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Laying the Groundwork for Participatory Budgeting – Developing a Deliberative Community and Collaborative Governance: Greater Geraldton, Western Australia

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Abstract

Participatory Budgeting (PB), an institutional innovation to promote democratic change, is a form of collaborative governance in which citizens are involved in decision-making processes about how to spend part or all of available government funds. Like the broader concept of democracy, for PB to be effective, there needs to be an ongoing participatory process that involves the building of civic capacity and infrastructure. This paper focuses on a particular attribute of civic efficacy, that of deliberative public engagement, defined as collaborative problem solving through informed, inclusive, egalitarian processes with the outcomes influencing policy, decisions and/or collaborative action. It is argued that to be a deep democratic reform, PB needs to be more intentionally deliberative than usually practiced, within an environment that nurtures civic collaboration and empowerment. In the current situation of disaffected, often angry and/or cynical citizenry, without resorting to revolution, overcoming the pervasive sense of impotence to effect real change is not easy. It requires ongoing effort to create the civic capacity, policies and the institutions that will enable everyday people to work together with decision-makers to achieve collaborative public wisdom, decisions and action. For PB to avoid being merely a superficial band-aid to the perceived malaise of our democratic systems, we contend that the culture in which it is situated needs to be nurtured and stewarded to be more collaborative, considered and egalitarian. The deliberative democracy process instituted over a number of years in Greater Geraldton, Western Australia, shows how some of the preconditions for an effective participatory budgeting initiative could be achieved. The lessons learned are widely applicable to other western democracies, and potentially, other forms of governance.

Keywords

participatory budgeting, deliberative community, collaborative governance

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Laying the Groundwork for Participatory Budgeting – Developing a Deliberative Community and Collaborative Governance: Greater Geraldton, Western Australia

Introduction

The focus of our research is the City Region of Greater Geraldton, Western Australia, situated over 400 kilometers from the capital city, Perth. The research explores participatory sustainability, finding and studying innovative ways to create future regional sustainability. A key concept of sustainability is stewardship of our resources, considering the rights of future generations, so that no generation should inherit less human and natural wealth than the one that preceded it. Never easy to achieve, this is a particular challenge and opportunity in Greater Geraldton.

The Greater Geraldton City Region consists of a coastal city/port and surrounding fishing, farming, tourism and mining area, covering almost 13,000 square kilometers, with a population of around 40,000 residents. The City Region is beset by challenging problems such as a significantly declining fishing and agricultural base, environmental vulnerabilities due to climate change; a relatively large, disadvantaged Indigenous population (around 17% of the total population); many young people leaving because of inadequate educational and work opportunities; proposals by big mining companies to increase their fly-in-fly-out workforce, likely to erode the City Region's long-term viability; and, finally the decision-making ability for significant developments often being retained in the capital city rather than locally. On the positive side, Greater Geraldton is bestowed with extraordinary opportunities: endless alternative energy sources (solar, wind, wave, geothermal and biomass); it is an early recipient of the Federal Government's National Broadband Network (NBN), as well as other high technology developments, such as receipt of one of IBM's global 'Smarter Cities Challenge' grants that aims to deliver systemic and long-term digital improvements, and the extraordinary SKA (Square Kilometer Array) with its proposed \$3 billion radio telescope.

In the midst of these challenges and opportunities, like most cities and regions in Australia, the Geraldton citizenry tends to be cynical about government, apathetic about politics (with low turnout for local elections, though voting in State and Federal elections is compulsory in Australia), and relatively uninvolved in important decisions being made for their City-Region. Recognizing this as a significant deterrent to future sustainability, the City CEO requested Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute (CUSP) to partner with it to find ways to

more cooperatively involve citizens in co-creating a sustainable future for the City Region. The project that evolved was awarded a national university grant over a 3-year period, as well as lottery funding. ‘Geraldton, 2029 and Beyond’ is now in its third year. It has already achieved global recognition, being a finalist in the renowned Reinhard-Mohn 2011 Prize on ‘Vitalizing Democracy’ and the global winner of the UN LivCom award for ‘Participation and Empowerment’.

