Multiple Dialogues and Conflicting Agendas on Governing the City: Western Australia’s ‘Dialogue with the City’

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Abstract: Governments are seeking to involve the broader community in their decision-making processes in response to changes in the relationships between citizens and the state. This is particularly relevant to public policy issues concerning the built environment of cities. Deliberative democracy has emerged in both practice (Parkinson 2004, Weeks 2000) and theory (Bohman 1998; Bohman & Rehg 1997, Cooke 2000, Dryzek 2000) as a philosophical approach for involving citizens in these types of government decision-making. This has been documented in the planning literature as a normative shift towards participatory planning, as seen in communicative planning theory. While advocates of participatory government decision-making (Healey 1996, 1997; Forester 1999) insist that it can increase citizen influence on policy, some scholars (Cooke 2000; Gaus 1997; Young 1996, 2000, 2001) argue that processes employing this philosophy are either naïve or obfuscatory. Furthermore, several scholars (Held 1987; Young 2001) argue that participatory processes can actually reduce citizen power in decision-making.

This paper argues that participatory processes are viewed in multiple ways through multiple dialogues or discourses. It draws on the author's research of a participatory planning process, the Western Australian Government’s ‘Dialogue with the City’. 'Dialogue' was initiated in 2003 by the Western Australian Planning and Infrastructure Minister to formulate a long-term plan for metropolitan Perth. It was designed as an exercise in deliberative democracy that sought to involve the broader community in determining the future shape of the city. This paper highlights the conflicting perspectives participants had on the Government's motivation for initiating 'Dialogue' and discusses the implications of these agendas for the role of planners in participatory decision-making.

Introduction
Participatory processes are becoming a common response by governments needing to make public policy decisions on pressing issues facing cities. This paper examines a large-scale participatory planning process, 'Dialogue with the City' (therein referred to as 'Dialogue'), undertaken in Western Australia between 2003 and 2005. 'Dialogue' was initiated by the Western Australian State Government as an exercise in deliberative democracy and consisted of two main parts - a community forum and a series of stakeholder committees - that culminated in a draft planning strategy for metropolitan Perth being adopted by the Government. This paper examines the Government's participatory discourse on 'Dialogue' and identifies conflicting perspectives participants of the process had on the Government's motivation for initiating 'Dialogue'. It draws on: a questionnaire of the forum participants, interviews with committee participants, documentary material, and the author's own observations of the 'Dialogue' process. The paper argues that the different perspectives participants had on the agenda of 'Dialogue' were reflected by the multiple discourses about the ideal role of public input to government decision-making.

Two schools of thoughts about public participation
While advocates of participatory decision-making (Healey 1996, 1997; Forester 1999) insist that it can increase citizen influence on policy, some scholars (Cooke 2000; Gaus 1997; Young 1996, 2000, 2001) argue that processes employing this philosophy are either naïve or obfuscatory. Furthermore, several scholars (Held 1987; Young 2001) argue that participatory processes can actually reduce citizen power in decision-making. Anecdotal evidence suggests that citizens are often not engaged in a meaningful way by governments (Perlgut 1986). This has resulted in citizens becoming cynical of government motives for undertaking public participation. Citizens' expectations of the influence of their participation are often not met, which is exacerbated by organisations not making their intent of such processes clear. Furthermore, governments experience difficulties undertaking participatory processes and are often frustrated by what they consider to be self-interested community groups who often dominate participation (Carson 2001). Given the dissatisfaction experienced by both citizens and governments with public participation, what then are the agendas for governments engaging in such processes?

A review of the planning literature identifies two different schools of thought about the role of public participation in government decision-making. The literature discusses two possible motives for governments engaging in public participation - genuine or strategic. These motives represent democratic (genuine) and manipulative (strategic) reasons for initiating participatory processes. The
democratic school of thought claims governments use participatory processes to give citizens more influence over decisions that affect them. The manipulative school of thought, however, argues that governments use participatory methods as manipulative tools to give the illusion of citizens having influence in the planning process. Decisions, in this viewpoint, have already been made. This paper discusses these two schools of thought and uses them to analyse the 'Dialogue with the City' process.

