research indicated, facilitation may often focus initially on some issue “out there” only to discover that there are issues “in here.” Once surfaced,

these might then be addressed if there is adequate shared reflection, acknowledgement, and motivation to work on the internal dynamics. This may be a risky thing to do and requires a structured holistic approach to move through the possible transitions of action, reaction, smash in order to synthesize into a new form of dynamics. Ross (2006) indicates that before a group can effectively respond to complex relationships that make up their community *politics*, which are defined as culturally common ways of relating, they may benefit from using a designed deliberative process to consider their tone and intentions in their own politics or ways of relating to each other.

Fatigue Factor

At the end of the session, there was a sense of both highly motivated energy as well as a sense of fatigue from working intensely for four hours. Considering details pertaining to decisions with enough thoroughness to thoroughly understand the potential benefits, consequences, and trade-offs cannot be done sloppily; it takes concentration. Being open to different views than the ones we are used to hearing inside our own heads can also take a lot of emotional energy. Moving through the “smash” stage of transition before synthesis can be difficult (Ross, 2008). As Ryfe (2005) indicated, facing into the reality that there are no quick fixes, and that issues as well as our interactions are complex, can be frustrating and anxiety producing. Even with all of this, based on my research in using a holistically designed process, the group did indicate a motivation to use a more complex process for making decisions.

Fatigue can also occur when effort is not valued either financially or socially. It suggests another potential research question to consider: how can this kind of work, often done by community volunteers for the good of the commons, be compensated and sustained? It would point to a need for creating a new form of calculating value, including knowledge and capacity building as resources that add to the common pool of resources and require compensation from that common pool (Ostrom, 2000; Quilligan, 2009).

How Much is Too Much Investment?

An underlying and unanswered question arises in terms of how much time and commitment would it actually take for a holistic process such as this to really affect the specific issues this group was trying to address, as well as the culture of public involvement in the community as a whole. Is it too fatiguing and daunting to consider? This could be the focus for a subsequent research project. Just for the sake of presenting a potential hypothesis to test, I will do a quick projected calculation of how much time this might take. What if the research group met two to three more times to turn their holistic concepts for public involvement in decision making into specific agreements regarding strategies for action? And before that, what if it took another two to three sessions to deal with how members wished to deal with their internal dynamics? Then, if they had another community issue to work with, such as rezoning, affordable housing, food security, energy efficiency, etc., then they would again need five to seven sessions to clarify the question, anticipate and deliberate the various approaches the community might have to it, and engage more of the community in a process to publicly deliberate the options and reach conclusions they could support. By now, there might be some understanding of *what* was being done as well as the understanding of the *act of the doing*. Motivated by this understanding they

might then wish to transfer this process to yet another new issue in the community, which would also need another five to seven sessions. By this time, the capacity to use this process more regularly and independently might have been integrated. Altogether, this might have taken sixteen to eighteen sessions. Is that too much? Would there be motivations in carrying through with this larger investment? When people do not understand the nature of making a holistic decision and are still hoping for a quick fix based on just looking at a part of an issue, and not understanding how the whole issue grew, then it might be too daunting. However, when compared to other ways the public has available for responding to controversial issues it might actually be shorter and result in more effective responses. For example, how many hours went into planning and executing the Copenhagen conference on Climate Change and what did it yield?

The Role of the “Champion” and the Role of the Facilitator

Outside of the holistic process itself that was researched, there are at least two other contributing factors that deserve mentioning and potentially researching: the role of champion and the role of facilitator.

By champion, I mean the person or persons who serve as a supportive bridge to a new group. In the case of this research project, there was someone who understood the need for a more holistic process in their community even though they may not have understood the details of the process itself. When introducing something new into a community, this role of innovation diffusion is vital for communication and basic legitimacy, and does not easily happen through impersonal written articles or cold calls. Therefore, another question that could be researched is: how does one find champions, and what capacities for holistic thinking regarding complex public issues would a champion require?

Another question that could be researched is the role of the facilitator: what degree of integration of holistic thinking, as well as training in this specific process, would be required for the research results to be duplicated by another facilitator? This question is raised based on a hypothesis that holistic practices are not just “tools” to be taken off the shelf and plugged into any situation out of context but rather involve facilitation based on prior experience in reflection, analyzing the context and complex layers of personal and public issues, and supporting emergence of new understanding through the messy sorting of multiple perspectives (Inglis & Steele, 2005).