It is this experience, including the City Region’s plans for Participatory Budgeting, that forms the background to this paper. It is the author’s contention that Participatory Budgeting is a powerful tool for achieving more effective democracy, particularly so if it is more intentionally deliberative than usually practiced, and if the environment in which it is practiced supports inclusive, collaborative problem solving and decision making. This paper begins with a brief description of the development of PB as it relates to our theme. We outline how and why Geraldton’s dual PBs are alike and dissimilar to the more standard PB model of Porto Alegre. This includes a redefinition of the notion of redistribution of resources and a more particular definition of deliberative public engagement, explaining why we view deliberation as so central to effective PB. To illustrate, we explain briefly how we have nurtured and stewarded a more deliberative and collaborative environment in Greater Geraldton. We draw lessons from what we have learned, developing what we believe to be important preconditions to PB if its intention is to bring about meaningful democratic reform, while at the same time, bringing about more equitable redistribution of resources, not just for the current population, but for future generations.

Brief overview of PB

The first Participatory Budgeting initiative in Porto Alegre in Brazil in 1989 had an explicit intention of involving ordinary people to help address the social inequalities that plagued the city (Baiochhi, 2001) as well as the corruption that plagued governance (Wampler and Avritzer, 2006). The initial endeavour in Porto Alegre has now become institutionalized there (though not in legislation) and a wide variety of permutations, all called Participatory Budgeting, have spread throughout the world, including South America, Europe, China, the USA, the UK, South Korea, Turkey, Canada and Australia. Their intent is often quite divergent from the original PB, as are the processes they employ. Similarly, the extent to which they have become institutionalized as ‘business as usual’ varies from being legislated, to accepted practice, to sporadic opportunism (see for example Avritzer, 2006; Best et al.,

2011; Boulding and Wampler, 2010; He, 2011; Kim, 2010; Maley, 2010; OECD, 2009; Sintomer et al., 2008).

Although it is difficult to define precisely (Bassoli, 2010), Participatory Budgeting (PB) involves citizens in decision making about how to spend part or all of available government funds, for example by prioritizing expenditure on local infrastructure, usually at a local, precinct or city level. The Porto Alegre PB process, often seen as the exemplar, includes an annual process of representatives participating in the rule development and oversight of the process, civic groups developing proposals for funding, and the broad resident base voting on their preferences, with government accepting the outcomes. A key aim is the more equitable redistribution of resources. While most PB models involve a voting aggregation process, a minority of PBs involve public deliberation alone, where demographically representative participants (usually randomly sampled) collaborate in an intentionally deliberative process, for example, the Deliberative Polling in China (Fishkin, 1998) and the recent PB deliberative minipublic in Canada Bay, New South Wales, Australia. In some PBs, legislative constraints mean that the final decision resides with existing government bodies, while elsewhere changes to legislation have meant that citizen groups have been given the power to make final decisions themselves (Baiochhi, 2001; Bassoli, 2010; Boulding and Wampler, 2010; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008; Kim, 2010; OECD, 2009; Maley, 2010). Since a common ambition of PB initiatives is to engage citizens through the budgeting process to affect issues that matter to them with the related outcome of building social cohesion, then PB processes need to be both ongoing and inclusive of all sectors of the population to be effective. In Porto Alegre, for example, the process is a yearly cycle, with citizens and representatives of civil society groups involving a significant cross-section of the community being involved in developing, deliberating and voting on investment priorities and projects that should be implemented (Baiochhi, 2001, 46).

Deliberative Democracy

The term *deliberation* is now part of everyday lexicon, often meaning no more than talking together. However, it is often noted that one of the endemic problems with political discourse, whether among citizens or politicians is that it relies on advocacy, argumentation, persuasion, sometimes cooption and often polemics. Such discourse rarely results in mutual understanding, let alone wise problem solving; it is invariably inequitable; and it inevitably results in winners and losers or dead ends. We argue that PB cannot realize its potential as a

deep democratic reform if the discourse that characterizes it is not egalitarian and respectful. We propose that if we want more effective democratic participation, then the capacity to ‘deliberate’ matters. Dryzek notes that, at least among theorists, “the essence of democracy is now widely taken to be deliberation, as opposed to voting, interest aggregation, constitutional rights or even self-government” (Dryzek, 2000, 2). In short, an effective democracy requires more than periodic voting, even official rights; it requires the participation of citizens in mutual understanding and considered, collaborative problem solving, that is, deliberative democracy.

