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Dialogue with the City: An Era of Participatory Planning for Provision of More Sustainable Infrastructure in Perth?

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Abstract

The paper examines the use of participatory methods in a planning exercise for the future of Perth, Western Australia. After a brief historical overview of the three models for city planning and infrastructure, namely the walking, transit and auto city, the new emerging sustainability concept is analysed through the lenses of the ten Melbourne principles for cities as sustainable ecosystems. The public forum eloquently named 'Dialogue with the City' which started in 2003 serves as a case study for applying participatory methods in planning of urban space and infrastructure. The outcomes of the process which involved discussion papers, community survey of 1,700 people, web-based on-line discussions, a school competition, listening sessions with groups which opinion is often left unheard (such as the youth, indigenous people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds), a one day forum with 1,100 participants and continuing workshops, provide a broad and coordinating framework in which citizenry, government and business can tackle the issues of Perth within a long-term vision based on sustainability. The Dialogue also helped reaffirm that the people of Perth have a strong sense of place and are willing to participate in the decision-making process.

Introduction

The first section of the paper provides firstly a brief historical overview of cities and how they relate to infrastructure; secondly, an outline of the characteristics of sustainable cities; and thirdly a discussion about the emerging participatory paradigm of planning and how this contrasts to the modernist paradigm. The second section describes the vision, methods and outcomes of a participatory planning forum in Perth, Western Australia which was eloquently named 'Dialogue with the City'. The third section analyses the historical significance of this event and what possibilities may hold for the future of participatory planning for sustainability in Perth, including its relevance to urban infrastructure.

Planning: Past and Present

The modernist paradigm perceives the planning of urban form and infrastructure as the specialised work of trained experts who have the visionary ideas as well as the skills to implement them. The development

of modern cities after the Second World War has isolated the public from participating in this process but this is now changing. The community is reclaiming and rediscovering the area of urban planning and this process can be facilitated through the use of participatory methods.

A Brief History of Cities

Cities have existed for some 10,000 years. Newman and Kenworthy (1999) note three major forces which have historically shaped cities. These include: transportation priorities; economic priorities which include how new suburban infrastructure enables peripheral growth instead of redevelopment and renewal of current urban development; and cultural priorities, particularly perspectives on urban space. This provides perspective on how urban infrastructure is prioritised.

Transportation priorities

An observed constant through much of history has been that people prefer to commute no more than half an hour each way. This is called the Marchetti constant and is found to be true in all cities and throughout urban history. It means that cities are always 'one hour wide'. Given this constant three types of cities have developed in the face of technological change. Cities today contain elements of all three types to a lesser or greater extent.

The walking city was first developed between 10,000 and 7,000 years ago, in the Middle East and became the standard form in cities around the world until the mid 19th century. The traditional walking city is characterised by high density, mixed land use, and narrow streets with a form that follows the landscape and are typically no more than 5 kilometres across with an average trip on foot being half an hour. Many European centres have retained this history and the walking city can also be found within the developing world..

The walking city began to collapse under the pressure of industrialisation in Europe and the New World from about 1860. Train (first steam and then electric) and tram or streetcar (first horse-drawn, then steam, then electric) evolved and allowed faster travel, creating the transit city. Medium density, mixed-use areas were developed at rail nodes and along transit routes. This city spread to about twenty to thirty kilometres with intense activity at the major nodal centre. The density was about fifty to hundred people per hectare. Many American and Australian cities were formed during this period and have retained some of the characteristics of this time. European cities have mostly retained the characteristics of this period.

The auto city developed from the accelerated use of the automobile after the Second World War. Low-density housing became a possibility with the average distance from the centre going as far as fifty kilometres. Residential and business centres were developed through zoning and the city began to decentralise and disperse. Densities were dramatically decreased to only between ten and twenty people per hectare. Some cities like Los Angeles have become a series of auto cities which are largely independent of each other. Public provision of transport became less necessary which has resulted in the automobile changing from, and is often now today, necessity rather than choice. Community support processes were detrimentally affected by automobile dependence and today cities across the world are trying to find a city form that is not so car dependent.

Economic priorities

Economic forces are also very powerful in affecting urban planning. The traditional high-density city developed wealth from an industrial base for import substitution. Little money was left for urban infrastructure and thus housing became dense. In contrast to this, the new frontier economy developed wealth by servicing the hinterland.