Implications for Democracy

Recognizing that reflection and integration do not come easily and that fatigue can be a factor, has implications for a more participatory multidimensional democracy, especially considering the gravity of the issues we face globally. We are facing what seem to be obvious signs of disastrous climate change with extreme heat and fires in Russia and Texas, floods in Pakistan Australia and China, and oceans becoming dead zones—and yet *still* we are caught in a gridlock between unresponsive government and economic structures not built to take effective action to such global issues. A regime change, or whole new set of principles, norms, rules, and decision making, is needed to create agreements on procedures for governance of the global commons (Vogler,

2000). To create these new relationships amongst ourselves and our planetary systems will require that “commoners,” those most connected to the issue areas at risk, need to be much more engaged instead of passively hoping others will come up with solutions.

In April 2010, a conference on *Mobilising Democracy to Tackle Climate Change* was hosted in London by The Salzburg Global Seminar and Schumacher College. Afterward, one participant was advocating that based on (a) the necessity to make decisions rapidly in the world to avoid catastrophe, and (b) the incapacity for citizens to make decisions collectively, it would be better to use the efficiency of a Chinese style top down governance or a benign dictatorship. This implication, that people cannot be trusted as they are “unreasonable,” as previously challenged by Bohman (2000) has also been disproved by results of my small study. This above advocacy apparently does not see the situation holistically, missing the context and complex layers that would be triggered by using this top down option especially amongst people who are used to “democracy” however flawed. It is wishful thinking to believe that some leaders will magically decide the right things for us all to do. How would we, as diverse citizens with different life experience and perspectives, all agree which government or dictator had our best interests in mind? If we did not agree, are we saying we would be willing to have military force put the rest of us in line?

It is regrettable a conference such as this, or those connected with UN agreements, did not instead frame the various different views and approaches to democracy that could be taken in light of climate change pressures. If participants were immersed in deliberation of the consequences and trade-offs that they, as concerned citizens, were really facing, this might have resulted in the emergence of a new understanding of ways to proceed with a different definition of democracy that included depth of root causes, breadth of perspectives, and length (time scales and scopes). However, if this conference operated like most conferences, the topic was likely considered abstractly, at professional arm’s length. If so, then participants missed the chance of an embodied transformative experience that could arise from the “contraires” of their real, in-the-room different views being stirred up and needing to be resolved. A more holistically designed process, integrating objective detail and experience regarding their assumptions of democracy might have held this tension and resulted in participants getting really involved, and ultimately evolved.

Summary

We have a narrow window of time, in which many communities and nations still have the stability required to support more reflective holistic thinking about the issues we face in order to enable more comprehensive decisions and actions to emerge. Holistic thinking and methods do not arise on their own. As Goethe indicated, they reflect a more high level form of response. This framing of higher level approaches to effectively match complex tasks, echoed in research on adult development (Commons et al, 1998), is a key to unlocking the potential of public contributions for the resolution of complex problems. However, to reach this high level requires holistically designed structures to scaffold their rise to more systemic responses. Without such methods, and the commitment to use them to guide our collective evolution, we face another darker possibility: that of devolving into, or continuing to rely only upon, individualistic, simplistic, divide and conquer techniques. The concepts and findings presented in this paper

support a more comprehensive model of how democracy and citizen engagement can be presented, achieved and valued with the hopes that it can provide a more sustainable and life enhancing outcome.

In this century, for better or worse, the long process of social evolution has reached the Planetary Phase, with the shape of the future subject to the ways we respond culturally and politically to the challenge of transition. Prospects for a passage to a decent world rest with the capacity for human consciousness and action to rise to this existential challenge of our moment. There is still time, but the hour grows late. (Raskin, 2010, n.p.)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Agenda and issue booklet⁶

How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?

A Deliberation of Four Approaches

Agenda

Opening process:

- Introductions
- Overview and Agreements for effective deliberation
- Practice in taking different perspectives
- Overview of the issue book and approaches

Deliberating each approach

****Break****

Deliberating among all the approaches

Closing Process:

- Assess completeness of deliberation
- Identify decisions reached, follow up needed
- Sharing final thoughts

⁶ Developed by Jan Inglis

How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?