Deliberative democracy is collaborative decision-making and policy development that is influenced by the outcomes of informed, considered, respectful and egalitarian deliberation between participants who are representative of the population in terms of demographics and attitudes. In short, deliberative democracy is distinguished from the usual community consultation, in at least three ways: it is representative/inclusive, deliberative and influential (Carson and Hartz-Karp 2005). Deliberation takes a particular meaning of making considered judgments based on rationale as well as emotion, inclusive of different world views, able to address tensions by negotiating both disagreement and consensus, and capable of being practical, large-scale and problem-solving.

In our work, we endeavor to ‘scale out’ such participation, that is, to find ways to involve the broad population in the deliberations, for example through media coverage more focused on community development than sensationalism, interactive social media and innovative online deliberation. We also endeavor to ‘scale up’ participation, that is, to find ways to enable deliberation on big and complex issues. If we hope to achieve greater sustainability, wherein future generations will not be worse off than we are today, we need everyday people to have the capacity and opportunity to help to generate the public wisdom needed to address the tough, often ‘wicked’ problems that face us. The renowned sustainability author and provocateur, McKibben (2006), has suggested that the only way we can shift into a sustainable future is through new technologies of cooperation. In our view, deliberative democracy is such a technology.

While it is often said that the various assemblies involved in PB processes are “deliberative” (Avritzer 2006), it unclear the extent to which they ‘authentically’ reflect cognitive diversity and egalitarian, skillful discussion that balances inquiry and advocacy in order to arrive at a

coherent voice. If such discussions simply mirror the adversarial debates, lobbying and voting that typify party politics, then we argue that PB cannot realize its democratic potential. This is particularly so if we take a broad view of democracy as “a way of living” that provides varying opportunities for citizens “to participate as equal authors of their collective life” (Hartz-Karp and Briand, 2009, 4). For this to occur, people of diverse viewpoints need ongoing opportunities to deliberate, involving the careful consideration of perspectives, values and options in order to arrive at a coherent voice that represents common ground. This cannot be a one-off bargaining moment but rather multiple opportunities over multiple years.

It is this conceptualization of deliberation that has guided our development of deliberative democracy in Greater Geraldton. Our aim has been to provide diverse opportunities for a significant cross-section of the community to have conversations on issues that matter to them in ways that are inclusive of different viewpoints, cognizant of different values, seeking and carefully considering alternative options, enabling them to explore the potential for common ground and joint action. Decisions and actions that involve the City administration have been fast-tracked through the system, implemented where feasible, and explained when not.

Although the implementation of PB in Greater Geraldton was discussed early in the ‘2029 and Beyond’ project, at that stage it was determined to be too high a risk, especially since there was distrust between the community and administration, and elected officials were very wary. In their view, they had been elected to make decisions, they knew what the community wanted, and their job did not entail ‘handing over’ decision-making to unelected people. This was anything but fertile ground for Participatory Budgeting, given that PB inherently requires devolution of decision-making power (Sintomer et al., 2008). Moreover, a process similar to Porto Alegre was not feasible given the paucity of civic infrastructure to steward the initiative – there are very few civic society organizations in the City Region other than sport. There was also little good will since the City’s efforts at community consultation were often perceived by citizens to be too little, too late, and the City considered those turning up to the consultations to be self-interested and uninformed or misinformed. We needed to create a different environment, more conducive to mutual trust and collaboration before launching into a PB.

Developing a more Deliberative, Collaborative Culture in Greater Geraldton

Our initiative in Greater Geraldton has involved both the development of a deliberative community and collaborative governance. The aim has been to deepen democracy in ways that

could lead to a more resilient and sustainable community. From the outset, the hope has been that this process of empowered participation would lay the foundation for the subsequent implementation of participatory budgeting, as well as other innovative forms of collaboration that require governments to relinquish some of their decision making power.¹