The advent of Information Technology (IT) has had enormous ramifications upon the urban infrastructure needs of society. Urban nodes are being created through reurbanisation or recentralisation in which businesses with overlapping interests are being found to cluster. IT has enabled routine and follow-up communications to occur and is freeing up time for face-to-face interaction that involves creative interaction and the sharing of skills. In Europe and Australia nodal development has been occurring in the inner cities whilst in the United States this has been occurring at the edges as well as in traditional centres.

Within Australia there is little economic activity in outer suburbs, and thus these have high unemployment and social exclusion (particularly within outer suburban pockets) in addition to environmental deterioration resulting from urban sprawl. These are serious questions about the economic value in continuing urban sprawl but this issue is also a cultural one.

Cultural priorities

In Australia and also in America the new frontiers were built with an ethos of filling as much space as possible. This was promoted by a strong anti-city, pro-rural tradition from England in opposition to the mills and polluted industrial cities. However, a global pro-urbanisation movement has also existed and recent studies show that support for this movement is on the incline. Cultural aversion to space has not been prevalent in Asian societies.

It is now well accepted across the disciplines and is most prominently advocated by supporters of New Urbanism that local interaction brought about through nodal development based upon high density enables a sense of culture and belonging, essential for the emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of individual development and for society cohesion and wellbeing. This however should ideally be balanced by broader considerations such as cultural and class diversity and acceptance. Obvious complexities require an inter-disciplinary and holistic approach with sustainability as a central and guiding principle.

As these aspects which impact upon urban infrastructure priorities – transportation, economic and cultural – are all contested and require communities to resolve. However, such priorities are in the context of new global limits.

The Sustainable City

Global awareness of the problems of climate change, oil vulnerability, waste disposal and air quality, has meant that cities have been drawn into consideration of these broader constraints as well as more local economic and social issues. These matters are considered now under the rhetoric of sustainability.

The concept of sustainability has travelled and evolved through many international conventions and documents including the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the publication of *Our Common Future* in 1987, the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in which participants compiled Agenda 21 and the more recent 2002 World Summit in

Johannesburg. In this paper sustainability is taken as a framework of principles, a philosophy of practice that engages multi-levels, places, cultures and actors in a systematic approach towards better environmental and social health whilst simultaneously allowing the economic improvement that this may require. Sustainability emphasises the importance of the local, of knowledge and action, but relates this to a broader global perspective in which interrelationships are recognised.

The practical implementation of sustainability principles is best planned through the interactions of three major sectors which intersect at the local, regional, national and trans-national in many ways and through many mechanisms. These sectors include the economic, social/cultural and political institutions within society at all levels. People who act within these institutions hold different perspectives but difference is generally greatest between these institutions. Difference also may exist between the levels of interaction. Individual lives however exist beyond the boundaries of these institutions and are found in the spaces between them. An individual may thus hold differing perspectives in varying settings, and have conscious values as well as the less conscious, the taken for granted aspects of existence. It is only through the coming together of these actors in their various capacities within an open dialogical process in which power is equalised and consciousness of society is ever expanding that sustainable change is possible.

Sustainability and cities is a highly significant topic for global sustainability more generally in light of the fact that over 50% of the world's population lives in cities and this figure is increasing. The Melbourne Principles were formulated by 40 experts and decision makers in Melbourne in April 2002. The vision behind the creation of these principles was the formation of environmentally healthy and sustainable cities. These principles were presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg within the Local Government Session and were formally adopted in the final document 'Local Action 21'. They were also intended to provide guidance to UNEP's Cities as Sustainable Ecosystems (CASE) initiative (UNEP, 2003).

The ten Melbourne Principles are as follows:

1. Provide a long-term vision for cities based on sustainability, intergenerational, social, economic, and political equity, and individuality.
2. Achieve long term economic and social security.
3. Recognise the intrinsic value of biodiversity and natural ecosystems and their protection and restoration.
4. Enable communities to minimise their ecological footprint.
5. Build on the characteristics of ecosystems in the development and nurturing of healthy and sustainable cities.
6. Recognise and build on the distinctive characteristics of cities including their human and cultural values, history and natural systems.
7. Empower people and foster participation.
8. Expand and enable cooperative networks to work towards a common sustainable future.
9. Promote sustainable production and consumption, through appropriate use of environmentally sound technologies and effective demand management.
10. Enable continual improvement, based on accountability, transparency and good governance (UNEP, 2003).