The democratic school of thought is premised on the philosophy that participatory processes have, by definition, the intention of allowing citizens to participate in decision-making. Democratic intentions for undertaking participatory planning processes are reflected by planning theorists such as Healey (1997), Forester (1999), and Hillier (2002). These theorists argue that planning should be more participatory in order to meet the democratic requirements of good governance. This shift is evident in a number of participatory approaches proposed for planning under the terms of 'collaborative planning' (Healey 1997, 1998, 2003), ‘deliberative planning’ (Forester 1999) and ‘consensus-building’ (Innes 1996; Innes & Booher 1999a, b). The shift towards participatory planning has also been reflected in the application of deliberative democracy theories (Bohman 1998; Bohman & Rehg 1997; Cooke 2000; Dryzek 2000) in practice (for example see Parkinson 2003; Weeks 2000). Deliberative democracy, which refers to a method of political decision-making based on the public deliberation of citizens in an open forum (Bohman 1998; Uhr 1998), is also based on a normative agenda of increasing citizen influence over government policy.

The normative movement towards participatory planning has been widely discussed as part of the "communicative turn" in planning theory (Healey 1993, 1996a, b). A participatory model for planning is primarily based on the argument that top-down decision-making does not adequately represent the desires of the community (Gleeson & Low 2000). As part of this proposed model, 'communicative planning' theorists conceive of a new role for planners - that of facilitator or mediator (Campbell & Fainstein 2003; Forester 1999; Healey 1996a; Innes 1995; Taylor 1998). While participatory models in this school of thought are intended to improve how democratic decision-making processes are, the practical benefits of these models are also recognised. Healey (1997), for instance, argues that plans and policies are unlikely to be implemented unless everyone with an interest in the issue is involved in the decision-making process. The democratic school of thought suggests that governments who undertake public participation are doing so to increase the level of public input to decision-making and hence improve government policy.

In contrast to democratic agendas for public participation, the manipulative school of thought suggests that governments engage in such activities to legitimise decisions that have already been made. In accordance with this view, some authors have questioned the genuineness of participatory processes. Bailey (cited in Gleeson & Low 2000:137), for instance, argues that participation can perform "...a masking function in that it appears to acknowledge and provide for participatory democracy while in fact "educating" clients towards professional views...". Cooke (2000) argues that there is a danger that participatory processes may be manipulated for strategic purposes. The normative visions of communicative planning theorists are proposed with cautions about the potential for participation to be manipulated to meet the strategic objectives of planners (Forester 1989; Hillier 1993). Under this model, the role of planners is as strategic actors, directing public participation under the guise of offering citizen input.

The manipulative school of thought argues that it cannot be assumed that public participation per se is a 'good thing' (Sandercock 1983; Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger 1998). Another motivation for undertaking participatory processes for manipulative reasons is discussed by Sandercock (1983). She argues that governments may use participation as a means of dissolving opposition by co-opting leaders of opposition groups into the decision-making processes, in order to gain their support and remove them from their supporter base (Sandercock 1983). This motive for participation is referred to be Parkinson (2004) as 'big tent politics', which entails making sure that potential critics are 'inside the tent' in order to bind them to the outcomes through their involvement in the decision-making process.