The implementation of this process involved and continues to involve interlocking diverse forms of face-to-face, small and large-scale deliberations, with innovative online deliberation and social media.² This process (described in more detail below) relies on inspiring and fostering a different sort of community participation than the more typical inputs of criticisms, complaints and/or self-interested advocating. It requires the time, effort and good will of everyday people as well as stakeholders to resolve tough problems. For this to occur, those involved need to know their efforts will make a difference, influencing decisions, action or policy. Hence, such a process also requires the good will and trust of decision-makers to share the problem solving and decision making with those not deemed to be ‘experts’. From experience, such collaborative governance is often the more problematic part of the equation. However without it, public deliberation tends to be short-lived, often resulting in increased cynicism. In short, the intent of the ‘Geraldton 2029 and beyond’ process is to provide opportunities to strengthen the willingness and capacity of an ever-expanding range of everyday people as well as stakeholders and decision-makers to collaboratively problem-solve, develop policy, make decisions and enact the outcomes. The difficulty has been melding this process into the usual mode of government planning that requires pre-established, often annual goals, resource allocation and action plans. However, throughout ‘Geraldton 2029 and beyond’, decisions regarding where, when and how to put time and resources into deliberative democracy initiatives has been a case of adaptive management³ –

¹ This is in keeping with the typology of collaborative governance proposed by Gollagher and Hartz-Karp (forthcoming), suggesting three fundamental reasons for implementing collaborative governance: (1) legitimising and better informing existing government decision making, by linking collaborative processes formally to conventional governance processes; (2) challenging and/or gradually transforming existing government power structures; and (3) usurping, or acting outside of, conventional government processes. It is suggested that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but may also be implemented simultaneously, or sequentially, with the intention of allowing participants and government actors to better understand and trust deliberative democracy, and therefore become more amenable to further devolving decision-making power. In effect, experience with a category 1 process may lead to subsequent implementation of a category 2 process.

² For further details regarding these initiatives, see Hartz-Karp, J. 2011. *‘Geradlton 2029 and Beyond’*. Bertlesman Foundation. Reinhard-Mohn Prize Finalists.

³ The study of sustainability has long recognized uncertainties regarding cause and effect. Traditional scientific approaches that rely upon linear thinking, dividing phenomena into distinct components in order to study them, have been seen to be inadequate. One result has been the acceptance of “adaptive management” which focuses on design and experimentation, iteratively linking knowledge and action, integrating forms of knowledge (in this instance public wisdom) outside those sources traditionally seen as legitimate, and being responsive to changes in the system (Walters and Holling 1990).

making the most of momentum as it gathers on opportunities and threats of consequence to future sustainability.

The Geraldton public deliberation process began with bottom-up initiatives including the elicitation of around 40 Community Champions who volunteered to learn about and orchestrate small-scale deliberations in the community, starting with a World Café.⁴ The deliberated outcomes would, wherever feasible, result in decisions, plans and actions. For this to occur, it required a different relationship with the media and other government agencies in the region. A partnership was formulated with the local newspaper, where most people in the region get their news, encouraging the paper to take on the role of contributor to community development rather than its prior preoccupation with critique and sensationalist issues. The Indigenous media and the local Aboriginal umbrella organization also formed loose partnerships with the project. These efforts were successful, as evidenced by the subsequent participation by agencies from the three tiers of government and industry groups.

A Deliberative Survey⁵ ascertained public sentiment on key challenges facing the community. Participants considered, deliberated views, even supported radical action to achieve sustainability. Grassroots, small face-to-face deliberations, Conversation Cafes⁶ continued the discussions, this time focusing on what Geraldton people meant by an oft-used phrase of not wanting to lose ‘the Gero feel’ as Geraldton developed. These small-scale deliberations were supplemented by an innovative online deliberation platform, CivicEvolution,⁷ which enabled community members to develop ideas into proposals that could then be prioritized and fast-tracked so implementation could be supported. A number of these larger and more complex

⁴ A World Café enables large numbers of people to be engaged in interactive conversation to explore important issues (in this instance, there were 36 World Cafes, involving around 400 participants). Participants are not randomly selected, they are invited – the purpose of the meeting determines who should be there. World Cafés are deliberative – people move from group to group exploring questions related to a particular issue.

⁵ Deliberative Survey participants are selected via random sampling to represent the demographics of the population. The purpose is to examine what the public would think given the opportunity to be informed and to deliberate with their peers on topics of social and public policy. An initial survey (used to calibrate the results of subsequent surveys) is sent to a large random sample of the population (in this instance, 3,000) with all recipients being invited to participate in a forum (in this instance, 1 day). At the forum, participants (100+) are surveyed before and after hearing from and questioning ‘experts’ representing differing viewpoints, with opportunities to discuss the issues with their peers in small group dialogue. The results of the surveys are analyzed to determine whether information and deliberation alters participant viewpoints and preferences.