The formulation of these principles is contained within a paradigm change that has been shaping the face of global planning practice over recent decade – the need for greater involvement of people in planning. The theory and the practice of this paradigm shift are discussed in the following section.

A Paradigm of Participatory Planning

The dominant modernist development paradigm of the twentieth century was based upon centralised and hierarchical planning with a focus upon investment in infrastructure and capital, and in particular investment in highways. This ignored the social and quality of life issues which are complex and unquantifiable and are thus deemed difficult. Neo-classical economists and engineers have tended to dominate professional practice in this model. This approach has in recent decades been heavily critiqued by a growing body of literature which instead typically advocates the importance of transformation through participation, empowerment and capacity building. Sandercock (2003 p2) urges that we now need to give “systematic attention to the crumbling pillars of modernist planning”.

The critique of orthodox planning is particularly based upon its inherent tendency to control, model, predict and make certain, inhibit instead of promoting, weaken instead of supporting – the pluralistic, spontaneous, market-driven and entrepreneurial dynamics which actually shape cities (Hamdi & Goethert 1997). Rakodi (1993 p219) writes that this is because of “...its historical origins, its colonial history, its professional concerns with order and standards, its association with government and its domination by men” (in Hamdi & Goethert 1997).

The comparatively recent theoretical traditions of critical and interpretative social science which have been further developed by feminism and post-modernism have contributed to the ongoing development of this alternative body of literature. In a critique of the positivist Cartesian philosophy these traditions recognise that knowledge is a form of power that is socially constructed by changing social and historical processes, relations, perspectives and interpretations and instead emphasise the need for multiple discourses, collaborative and non-exploitative relations, the placement of the professional within the project and a praxis that is transformative and emancipative (Herron 1996, Schulz et al. 1998; Neuman 2000). Professional experts become participants in equal partnership and recognition with and of other sources of knowledge and expertise.

Chambers (1997) delineates two paradigms of development. These include firstly, a paradigm of ‘things’ (modernisation through infrastructure and capital), and secondly, a paradigm of ‘people’ (participatory and empowering development). This paradigm shift is outlined in Table 1.

The very essence of sustainability is often expressed through overarching principles which require participation, empowerment, ownership and a process that can account for difference in order to implement sustainability at the local and regional levels. Pretty supports this view and stating that sustainability is time and place specific and therefore requires a participatory approach (Pretty 1995). The ‘politics of inclusion’ has certainly had enormous influence over the affairs of public policy across the globe in recent years. Direct participation in the decision-making process is now considered necessary (Owen 1994).

Participation is however a contested term with multiple interpretations that range from manipulative participation, consultative participation, interactive participation to self-mobilisation (Pretty 1995, Sarkissian, Cook & Walsh 1997, Arnstien 1969). The traditional approach to public participation has been to ‘describe, educate, announce, defend’, otherwise known as DEAD (Roseland 1998). In contrast, as a

method of change, participation is a means to develop the voice and organisational capacities of those previously excluded (Rahman 1993)

Table 1: Characteristics of the orthodox planning paradigm and the alternative paradigm compared. Source: Hamdi & Goethert 1997.

Orthodox Paradigm - Providing	The Alternative Paradigm - Enabling
Increase productivity-growth in GNP as a goal	Encourage resourcefulness/well-being as a goal
People as objects of development	People are subjects of development
Professionals as benevolent pragmatists	Professionals as populist idealists
Promotes dependency	Promotes self-sufficiency/empowers
Professionals/governments as prime actors	CBPs/NGOs as prime actors – professionals as catalysts, governments as enablers
Promotes technology transfer (products)	Promotes appropriate technologies (processes)
Produces projects/concerned with outputs	Management of resources/concerned with outcomes
Information as data (things/surveys)	Information as knowledge (systems/oral testimonies)
Centralises productions and decision making	Decentralises production/devolves decision making
Prefers standardisation	Promotes variety/flexibility
Instant projects, prescriptive plans	Incremental projects/progressive programmes, adaptive planning
Consolidated (formal) industry, preferring large organisations	Fragmented (informal) industry based on small enterprise

Participatory learning and action are a family of methodologies within this new alternative paradigm that facilitate processes of inclusive and participatory democracy. The principles in common include:

- A systematic learning process;
- Multiple perspectives;
- Group learning process;
- Context specific;
- Facilitating experts and stakeholders; and
- Leading to achievable and sustained action (Pretty 1995).