The dualistic nature of public participation is reflected in Arnstein's widely cited conceptual 'ladder of participation'. Arnstein (1969) argues that public participation can be viewed on a continuum ranging from non-participation to citizen control, depending on the level of influence citizens are given (see figure 1 below).
This concept of public participation assumes that those organising such processes either have genuine motives of giving citizens decision-making power (rungs 6-8), or the strategic motives of tokenism (rungs 3-5) or non-participation (rungs 1-2). In this model, only those participatory processes that offer citizens significant decision-making authority (at least equal to that of traditional decision-makers), are genuine in their motives. Other processes, which don't offer this level of influence to citizens, are considered in Arnstein's model to be manipulative or tokenistic at best. Arnstein's 'ladder of participation' assumes that all participatory processes are undertaken with a rhetoric that they intend to give citizens decision-making authority. Those that do not offer this level of power to citizens are therefore not considered to be genuine. Planning practice, however, suggests that many participation exercises are done with lesser aims - to consult citizens rather than to offer decision-making authority. Furthermore, it may not be feasible to engage in partnership-style relationships with citizens on every planning matter.

The literature on public participation in planning reflects the dualism presented in Arnstein's 'ladder of participation'. Studies of participatory processes tend to analyse the motives of governments in this manner, often judging organisations as being tokenistic or manipulative simply because they don't devolve decision-making authority to those who participate. As Lane (2005) argues, public participation can only understood in terms of the decision-making context in which it is undertaken. It is therefore not appropriate to evaluate participation processes against criteria these processes don't intend, even rhetorically, to meet.

The changing role of planners: from experts to facilitators?
The dichotomous representation of the motives of governments in undertaking public participation reflects the confusion, in both theory and practice, over the role of planners and planning. The participatory model of planning, as expressed in the planning literature, requires a shift in the role of the planner from that of a policy-maker to that of a policy-facilitator. This raises a question - should planners be urban form experts, as in the tradition of the profession, or disinterested facilitators, as a participatory model of planning suggests? Perhaps more importantly, what role do planners actually take in participatory processes? As both Yiftachel (1991) and Allmendinger (2002) assert, there is a lack of consensus over the role of planners. This lack of consensus is particularly reflected in comparisons of planning theory and planning practice. Whilst the planning literature has documented a widely agreed shift away from rational approaches to planning, observations from practice suggest that the rational model of decision-making is still preferred.

The widespread shift away from a rational approach to planning during the 1960s reflected a growing criticism on the technocratic nature of planning. A key critique of the rational model of planning was critiqued was its separation of facts from values. The role of planners under this model was to undertake 'objective' technical analysis that was seen to be removed from the activity of value setting, which was done by politicians (Healey 1997). As Fischer (1990) contends, the participatory concept of professional practice advocated by a growing number of theorists is a direct reaction against the elitist model of professional practice which has characterised the planning profession.

The danger of technocratic rationality comes...from the use of technical findings to discredit the legitimate purposes of others as irrelevant, self-interested, and stupid. (Hoch 1994:296)
During the 1960s the assumed consensus over the public interest was challenged with a growing recognition planning decisions were political, not neutral as was previously thought (Taylor 1998). Despite planning being widely accepted as a political activity in planning theory, Throgmorton (2003) argues that planning is still sometimes considered an apolitical activity in practice. Many practicing planners have the view that:

...planning is purely a technical activity and politics is something that takes place downstream from the technical work and can only muck it up. (Throgmorton 2003:128).

If planning is considered a political activity, then this suggests that the public be involved in planning decisions (Taylor 1998). However, the perspective of practicing planners highlighted by Throgmorton reflects the rational view of planning and suggests that planners may not see the need for public participation.

The democratic school of thought suggests that the role of the planner should change from an urban form expert to that of a facilitator of other's interests. However, many authors agree that planners are strategic in their actions. Forester (1989) asserts that planners strategically direct public attention to particular arguments for and against urban form proposals. Similarly, Throgmorton (2003) describes planning as persuasive story-telling about the future, a process of selectively presenting information and arguments to persuade others of the value of particular planning proposals. He argues that planning stories:

...shape meaning and tell readers (and listeners) what is important and what is not, what counts and what does not, what matters and what does not. (Throgmorton 2003:128)

Hillier (1993), however, views planners shaping meaning as planners potentially being manipulative. She states that planners may manipulate their 'stories' to encourage certain interpretations and inhibit recognition of non-preferred options (Hillier 1993). Thus, planners have a significant role in influencing public views because they provide the information that frames planning problems and potential solutions.