⁶ A Conversation Café is a small, hosted, lively, drop-in conversation among diverse people about their views and feelings about issues of importance. They are held in real cafes or other public places to enhance the sense of inclusivity and creativity that can spontaneously occur when people get together. The aim is to foster inquiry rather than debate about issues that matter, and to speak with the heart and the mind. The structure is simple, aided by a few methods to ensure everyone has a turn to talk and to listen.

⁷ For more information on this process of ‘Think together to act together’, see www.civicevolution.org.

proposals resulted in inter-departmental and community planning groups. Social media accompanied all these initiatives to maximize exposure of the issues and encourage public interaction. All these inputs were incorporated into a ‘Community Charter’, which has been widely disseminated and then included in the integrated ‘Strategic Community Plan’, which drives the future funding of the City-Region.

The opportunity arose for a revised, whole-region planning process, which meant Greater Geraldton’s ‘Statutory Regional’ plan needed to be renewed and precinct planning set in motion to develop ‘Precinct Plans’. The public deliberation process for 2012 has largely focused on this opportunity for change. A large-scale 21st Century Dialogue⁸ integrated with an Enquiry-By-Design⁹ and small-scale public deliberations have resulted in a new Regional Plan that is driven by community aspirations for a sustainable, vibrant City Region. Similar public deliberations will involve the local residents in planning their own precincts. The first of these is purposefully in the lowest socio-economic precinct, incorporating a large proportion of Indigenous residents and most of the public housing, a precinct that has been neglected and under-funded for decades. The plan is to make this area the center for renewal, incorporating planning that will ensure that Indigenous and other disadvantaged residents are not driven elsewhere as a result of gentrification that often occurs with renewal.

Another opportunity arose when Geraldton won an IBM Smarter Cities Challenge grant and was also a recipient of the early roll-out of the new National Broadband Network. A survey was sent to a large random sample of the City Region population and yet another to the high school students in their final two years to ascertain their views on their digital future. A community deliberation group, akin to a Citizens’ Jury,¹⁰ included 19 respondents from the randomly sampled survey and high school students who agreed to take part in further deliberation. The Citizens’ Jury firstly enabled the IBM team to modify their recommendations to be more relevant to ordinary citizens. Then when the IBM team delivered

⁸ This technique enables a large number of community, industry and government representatives (in this instance, 250) to engage in informed deliberation over 1-4 days in small groups, connected through networked computers. Their input is themed in real time by an independent theme team, clarifying common ground as well as minority viewpoints. Priorities are ranked and a Participant Report of the outcomes is then disseminated.

⁹ An Enquiry-By-Design is an interactive process held over several days (3-4), that seeks win-win solutions for urban planning/design/renewal. It incorporates the values and feedback of the community into evolving plans and designs created by a multidisciplinary team of technical experts.