These methods provide the practical means to achieve the philosophy and conceptual framework of participatory development at both a community and also institutional level. Participatory methodologies have been utilised internationally in developed and developing worlds.

Professional practice based upon the characteristics of the alternative paradigm described in Table 1 is now required to achieve sustainability at all levels. The recent recognition of the important role of a catalytic non-government sector in addition to an enabling public sector and a decentralised economy is important for the institutional and professional considerations of planning a city. No longer can decisions be left solely to Government or to the market, decision-making requires ‘jazz and synergy’ in flexible partnerships between these sectors and with civil society groups. Dancing to this tune will require attention to the participatory and partnership skills required.

Newman and Kenworthy (1999 p292-304) note four important principles that underlie sustainable urban professional praxis. These include:

- Recognising values: Core values may include environmental health, social justice, heritage, public realm, the urban economy and the community.
- Maximising diversity: This includes housing, transportation and urban form, fuel, infrastructure and cultural diversity.
- Crossing boundaries: Including physical, disciplinary and cultural boundaries.
- Facilitating organic processes: Both natural and community processes.

The theory and practice within this new paradigm has evolved through time and space in parallel and often in partnership. An essential principle has been reflection, analysis and theoretical development upon and about professional practice which is now widely documented. It provides the opportunity for cities to reevaluate how they provide urban infrastructure. This paper aims to contribute to this literature by reflecting upon a participatory forum held in Perth, Western Australia. This next section will describe this process.

Dialogue with the City

In September 2003 1,100 people participated at the biggest interactive consultation ever held in the southern hemisphere.¹ They gathered in the Fremantle Passenger Terminal for face-to-face interaction facilitated by computers to participate in the planning of the future for their City – Perth, the capital of Western Australia.

A History of Planning in Perth

Perth is known today by residents and visitors alike as a spectacular capital city with a clean coastline, an aesthetic river system, a multitude of recreational parklands and remnant bush land corridors and a multi-cultural populace who mostly enjoy a high quality of life. Perth was initially settled by Captain Stirling in 1829. The fertile soils attracted settlers looking for a new life of open possibilities and also by convicts serving life punishment. Relations with the first nation Indigenous people were at first cordial but this was to soon lead into a tragic history of massacre, displacement and at best paternalism. Planning decisions have continued through this history to ignore the Indigenous sense of place and at the very minimum respect sacred sites. The reconciliation movement is helping to raise public awareness on this issue as one of many.

Over the last half a century Perth's urban infrastructure growth has been typified by the American model of sprawling suburbs with centralized but ad hoc planning and decision making with a large number of uncoordinated actors. Perth is best classified as an auto city in accordance with the model of cities described in the first section. This has resulted in Perth, as it has previously elsewhere, in growing pockets of inequity and social exclusion, a strong reliance on the automobile, increasing pollution and a significantly altered natural environment.

Perth's population continues to grow at a high rate with an estimated 650,000 new residents living in the metropolitan area in the next 25 years with a total projected population of 2.2 million. This will put pressure on Perth's infrastructure, social health, limited financial resources and environment. Continuing along the current trajectory of planning practice is not a sustainable option for the future of Perth. This

was recognised by the current Minister for Planning and Infrastructure who as a result initiated a participatory planning process with the aim of inserting public input directly into planning decisions.

Dialogue with the City: Methods for Engagement and Outcomes

In early 2003 the Minister and her department, Planning and Infrastructure established the participatory planning process in partnership with the Western Australian Planning Commission, a number of industries including BHP Biliton Iron Ore Division in addition to both newspaper and television media. The aim of the process was to plan the future of the metropolitan area and the Peel region, with the aim of “making Perth the world’s most livable city by 2030”. The multiple methods that were employed to involve the community towards this aim are described below with their respective outcomes.

Discussion Papers

As a lead into the process the Western Australian Planning Commission, released a variety of discussion papers which outlined trends and issues for consideration in a number of significant areas. These were summarised as an Issues Paper which was given to participants at the one day forum in September 2003.