If planners are strategic actors in the policy-making arena, then is it possible for them to be neutral facilitators who are uninterested in urban form matters? The idea of planners being neutral facilitators precludes them from being involved in planning as urban form experts. Hence, under this model, planners are to be more concerned with the procedural aspects of decision-making - ensuring everyone has a voice and that key stakeholder groups don't dominate processes. In accordance with this view, Forester (1989) argues that planners' role in decision-making processes should be to mediate the exercise of power:

...by choosing to address or ignore the exercise of political power in the planning process, planners can make that process more democratic or less, more technocratic or less, still more dominated by the established wielders of power or less so. (Forester 1989:28)

Planners have significant influence over participatory processes because, as Forester (1989) points out, they control the decision-making process (who participates, etc), and are involved in agenda-setting and needs-shaping. He argues that planners should use this influence to ensure a fair and democratic planning process. This proposal, however, assumes planners operate outside political concerns and that they can put aside their own professional preferences for certain urban form outcomes. Throgmorton (2003), however, claims that planners cannot be neutral in decision-making processes. He suggests that planners develop a vision for sustainable cities and use their influence to help achieve this vision. Throgmorton's view assumes, in the rational planning tradition, that planners have a privileged view of what is in the public interest.

While there is a consensus in the literature that planning should be more participatory, observations suggest that planners may not prefer a participatory model of decision-making. Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (1998), for instance, argue that a preference for participatory methods of decision-making is a value not widely held by practicing planners or politicians. If this is the case, why then is public participation becoming a commonly used method in planning practice? Fischer and Forester (1993) and Hoch (1994) argue that the increase in public participation reflects a shift away from the elitist model of planning that views planners as apolitical experts and holders of the public interest.
However, if the trend in practice does not reflect this attitude, does this mean governments have manipulative agendas for undertaking public participation? In order to address this question, this paper examines a case study of a participatory process - 'Dialogue with the City'.

The Government's participatory discourse on 'Dialogue with the City'

'Dialogue' was initiated by the Western Australian Government in 2003 as part of its process of developing a new strategic long-term plan for metropolitan Perth. It involved a number of participatory events, the most prominent of which was a community forum of around one thousand participants. A series of committees made up of government, industry and community representatives were then established to develop the plan. Further community and stakeholder workshops were held to continue the participation process. A draft plan was finalised in September 2004 and was released for a three month public comment period. This section of the paper examines the Government's participatory discourse and seeks to identify the agenda of the Government in initiating the 'Dialogue' process.

A review of the Government's policies, speeches and press releases illustrates their position on the role of public input to decision-making. The Government's discourse on public participation illustrates a number of perceived benefits for organisations who engage in public participation. These benefits range from mainly democratic concerns to more practical concerns about governments seeking legitimacy for their actions (see figure 2 below).

![Figure 2: Benefits of public participation](Complied from: Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2002, 2003; Gallop 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic benefits</th>
<th>Practical benefits</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Builds stronger communities</td>
<td>Produces long-term financial savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases citizenship capacity</td>
<td>Decisions have greater legitimacy and credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows citizen input on issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowers citizens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reveals community needs and wants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves relationships with citizens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves awareness of issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases user satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures more informed decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates a commitment to democracy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assists in prioritising policy options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raises awareness of issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The democratic benefits of public participation, according to the Government, include: empowering citizens, allowing citizen input and discovering the community's needs and desires. The majority of the benefits outlined by the Government, however, are more practical in intent. These practical benefits include: developing shared ownership for collective issues, increasing the likelihood of policy acceptance, long-term financial savings and the conferring of greater legitimacy on the outcomes of decision-making. Many of these practical benefits relate to a concern about implementing policies and enacting social change. None of the benefits identified in figure 2, however, suggest partnership-style relationships but rather public participation is seen as an adjunct to traditional top-down decision-making. This attitude is reflected in the Planning and Infrastructure Minister's discourse about the role of public participation:

Regardless of the consultation process we use, at the end of the day, it is my responsibility to make the final decisions. But I don't have all the answers and even if I did - I couldn't be sure I could get broad support for my 'answers'.