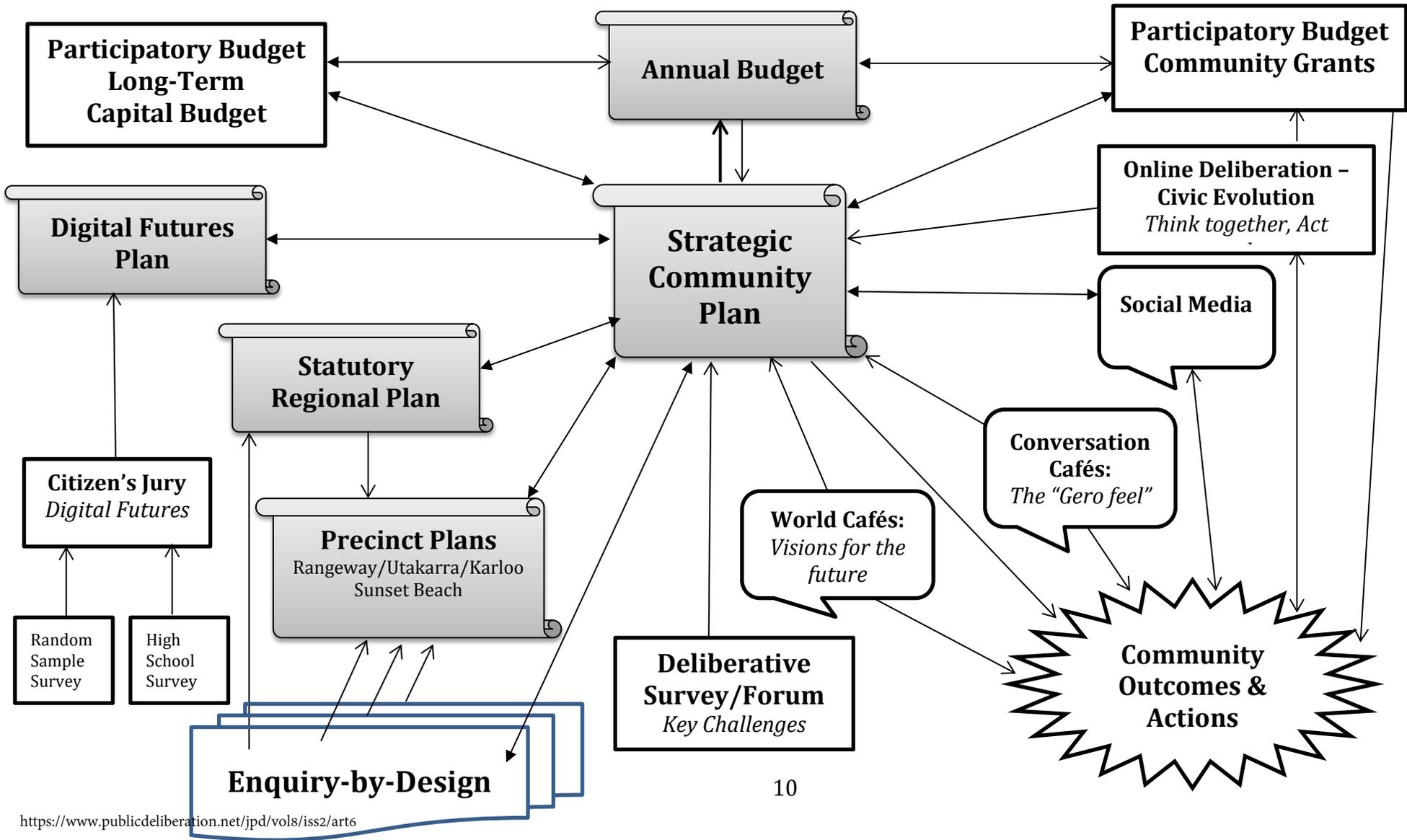
¹⁰ The Citizen’s Jury process provides the opportunity for a randomly selected microcosm of the public (15–25) to deliberate thoroughly on an issue (over 1–5 days). Jurors are assisted by expert witnesses (to understand the range of viewpoints) and a professional facilitator (to assist the deliberation and search for common ground). Jurors present their findings to decision makers.

their proposals, the community deliberation team continued to work to develop their community response. The community digital plan that evolved was formally delivered by the deliberation group to the Federal Minister for Communication, and is currently being integrated into the City Region's plans for enabling a digital and carbon-neutral City Region.

From the outset of this process, new forms of collaborative governance were pioneered, including the formation of an Alliance Governance Group of industry, government, Indigenous and NGO decision-maker representatives, as well as several randomly sampled ordinary citizens. The role of the Alliance Group is to oversee public deliberation processes to ensure their fairness, comprehensiveness and transparency, and to prioritize proposals that have resulted from these deliberations, then help to implement them when approved by the Council (or by the City if it aligned with their budget). Local Government legislation and regulation in Western Australia puts the decision-making capacity of the local government firmly in the hands of the elected Council. This makes it very difficult to truly share, let alone delegate power. Doing so rests on the good will of elected officials to support the proposals that emanate from the deliberative process. This has not been a smooth process, especially with local government elections and significant changes in Council membership as a result of the amalgamation of two local areas into one Council. When this project began, significant effort was put into working with the Council to understand and support public deliberation and collaborative governance. This resulted in steady progress in trust and willingness to pioneer new shared decision-making initiatives with ordinary residents. However, with the appointment of many new members to the new Council, it became apparent that this process of building trust and support would have to begin anew. Given the community momentum that had been building, many have found this slowdown to be frustrating.

The following diagram overviews the deliberative democracy processes in Greater Geraldton, their outcomes and linkages.