Community Survey

A large scale community survey was undertaken to firstly, provide information to the participants at the one day forum on the wider views of the community and secondly, to provide direct guidance to the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. The survey was designed to explore general attitudes and preferences on a wide range of issues, rather than specific planning issues only relevant in 2003. 8,000 people were randomly selected from the electoral roll who as a group was representative of the population of Perth. 1,711 people returned the survey and the results were weighted to match the representative profile.

The key findings of the survey were as follows:

- 80% wanted planning in Perth to adopt the trends of other livable cities which included environmental protection, public transport and planning decisions to be made with the whole of Perth in mind, not just local residents.
- Over 75% wanted government to reduce car dependency indicating that more money should be spent on passenger rail lines and improving safety.
- 90% wanted growth in several major regional business and entertainment centres.
- Approximately two thirds preferred development around corridors near major public transport rather than even growth in all directions.
- There was roughly an even split between those who wanted the city to grow out and those who wanted to fill in existing areas.
- Most people preferred the ‘stand-alone’, low density house close to services and natural attractions.
- 40% said they were attracted to living in a flat or townhouse.

The community survey report indicated that the “people of Perth had a close interest in the future of the city, and strong opinions about what is important to them” (WA Department of Planning & Infrastructure 2003a p2).

Raising awareness

A web-site and on-line discussion group was established. The web-site allowed people to download articles and to also submit their views through discussion papers. The on-line discussion group was set up to encourage debate. People who visited this site were mostly concerned with improving and promoting public transport and the cost of housing.

A number of articles published in the West Australian newspaper in addition to a hypothetical debate being played on a TV commercial channel (Channel 7) prior to the one day forum also helped to raise public awareness.

School competition

Youth input was encouraged through a school competition in which children were asked to submit essays and paintings on the theme – Perth 2030: The Kind of City I Want to Live In. Over 200 drawings and 30 essays were entered. The winning students received a \$250 voucher and their school received \$1,000 donated by BHP.

Pre-event forum

The pre-event form was held on 3rd September and was organized by the Smart Planning Alliance and the WA Collaboration to provide NGO representatives and other participants with

- A briefing on the Dialogue with the City process and what to expect on the day;
- Opportunity to listen to speakers on issues such as alternatives to urban sprawl, an urban growth boundary, sustainable transport, housing and social equity;
- An opportunity for people to raise issues and concerns from different perspectives;
- A chance to discuss some of the important issues that will be discussed at Dialogue with the City.

Listening Sessions

Listening sessions were held with the youth, Indigenous and non-English people on the Thursday evening prior to the one day event. These were held with the aim of providing a space to ensure that these groups were heard. This aim was explicitly stated over the evening. Some of the issues included:

Youth

- Cheaper housing in the CBD for young people
- Tighter planning controls limiting urban sprawl
- Medium density housing to promote opportunity for activity and entertainment
- Faster and more efficient and diverse transport
- Greater facilitation of community empowerment and awareness of policy decisions

Indigenous people

- Culture: Indigenous precincts, nurturing Indigenous elders
- Housing: diverse, near infrastructure
- Public transport to be improved

- Indigenous governance and representation issues to be addressed
- Land rights to be given attention

People from non-English speaking backgrounds

- Creative ideas for community interaction
- Urban villages with smaller lots and affordable housing
- Community participation to be strengthened
- Law that makes racists accountable

The Forum

The one day forum on Saturday 13 September 2003 attracted approximately 1,100 Western Australians. A training day was held on the Tuesday prior to the event for the facilitators and scribes, and the sequence of the day was trialled. Comments and questions were encouraged throughout the training.

Approximately two thirds of the participants were citizens who had been either involved in the survey or had nominated to be involved by responding to advertising. The remaining stakeholders were from local government, environmental, industry and community groups. At the forum the tables were heterogeneous with the exception of the Indigenous and non-English speaking tables.

The day began with much excitement; the air was charged with the anticipation of 1,100 people. International speakers from USA and England were first on the agenda talking about their experience with urban planning, transport management and also participatory planning, including the post September 11th planning event. A video re-played the debate that had been shown previously by Channel 7.