Approach 1: We advocate for the rights of our group when our needs are threatened

People may favour this approach if they assume that:

- *You can lose your rights if you cannot strongly advocate for them.*
- *Numbers and volume are powerful tools to use when advocating your concern*
- *Others can be corrupt and we have to defend against them taking over.*

People who favour this approach believe it is best because:

It is important to rally together and create solidarity when you need to advocate for a cause you feel is going unheeded. Examples of such issues might be if a building with historic or nostalgic value is proposed to be torn down, or a natural area is at risk, or if a new building is proposed that changes the landscape. Groups need to develop a strong powerful voice to be convincing and attract others of like mind or you will lose out. The bigger your voice and the clearer your message the more likely you are to win. It can feel good to work together like this. Governments may not notice our concern or may want to cover over controversy so you need to be vigilante. Government needs to be quickly responsive in an open non-judgmental way when public concern is raised. This public involvement process is useful as it is immediate, inexpensive, and a very clear method of getting action when decisions need to be made.

Sample Actions that make sense based on these assumptions:

- *Citizens organize a phone tree/email tree to get people to come out to public meetings*
- *Individuals start a letter-writing campaign*
- *Governments provide a clear process for requesting referendums*
- *Newspapers provide space for articles to present views on an issue*
- *Concerned citizens organize a door-to-door petition to force a referendum being taken*
- *Individuals tell others what they are going to lose to motivate them to respond*
- *Groups plan ahead to “stack” the mikes at public meetings or increase signatures on petitions*

Possible reactions we need to anticipate

- *“Having to keep rallying our group to take a stand takes too long and is too much work”*
- *“But anyone can lobby who has an emotional axe to grind, with no investment in the outcome or accountability to the impacts”*
- *“Militant lobby groups may scare off business investment in our community”*
- *“this is a band-aid approach and we need longer term total system planning”*
- *“This could polarize us into “good guys” and “bad guys” camps if we fall into being hard on people instead of issues”*
- *“I don’t have a job and need to feed my kids, I don’t have time to go to rallies and sign petitions”*
- *“Referendums are too costly and no one understand the issue or the question”*

A range of trade-offs that would need to be considered if this was the only approach we used:

- *We might win our cause but at what cost to ongoing relationships amongst our separate groups and community as a whole*
- *Information gets out but it is only from one viewpoint*
- *We gain some inclusion for our cause but may lead to some exclusion*
- *Increases involvement but sensationalizes the topic, adds a bias and could lead to polarizing community*
- *Increases involvement but maybe making opposition stronger (the backlash that comes from the 'stronger you are, the stronger the resistance will be')*
- *Forces an 'either you are on the bus or off the bus' requirement for sense of belonging in community*

How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?

Approach 2: We do our civic duty, vote for leaders and assume they are accountable for making fair decisions

People may favour this approach if they assume that:

- *Voting is the legal and traditional way of indicating what citizens want.*
- *The “right” answer is simple and should be obvious to everyone*
- *Voting, rules and regulations will ensure accountability*

People who favour this approach believe it is best because:

Leaders who have received the majority vote, whether within organizations or government, have the responsibility to follow through on what we voted for. Our responsibility as citizens is to make informed choices when we vote and ensure we have leaders who are capable of making wise and just decisions for the common good. Public meetings need to be well publicized and we need to learn how to organize them so that the objectives are met and decisions are made in an orderly fashion. Our civic leaders have a lot of information to deal with to make decisions. Most information can be made available to the public. Citizens groups can offer input to the city and expect the council will act on their advice. Busy citizens do not need to be involved in every decision if they are not impacted by them or if they are too mundane. That is why we have elected officials and staff. If you don't show up and vote when you have the chance then you have to assume others will make decisions for you. Those who have lived in the community the longest may know it the best. Existing laws already dictate public involvement processes, and we need to follow these to avoid mayhem. Relying on known laws and the officials responsible for public affairs is a predictable way to manage change to ensure a stable future.

Sample Actions that make sense based on this belief:

- *Councils adopt definite policies to make information accessible to citizens*
- *City Council establishes a community advisory group made up of different community organizations with clear terms of reference and responsibilities.*
- *Council present clear procedures for how referendums can be requested.*
- *City task force ensures that members of the public know where and when the minutes of public meetings (council, school boards, regional district) are available*
- *Individuals take responsibility to seek out information on legislation, policies etc.*
- *Community groups can write letters to editor to defend elected people or processes in order to educate people about how politics and economics needs to work.*
- *Individuals can disempower the voice of rabble rousers by showing how they want to oppose the rules, or are just ‘special interest’ groups*

Possible reactions we need to anticipate:

- *“I don't trust government. The whole lot of them is just paying lip service to meeting our needs”.*
- *“volunteering on the community advisory group is exhausting”*