Diagram1: Greater Geraldton Deliberative Collaborative Governance Overview 2010-2012
Citizens and Government jointly solving problems and making decisions
Alliance Governance Group prioritizing and fast-tracking where needed



Participatory Budgeting – the Proposed Process for 2012/13

The pioneering Participatory Budgeting initiative, planned to commence in late 2012, is a two-pronged effort. In our view, this is essentially due to the varying degrees of complexity of the budgets to be allocated, and hence the degree of deliberation needed to make informed, reasoned and wise decisions. In Greater Geraldton, the relatively straightforward, small-to-medium-expense projects (totaling \$1 million) that will be of immediate benefit to the community seem to suit a PB model akin to Porto Alegre. However, the long-term strategic infrastructure budget (totaling over \$10 million), aimed at ensuring that future generations are no worse off than the current population, is more complex. To allocate this budget will require not only understanding of the City Region budgetary process, but also of the Strategic Community Plan aimed at greater sustainability, as well as the modeling and data required to support informed infrastructure decision-making. This seems to suit a model based on public deliberation, akin to the Canada Bay PB in Australia. In the latter example, a randomly sampled group of 32 residents deliberated together over several months to make recommendations on what services to cut or whether to increase the Council's total budget of around \$60 million. In Australia, residents tend to pay little attention to the required/legislated local government efforts to inform them about the annual budgetary process. Hence, when informed about an imminent rate rise, community outrage generally ensues. In the Canada Bay example, the elected Council informed residents of their unanimous commitment to implement the deliberators' recommendations. The deliberators recommended a rate rise. While this decision was not necessarily liked, community outrage did not ensue. It appeared that randomly selected residents were trusted more than elected members on the issue of the reasonableness and wisdom of increasing taxes.

Using a more deliberative PB process, one prong of the Geraldton PB will involve the proportional allocation of the \$10 million long-term infrastructure budget. Since the Strategic Community Plan embraces Greater Geraldton becoming carbon-neutral, this needs to be an integral component of the long-term infrastructure decision making. A consultancy is currently measuring and modeling the carbon footprint of the potential infrastructure projects proposed thus far, providing important information for the participatory budgeting process. However carbon neutrality is not a straightforward concept and will need to be deliberated to determine its boundaries in this instance, and then weighed against the other sustainability social, cultural, environmental and economic goals that form the basis of the Strategic

Community Plan. This is a complex process, and it is envisaged it will involve a public deliberation process over several months, incorporating adaptations of several deliberative techniques, a Citizens' Jury and Citizen Choicework.¹¹ The Citizens' Jury will consist of around 25 randomly sampled residents. They will learn from and question experts, including researchers, technocrats and citizen activist groups. Through considered deliberation, they will develop and recommend infrastructure option packages, each with pros and cons (social, economic and environmental, including the carbon footprint). The broader community will also have the opportunity to deliberate the infrastructure option packages through Citizens' Choicework, with the randomly sampled deliberators helping to host the events and to learn more about the views of others. The process will be given as much media and social media exposure as possible. Taking into account the community's views, the deliberation group will recommend their preferred infrastructure budget allocation, which will be presented to both the City and the elected Council. The Council will have clarified at the outset of this PB process whether they will unconditionally accept the PB recommendations.¹²

The second PB prong will involve community groups developing proposals for the \$1million Community Grants, which will then be voted on by the residents. This Community Grants PB has several objectives. Firstly it aims to increase the breadth of community groups interested in developing a joint infrastructure project for funding, including a variety of cultural, social and environmental interests. Since many of these groups do not have incorporated organizations, the usual Community Grants procedures will need to be amended. If this is achieved, with the support of community champions, disadvantaged groups will be targeted and supported, if needed, to develop proposals. This, in turn, will hopefully lead to better community organizing around issues involving the least privileged. Secondly, it aims to elicit the broad interest of residents in determining how best to spend the money allocated for community projects. (Notably, in the past, organized sport, particularly football, has received a highly disproportionate share. It is not known if this represents effective lobbying on the part of a vocal minority or actual broad community support). Thirdly, it aims to garner the support of elected members, demonstrating how more inclusive, less contentious decisions can be made, so strengthening their trust in the process of collaborative governance. Lastly, it offers

¹¹ Deliberators are assisted by a Choicework Guide, presenting different choices with pros and cons. Rather than 'solutions' to the problem, the choices help people disentangle key elements of a complex problem so they can more effectively grapple with the trade-offs. Consensus is not the goal but rather a deeper understanding of areas of common ground, important disagreements, critical questions and concerns.