The participatory segment of the day involved two main sessions, before and after lunch. The first session involved the group using networked computers to record discussion and issues. This was sent to a theme team who collated and briefly analysed data. The set of common themes that emerged was presented on large screens to participants. The key findings include but are not limited to:

- The need to create a sense of community
- Creation of urban villages with unique character that incorporated cultural, historical and indigenous traditions
- Stronger and more vibrant activity in local areas
- Future development to be focused around good public transport routes
- People wanted to maintain their suburban backyard but also wanted freedom of choice amongst diverse housing types
- 70% wanted to limit urban sprawl and supported the concept of an urban growth boundary
- Reduction in car dependency with more support for public transport, particularly rail, and better facilities for pedestrians and cyclists
- Strong concern for sustainability

The afternoon session involved a mapping game which enabled the groups to consider the challenges of planning and map what they would like Perth to look like in the long-term future. Four scenarios were given to the group to decide which one they would like the Government to consider within planning decisions. These include a connected network; multi-centred city; a compact city; and a dispersed city. The connected city received 35.4% of support, followed by the multi-centred city with 29.4% and then the

compact with 22.4% and the dispersed city with 12.8%. The mapping exercise supported the findings listed in the previous paragraph.

Community workshops

Community workshops are currently being held in both the north and south areas of the central Swan River. The aim of these workshops is to discuss the draft strategies which include the vision, values and objectives of the strategy in addition to the challenges which these face.

The following section will analyse the historical significance of this event and what possibilities may hold for the future of sustainable and participatory planning in Perth.

Lessons for the Future

Planning towards sustainable cities requires a new paradigm as discussed Section 1. This section will demonstrate why and how Dialogue with the City was characteristic of planning within this paradigm

The democratic imperative requires that ‘those who will be substantially affected by decisions made by social and political institutions must be involved in the making of those decisions’. (Bullock & Trombley 2000 p 630)

The above quote depicts quite clearly the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure’s intent in initiating the process of Dialogue with the City. Ministerial goodwill was clear throughout the process and was translated directly into her department through the time and effort of individual volunteers and with the department’s resources. This would have the added benefit of ownership by the department which would certainly be an essential feature of effective implementation. Political and departmental support is necessary not only for implementation and ownership of the outcomes by these stakeholders but also for public confidence and thus ongoing participation. Thompson (1998) writes that within bureaucratic and hierarchal systems strong leadership is necessary at the upper levels in order to sustain a participatory approach. The OECD (1996 p91) supports this by writing that “participants who possess the responsibility and the authority to ensure successful implementation” must be included. The ministerial lead now sets a new and unprecedented standard for not only the affairs pertaining to planning and infrastructure but for the whole of government..

The Dialogue with the City process in part came out of a broader State Sustainability Strategy which was a cross government process that had occurred over the previous two years with substantial public participation (WA Government 2003). The partnership approach taken throughout the Dialogue process is an essential feature of sustainability. Industry, media and non-government were partners with the State Government in inviting citizen participation. Industry sponsorship signifies the important perceived role of participatory processes and the benefit of being aligned within a model of corporate social responsibility. Media partnership, in multiple forms, enabled public attention and thus encouraged participation. Participation throughout the process was aimed towards the inclusion of a diverse representation within the civil, business and government sectors to encourage dialogue amongst these groups necessary for sustainable planning. The WA Collaboration, a peak non-government organisation, has played an instrumental and catalytic role in the process including the pre-forum event, participation in the forum and post forum support.

Long term visioning was encouraged so that people would rise above short-term issues. Participants were asked to think about planning in Perth over the next thirty years which took them to their children and

grandchildren's lives and in many instances their own retirement years. In terms of scale, the area of consideration was the whole of the metropolitan area and facilitators tried to keep the discussion relevant to this broader level. The citizenry of Perth were sitting in the seats typically dominated by planning experts and making strategic decisions in this capacity. The seriousness and significance of this could be felt and seen throughout the day.

Expert involvement in the process before and during the one day forum enabled a dialogue to occur in which experts were effectively able to communicate the challenges and opportunities of planning. At the forum this included a presentation of the international experience which better encouraged outward looking interaction. The presentations given at the forum were all flavoured with humility. It was clear that the most important people attending the event were the participants themselves. Newman and Kenworthy (1999 p198) write that "Professionals need some humility in this process but are still essential participants in creating sustainable cities. Critical, therefore to developing a direction on sustainability in any city is the need for successful community participation and partnership with urban professionals". The participation of experts in the forum certainly enabled a dialogue with citizens.