(MacTiernan 2004a)

The Minister's media material identifies both democratic and practical reasons for initiating 'Dialogue'. The Government wishes to improve the functioning of the Western Australian democracy by having greater public involvement in decision-making.
...[Dialogue] is part of our commitment to put more content into our democracy - our government of the people. We want to do government differently - to develop processes where we involve the broader community in decision-making.
(MacTiernan 2004b:2)

As illustrated above, the 'Dialogue' process is presented as part of a broader participation agenda. The need to "do government differently" is a result of a number of factors. Firstly, the Government acknowledges that there is growing community cynicism about political processes and governments and that many citizens feel that they don not have a voice in decision-making (Gallop 2001). Secondly, there is the recognition that governments cannot enact change in the current political climate without the support of other organisations and the community (Government of Western Australia 2004b). Finally, the Government identifies a number of problems with conventional public participation processes. The Planning and Infrastructure Minister argues that these processes: involve uninformed or misinformed participants; are dominated by narrow-minded interest groups; and don't require participants to consider the wider public good (MacTiernan 2004a). Lobby groups were particularly singled out by the Government as a problem for participatory processes:

Lobby groups that have formed for very specific interests and have already determined what the end result should be, are not interested in finding out what the whole community might want, or in making any changes to their pre-determined ideas.
(MacTiernan 2004a:20)

The perceived problems with conventional public participation exercises had a significant influence on the development of 'Dialogue' as an alternate method of involving citizens in decision-making.

'Dialogue' was presented by the Government as an innovative and groundbreaking participation event. The forum was argued to be the largest public participation event ever to be undertaken in the Southern Hemisphere (MacTiernan 2003a). It was presented as a planning process that for the first time gave an opportunity for citizens to affect the shape of their city (MacTiernan 2003c). 'Dialogue' was presented by the Government as a planning process that departed from previous models of planning done by 'experts'. While the Minister acknowledges that the Government could develop a plan 'in-house' with input from a limited number of key stakeholders, she argues that past plans formulated in this way have not been successful.

We could convene forums with planners and developers and environmentalists, and no doubt come up with a plan...But like so many plans before it, nothing is likely to happen because the reality is, unless we can bring you, the community with us, we will not get the support from local government that we need to make meaningful, enduring change.
(MacTiernan 2003b:1)

Community support was viewed by the Government as essential to secure support from local government. This attitude reflects a view by the Government that local governments are not only critical to implementing plans (MacTiernan 2004c) but have also been influential in stopping past plans being implemented. The Government has faced significant challenges in getting local governments to accept higher density development, primarily due to local communities opposing such proposals. A key agenda of the 'Dialogue' process was therefore to gain support for these changes to planning policy.