- *“What about the poor, the youth, or busy young families? They are not able to be involved in politics and don’t get represented.”*
- *“Depending on voting once every few years means we don’t talk together about the many deeper issues”*
- *“Rules gets in the way. I should be able to do what I want when I want”*
- *“Dependency on governments for change is too slow and stifles innovation and creative solutions”*

A range of trade-offs that would need to be considered if this was the only approach we used:

- *If we work together well as an advisory group we may be criticized for compromising and not still representing our individual groups’ interests.*
- *Does it help if more people vote if they are not well informed about the issue.*
- *Elected officials may try to represent the interests of their ward but what happens if people in their ward have opposing opinions.*
- *If we have strong government doing everything we may have passive citizens*
- *The yes/ no vote is simple and clear but most decision are more complex than that.*

How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?

Approach 3: We can make decisions by being strategic and efficient in order to maximize opportunities

People may favour this approach if they assume that:

- *People are motivated to get involved when they see the benefits*
- *There is an efficient cost effective way to get things done*
- *We don't want to get bogged down in unnecessary rules and process*

People who favour this approach believe it is best because:

People need to take individual responsibility to know how the political and economic system works. They need to get to know those who are influential and have expertise when they want to impact how a decision gets made. Citizens and elected leaders need to keep abreast of new ideas in order to make the best decision and not miss opportunities. The community needs to be responsive to the economic climate in a global community and be up to speed by making decisions that are innovative and adaptive. We need to make proposals that attract partnerships, and motivate the public to get on board so that we can move ahead on good ideas. If there is disagreement we can negotiate. Good public decisions need to be like good business decisions. Creating atmospheres for friendly competition and incentives generates multiple options for citizens and leaders to choose from.

Sample Actions that make sense based on this belief:

- *City includes contract experts to develop multi media presentations to inform and engage citizens on upcoming issues*
- *People running for office need to get known by advertising in the paper and on posters*
- *School system partners with city to support political debates for youth*
- *Stakeholders set up meeting with those most invested in having a decision made on an issue*
- *Create incentives for people to attend public meetings and community events (prizes, food, transportation, child care)*
- *Organize a conference with expert speakers to provide education about how government and civic budgets work*

Possible reactions it would be good to anticipate:

- *“Only the charismatic individuals or those with lots of money will be given attention”*
- *“I do not hang out in powerful circles so won't be able to influence the people who make decisions”*
- *“I don't want high paid outside experts influencing decisions in “our” community”*
- *“Having small groups influencing side deals makes government a sham”.*
- *“Not all public decisions are business decisions; taking a business approach could result in decisions being made based on economic considerations but not in best interest of the public”*

- *“Youth just do not have enough grounded experience to be consulting on important public issues”*

A range of trade-offs that would need to be considered if this was the only approach we used:

- *We may educate the public more but risk becoming seen as spin doctors*
- *We gain input from outside experts but could be misled if they don't know our community*
- *If we spend money on hiring the expertise of consultants we will not have it to spend on other important programs*
- *We might gain from new opportunities but could lose the existing character of our community*
- *We gain from quickly seizing an opportunity but could lose well thought out implementation plans*
- *We may gain more participation at popularized events but people may only come for the free cake*

How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?

Approach 4: We reach out and include as many people as possible to work together as a whole community

People may favour this approach if they assume that:

- *By getting everyone together we can develop a common voice, a common future*
- *People know what they want, we just need to ask them*
- *Working together well takes time*

People who favour this approach believe it is best because:

Ensuring the inclusion of everyone in decision making, especially the minorities, is a responsibility we all need to learn to take. We need to create situations in which we learn to listen to all perspectives and decrease our tendency to argue and compete. Through citizen initiated gatherings we can share our wisdom and concerns with elected leaders to support wise decisions. We all need to come to the table as equals and develop consensus. If people feel left out of decisions they may become apathetic or even sabotage the decisions. Working together to find diverse solutions requires learning, commitment and planning. We should not expect it to happen right away. We need to find methods to weigh out the pros and cons of important decisions and not jump to quick fix solutions or expect our leaders to do so either. To make good decisions we need to see the big picture.