Reflective practitioner Schön in his 1987 publication titled *The Reflective Practitioner* states:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner may choose."

Within the case-study attempts by the State Government to encourage participation and venture into the low-lying swamp involved a number of different methods as described in the previous section. The discussion forum enabled ongoing interaction and dialogue which was fed by discussion papers published on the website. The Community Survey was sent to a large sample with approximately 25% response rate. The school competition gave youth an opportunity to express their views but also served as an educational device. The pre-event forum allowed people to discuss issues of significance to them and also to voice concern or provide suggestions. The one day forum enabled intense group participation and dialogue. Recorded points from the discussion required a majority view although minority views were recorded if desired. The presentation of data analysis during the day allowed the individual groups an insight into the broader picture. Documentation including the final report is based solely upon a participant perspective and thus represents a formal component of the dialogical process. Ongoing dialogue has been made possible through the post-forum workshops; interested participants are able to stay involved in the process in partnership with government and non-government. Additionally, personalised letters to all of the participants contain information as to the progress of the process and invite comment. A concerted attempt by the Minster and her department to move beyond one off consultation into the murky depths of participatory processes is evident.

A degree of similarity can be observed between the responses of the multiple methods over the duration of the process as described in Section Two. Similar issues were raised at different times through different methods. This could be a result of the multi-method approach attracting a diverse range of participants over the span of the process. Alternatively the multi-methods could be capturing the same participants who are expressing their views through a number of mediums. In the latter case the most dominant and

sustained voices would tend to dominate the sample over a process. The community survey which also invited participation in the one day forum was based upon a representative sample of Perth's population.

An interesting analysis would be a comparison of the percentage of each 'group' within the sample that participated in each method and in the process overall – raising the question of how well the process was able to resolve the postcolonial condition (Sandercock 2003). Opportunities to participate between individuals and 'groups' differ according to skills such as literacy and states of being including empowerment and a sense of belonging to the broader community. The engagement of the minority groups through the listening sessions prior to the Saturday, 13th September event helped to create a parallel stream which has remained in the documentation throughout the process. However, an Indigenous person was noticeably absent from the 'theme team' (the volunteers from the Department of Planning and Infrastructure who processed and presented the data on the Saturday) given that data analysis is significantly affected by an individual's cultural framework. In the case of representation within the minority groups, many of the Indigenous individuals were from government or were otherwise high profile individuals. Difficulties exist in participatory processes however in not only crossing culture but also class.

The Dialogue with the City now provides a broad and coordinating framework in which citizenry, government and business can tackle smaller issues and provide an integrated approach to urban infrastructure. In accordance with the first principle stated within the Melbourne principles (Section 1.2), planning in Perth now has the foundations for "a long-term vision for cities based on sustainability, inter-generational, social, economic, and political equity". The holistic and inter-related nature of sustainability formed an essential pillar of the process. The final report both implicitly and explicitly recognised the inter-related nature of our society and our relationship to our environment, constructed and natural. The creation of an urban growth boundary was one of many sustainable outcomes. Government commitment to this is particularly significant given that periphery development is often easier than inner-city redevelopment (OECD 1996). Taken as a whole, the Melbourne Principles were addressed within the process; a vision of a sustainable city was an outcome. Minority themes particularly recognised the complexity of sustainability, with issues such as governance, self-determination and land rights being stated by the Indigenous group as necessary features of planning in Perth.

Conclusion

Urban infrastructure priorities are complex as cities approach an uncertain future with auto dependence in decline and modernism failing. Sustainability is working its way into city processes to help create a better framework and foundation. Public participation is critical in this. In Perth this has been evident through the Dialogue with the City process.

Dialogue with the City helped to reaffirm that the citizens of Perth do have a strong sense of place, honor the sustainability principle and that many are willing to participate within long-term decision making processes. The challenge ahead for civil, business and government sectors alike is how to meet and sustain an engaged process approach essential for effective and sustained participation necessary to meet the challenges of the new planning paradigm and urban infrastructure decisions that can create a more sustainable future.

Notes

- ¹ Relevant material can be accessed from <http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/dialogue/index.html>. Unless otherwise indicated the material has been sourced from Dialogue with the City: Final Report of Proceedings.

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