Practical motives for initiating 'Dialogue' dominated the Government's discourse. 'Dialogue' was therefore designed as "a case study in deliberative democracy" (Hartz-Karp 2005:1) in order to overcome past problems with community consultation (Hartz-Karp 2004). According to Hartz-Karp (2004), governments are facing difficulties making 'good' decisions and citizens are becoming more vocal in their demands. This political situation has created the need for alternate decision-making processes that aim to meet demands from citizens to be involved and demands from governments to ensure that good decisions are made. The Government identifies a number of key principles that define their approach to deliberative democracy: participants are representative of the population; focus on understanding the issues and their implications; consideration of differing viewpoints and values; search for consensus or common ground; and capacity to influence policy and decision-making (Hartz-Karp 2004). These principles represent an alternate way of undertaking public participation aimed at overcoming past problems with such processes and developing a plan capable of being implemented.
This paper identifies the key design features of the 'Dialogue' process and discusses their relationship to the Government's practical agendas. The 'Dialogue' process consisted of two main stages - the community forum and the stakeholder committees. The community forum brought together one thousand participants, two-thirds citizens and on-third invited stakeholders, to deliberate on planning issues. Its role was to develop a vision for metropolitan Perth based on a choice of four urban form models: the dispersed city; the compact city; the multi-centred city and the connected networks city (Government of Western Australia 2004a) (see figure 4). Following the forum a series of stakeholder committees, with representatives from government, industry and community groups, were established to formulate a plan based on the vision determined at the forum. A summary of the key procedural elements of the 'Dialogue' process are illustrated in figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: 'Dialogue' process design**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of participation</th>
<th>Citizen</th>
<th>Forum - 2/3 citizens, 1/3 invited stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Key stakeholders</td>
<td>Committee - local government, industry, and community groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale of participation</td>
<td>Large-scale</td>
<td>Forum - 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee - 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of participants</td>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>Forum - targeted minority groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>Forum - random sample (representative of population)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee - local government, industry, and community representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of participants</td>
<td>Informed</td>
<td>Forum - provision of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equals</td>
<td>Forum - mixed tables of participants, each with equal vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant interaction</td>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Forum - face-to-face discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common good</td>
<td>Forum - justify reasons for preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making process</td>
<td>Consensus agreement</td>
<td>Forum - table agreement required, developing a plan as a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee - participant 'sign-off' on strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Important design elements of the forum included the: type of participation; scale of participation; characteristics of participants; status of participants; participant interaction; and decision-making process. Participants of the forum were required to be informed and deliberate for the common good in order to ensure a good planning outcome. This was deemed important to overcome problems with Not In My BackYard attitudes to increasing residential densities that have been a challenge to the Government's consolidation agenda. The status of participants and participant interaction were design features not clearly defined in the committee process, partly due to the purpose of this stage of 'Dialogue' being to implement the planning directions determined at the forum. However, the committee process aimed to involve potential critics in order to gain their support and remove their ability to oppose the outcomes of the process, in accordance with Parkinson's 'big tent politics' (Parkinson 2004). The key features of both the forum and stakeholder committees, as expressed by the Government, was the large-scale and representativeness of the participation. The aim of presenting the participation as representative was to develop legitimacy for the outcome of the 'Dialogue' process.

The Government's primary motive for initiating 'Dialogue' process was to legitimise change and create a mandate for government action. A public mandate was deemed necessary in order to overcome local opposition to higher densities that the outcome would likely evoke. The Minister argues that:

> There are considerable advantages in large-scale community deliberation...Government acquires the legitimacy to carry out plans that otherwise they may not have been able to achieve.  
> (MacTiernan)

A public mandate is reflected in the title of the planning strategy that was developed in the process - 'Network City: community planning strategy for Perth and Peel' (WAPC 2004). This illustrates how the strategy was presented as being developed and owned by the community, rather than by government. A Government planner also referred to the forum as "Network City's head of power" (Allen 2004:7).
The large-scale of participation at the forum was seen as generating a mandate for the Government to take action. The procedural elements of the Dialogue process were purposefully designed to achieve the practical outcomes of being able to implement a plan: to assist in creating a mandate for government, to reduce potential opposition, to generate ownership amongst stakeholders and the wider community, and to generate political legitimacy for government to implement plans.

**Conflicting discourses on agendas for governing the city**
While ‘Dialogue’ is presented by the Government as an innovative and groundbreaking participatory process based on the philosophy of deliberative democracy, many participants had a different view. There was a significant range of perspectives on the motives of the Government in initiating ‘Dialogue’. Most participants reflected the participatory rhetoric presented by the Government.