Sample Actions that would make sense based on this belief:

- *Councilors are trained to facilitate forums, discussion groups etc. to ensure diverse perspectives are heard*
- *Community advisory groups and city councilors develop work groups to take agreements from community forums and turn them into policy*
- *Council adopts a publicly supported policy for a community engagement and communication process for the annual budget*
- *City hosts one facilitated public forum each year to update the community vision for the future*
- *Non profit organizations adopt policies to model collaborative approaches within and across organizations*
- *A community advocacy group requests the media to inform but not inflame*
- *Community groups organize informal, small kitchen parties to share information and collect wisdom*

Possible reactions which should be anticipated:

- *“Community visioning just creates countless wish lists that we do not have the budget or ability to fulfill”*
- *“Most people have no clue of how a complex city operates so we cannot turn decisions over to them”.*

- *“The autonomy of my non-profit society might be threatened if I collaborate because we have to compete for dwindling funds”*
- *“It’s idealistic to think that everyone has the ability or interest to participate in a community process”*
- *“Engaging everyone is too expensive, time consuming and get’s us now where.”*
- *“Community meetings are only for retired people who have time to burn”*
- *“I hate sitting in those boring wishy washy talking circles. I want action”.*

A range of trade-offs that would need to be considered if this is the only approach we used:

- *We might end up with much more active citizens, concerned about the community but are we really willing to take the time and money to do this well?*
- *Open participation and communication is good but may get manipulated by special interest groups or angry individuals*
- *We may want to be inclusive but risk excluding people who don’t like vague group process*
- *More information gets out but who ensures everyone gets it equally and in an unbiased way?*
- *We cannot ask for public input and then not be able to follow through on all the things they want*
- *We might get quantity of participation but cannot guarantee we get a consistent quality of informed participation*

Appendix 2: Session Notes

Conclusions

Questions posed:

“After our consideration of these different approaches where have we arrived at regarding our question: *How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?* What sense do we now have about how to move forward with an action plan? “

(The following are points that were made but not sufficient time was taken to agree on wording. Also lacking are specific actions added that would implement them):

- If we did a good job of combining the best of #2, 3, and 4 we could reduce the need for, and problems which arise from #1
- Recognize that issues are complex, if we do consultation, it needs to be deep enough to get at the underlying issues, that get at “why” options are being suggested, or “why” people have questions, so that minorities are not making decisions for majorities
- We need to find a way that there is a two way street between an active engaged community and responsive elected officials. There needs to be mutual responsibility for this relationship otherwise issues and perspectives cannot be understood, our decisions cannot work or be trusted. We next need to find ways to put this principle into action.
- We need to flesh out the approach we want and publicize it in the media so people know why we think this way.
- We need to understand more about the kinds of processes that we might use.
- We need to consider what combination of process will be good enough that all (community organizations, representatives, elected officials and the community) will engage with it.

One proposed draft of a summary statement was submitted:

We do our civic duty, vote for leaders, assume they wish to be and are accountable for making fair and well-judged decisions and that they have a process to secure this. The process should include full, thorough and open consultation with the community in order to maximise opportunities for the community in a strategic and efficient way to realise them. Confidence is a key word: our confidence as community associations that we are seeing the whole picture and responding to ideas thoughtfully and flexibly, together with confidence in the way our proposals are considered by leaders (political and professional) in the Town Council, District Council and County Council.

Appendix 3: Post-session Interview Questions

Post-session questions for participants

During the session with ___members on April 10th we addressed the question: *How should citizens be involved when important public decisions need to be made?* To remind you of what we covered in our session I have attached the summary notes in the email I sent.

The session was almost four hours long and we used a process called deliberation, focusing our attention on the issue book of four diverse approaches, looking at the benefits and challenges of each approach and the cost and consequences that would need to be considered if this was the only approach used. Then we summarized an overview of where we had arrived at after all of those considerations.

- Would you say this deliberative process is different from how community groups usually meet and talk together when facing a challenging issue? If so, in what way is it different?
- Do you feel this kind of process was useful? If so, why? If not, what changes would you suggest to make it more useful.
- I provided you with 4 different approaches or common perspectives for looking at an issue of decision making. Was that helpful. In what way? By the end of that session do you feel that the exercise of looking at different perspectives affect the way you considered community decision making? -*Read out final statements*; is this different than where you were at the beginning....in what way
- Did you feel motivated during the session to put in the time and focus the process required?
- Do you feel you would be motivated to use this deliberative process again when decisions need to be made about challenging issues which might arise in the community? If so how do you think it could be initiated so that others would be involved?
- If this process was used often, what if anything might be different regarding the outcome of public involvement in decisions? Could it be done regularly? What would that require?
- What if anything changed as a result of doing the session? For you ? For the community?
- If change did occur, why do you feel that change occurred?
- What if anything might still change?