> It was really inspiring to hear a Minister who believes in participatory democracy and who actually has arranged to put it into practice.
> (Forum participant)

There were, however, a significant number of people that strongly disagreed with the Government's portrayal of the process as an exercise in participatory democracy. These individuals believed ‘Dialogue’ was a manipulative process and argued that the design of the community forum was constructed in such a way as to predetermine the outcome of the process.

> Network City...a strategy orchestrated towards a previously decided end, conducted by self-affirming professionals...
> (Wilkes 2004)

Many of the individuals involved in the committee process viewed the motives of the Government as both democratic and practical.

> ...I think there was a genuine desire on behalf of the Minister and some of her staff to create a more effective public consultation process...and probably a recognition that to really shift things they needed some process that could create a basis of legitimacy for change."
> (Committee participant)

Different views on the agenda of ‘Dialogue’ largely concerned the nature of the information provided to participants at the community forum. Participants were given an information pack prior to the day, which identified Perth’s low-density urban form as unsustainable. The information in this pack, and other information presented through a variety of mediums on the day, argued that Perth needed to have higher residential densities. The participation at the forum then culminated in the choice of one of four urban form options for metropolitan Perth (see figure 4 below).

**Figure 4: Urban form options used in the ‘Dialogue’ community forum**
(Government of Western Australia 2004a)
Some participants felt the urban form options, particularly the way they were presented on the day, were biased toward the connected network model (the option that was chosen). These individuals argued that the Government's agenda was to gain support for their own preferred planning directions:

The whole thing was loaded to support sustainability, public transport, higher residential densities and an urban boundary. The Government got what it wanted - support for items above.

(Forum participant)

A few individuals that thought the information given to participants of the community forum was biased, however, did not have a problem with this approach. They argued that it was appropriate for the Government to educate citizens on the most appropriate planning options. This attitude is reflected by the state government planners, who claimed that 'Dialogue' reflected a shift from the Decide Announce Defend mode of participation to the Profile Educate Participate model (Allen 2004). Questions over the nature of information provided in the 'Dialogue' process raises important questions about the role of planners and governments. The role of participation in 'Dialogue' was seen by many planners to educate citizens, in line with Bailey's (1975) view of such processes as manipulative in their intent. The argument that the role of planners in participatory processes is to educate citizens on preferred urban form outcomes contradicts the role the literature proposes as neutral facilitators. It also questions what education means - to educate citizens on all potential options or to educate toward one preferred outcome?

The extent of influence offered to citizens in the 'Dialogue' process was also viewed differently by participants. Whilst it was presented as a unique process for Perth in terms of the level of influence given to citizens, many committee participants saw the forum as just another consultation exercise, albeit on a large scale. This view reflected these participants' preferences for limited public input to decision-making. Those that viewed 'Dialogue' as giving decision-making authority to citizens, however, were concerned about how this process would affect the role of planners. One participant stated that:

If planning could be done like this, why did I waste 6 years at university?

(Forum participant)

The 'Dialogue' process was viewed by planners as threatening their role in decision-making. Concerns, for instance, were noted about the danger of participatory processes disenfranchising planning expertise. As indicated above, the 'Dialogue' process provoked significant confusion over the role of planners in decision-making processes.

The conflicting discourses identified above centred on differing views on the ideal relationship between planners and citizens. In accordance with Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger's (1998) argument about planner's values, planners in the 'Dialogue' process did not place a high value on participatory processes. They felt it was necessary in the current political climate, but not necessarily desirable. All committee participants saw the importance of involving the public in planning decision-making. Some actors, particularly those from non-government organisations, believed involving the public was important in finding out what they desired of their city, in accordance with the democratic school of thought. The development industry, however, viewed public participation as having a more minor role, arguing that local knowledge had a minor role in informing planning proposals. Many participants identified the increasing demand for public involvement from citizens as the key reason why governments engage in participatory processes. In addition, most participants believed that public participation increased the likelihood of implementing planning policies. Several participants noted that participation, particularly when it is carried out early in the decision-making process, could produce long-term financial savings by reducing delays to implementation. Participation was also seen as reducing potential opposition to plans, which has been a key problem for planning in Western Australia.

...[public participation] saves you a lot of trouble in the long time (sic) because if you try to force something on some people, then you’re going to get more people kicking up just because you’re forcing it on them...so you’re potentially making opposition.

(Committee participant)

Despite the unanimous acknowledgement of its importance, public participation was seen by most committee participants as not necessarily being positive. The development industry and planners both noted that participatory processes could unnecessarily delay planning projects and interest groups...
could dominate participation processes, resulting in poor urban form outcomes. The majority of participants believed that governments should provide leadership on important issues and that participation served more of an information role. Experts were viewed as providing the primary decision-making advice to governments. These participants felt that the community simply didn't have the appropriate knowledge or expertise to know what was in their best interest.

...there are times when even the broad public doesn't know what's best for them, and so you can end up with a decision that looks like it's the wish of the majority but they are nonetheless making it in ignorance or without being fully acquainted with all of the ramifications.

(Committee participant)

Dialogue is presented as a new model for public participation based on the principles of deliberative democracy. However, while some participants agreed with the view that 'Dialogue' represented a significant change in how planning decisions were made, many still viewed the process as simply another exercise in community consultation. These differences in view can be explained by differences in perspective over the degree of influence that citizens should have in decision-making. While the majority of committee participants see an important role for public participation, they believe 'experts' should have the primary input to decision-making.

**Conclusion**

Whilst the planning literature presents the agendas for governments engaging in public participation as either democratic or manipulative, the 'Dialogue' case highlights a third possible motive for governments engaging in participatory processes - pragmatic. In contrast to the democratic and manipulative schools of thought, the pragmatic motive suggests that governments employ participatory methods to assist them in getting support for and implementing policies and objectives (see figure 5).

**Figure 5: Three schools of thought on public participation motives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School of thought</th>
<th>Motive for governments' initiating public participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>To give citizens decision-making power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic</td>
<td>To implement government public policy objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulative</td>
<td>To legitimise decisions which have already been made by government.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the pragmatic school of thought about government motivations for engaging in public participation is largely overlooked in the planning literature, the Western Australian Government's discourse is dominated by pragmatic reasons for undertaking such processes. This pragmatic view reflects Bryson and Crosby's (1992) position on participatory processes. They argue that government leaders should undertake participatory processes in order to produce public policy change:

[Public leaders should]...decide what amount of participation in decision making will produce the desired results...leaders should increase participation to the extent that information and acceptance from others is necessary to make a good decision that is actually implemented.

(Bryson & Crosby 1992:38)

Participation in this perspective is used as a tool to achieve the preferred result of governments. This pragmatic motive, however, could be considered manipulative, particularly if such a participatory process is presented under a democratic discourse.

The Government expressed a clear message that 'Dialogue', while also having democratic benefits, is primarily a pragmatic response to increasing difficulties implementing plans in Western Australia. Much of the Government's documentary material emphasises the problems they perceive with interest groups dominating participatory exercises and presents a new model of participation centred on reducing the influence of these groups in opposing planning proposals and generating a community mandate to reduce opposition at the local level.

The 'Dialogue' case illustrated that there is a significant degree of confusion in planning practice as to the role of public participation. Some planners viewed public participation as a threat to their role as
urban form experts, whilst others saw it as simply of task of educating the public on preferred urban form outcomes. Sager (1994) highlights this confusion over the role of planners as a tension between two decision-making methods: relying on expert judgement; and engaging in participatory processes. While governments are increasingly using participatory processes to govern the city, the role that planners play in these processes is still unclear. What is clear is that the democratic philosophy behind participatory processes challenges the traditional role of planners as urban form experts and raises an important question about who is in the best position to determine what is in the public interest - planners or citizens?

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