¹² The decision as to whether the recommendation will be unanimously accepted by the elected Council is currently under consideration at the time of writing this paper.

an obvious route to institutionalizing at least one form of deliberative democracy, since it involves a routine, annual cycle.

It is intended to comprehensively evaluate both PB processes to determine the extent to which they were perceived to be effective, had legitimacy, led to increased civic infrastructure and a sense of political efficacy, improved trust between residents and government, and more equitable redistribution of resources, not only in terms of the current population but potential impact on future generations.

Over the last few years, the learning accrued from the Greater Geraldton ‘2029 and Beyond’ deliberative democracy initiative, including the proposed PBs, has been insightful. These experiences have enabled us to develop a set of desired preconditions for PB if its intention is to be a deep reform to democracy that could address the perceived malaise of most Western democracies. It is expected that the following preconditions will be amended over time, in particular after the two PB initiatives in late 2012 and early 2013.

Preconditions for Deliberative Participatory Budgeting

1) An elected Council and City administration sufficiently trusting of the decision-making competence of ordinary residents and the effectiveness of the public deliberation process to be willing to take on board their recommendations, albeit with the Council retaining the ultimate decision-making power. (To change this caveat would require legislative change, in this instance, the Western Australian Local Government Act). This trust from the Council and City, once gained, cannot be taken for granted. Especially given the likely change of actors over time, for example, through local elections, the trust building may well need to begin anew.

2) Outreach to those people unlikely to volunteer in civic life, for example the ‘time poor’ (the majority of citizens), the cynical and skeptical, as well as the disadvantaged who are often excluded or hidden from civic life. Effective deliberation requires demographic and cognitive diversity, so eliciting inclusive and representative participation is critical to its success. This is sometimes achieved through population random sampling¹³ and sometimes through large-scale deliberation.¹⁴ Ensuring inclusiveness and representativeness is often the most taxing

¹³ For example, for an overview of representative justifications of using random sampling, see Parkinson, 2003.

¹⁴ For example, for a rationale for scaling up to large-scale deliberations, see Lukensmeyer and Brigham, 2005.

part of a deliberative process.

3) Building the community's deliberative capacity through ongoing and diverse opportunities for everyday citizens to talk with, listen to, learn from and problem-solve with people from different backgrounds and perspectives, and the willingness to search for common ground, with the outcomes having some influence on decisions or actions. While consensus is often not possible, a deliberative process usually aims to achieve a coherent voice, acceptable to those who participate.¹⁵ The capacity to deliberate and the opportunity to do so is equally important for the broad public, stakeholders in the issue, City administration and elected officials. (Without experiencing empowered deliberation, administrative and elected officials are unlikely to support it in the public sphere.) Such capacity building will require the ongoing commitment from government to invest the time, human resources and money into providing diverse opportunities for the community to jointly problem-solve and collaboratively decide and enact issues of import. For such participation to become a 'virtuous cycle' (Hartz-Karp 2004), all those involved need continued assurance that these processes will be equitable, inclusive and influential.

4) A communication system between government and community that is easily accessible, multi-faceted, provides comprehensive and user-friendly information and interactivity, encouraging the two-way flow of ideas and knowledge. The local media needs to play a vital part, in this instance, seeing its role in community development, supporting community deliberation by helping to clarify differing viewpoints without prejudice (rather than being preoccupied primarily by 'headline' polemics, 'digging for dirt', or supporting vested interests). Social media is also an important resource.

5) Keeping the system and players honest by including ordinary citizens in the oversight, rule creation and evaluation of each process; working to ensure transparency and accountability; and creating an environment that enhances cooperation without co-option. Notably, cooperating in a joint venture such as a PB requires government officials to be willing to share technical and budgetary information with ordinary citizens and to be transparent about policy development and decision-making processes, and residents to be willing to put aside their

¹⁵ While arriving at a coherent voice may involve voting, this process is preceded by an exchange of views and consideration of options. Additionally, voting is usually more layered than a simple yes/no, for example involving a multi-criteria analysis (options weighted by criteria/often values). At other times it remains deliberative, involving the creative development of alternatives and a search for common ground.

activist or self-interest hats to seek common ground. At the same time, there has to be willingness to allow for contentious behavior and contestation, so those involved feel free to express themselves without negative consequences, while ensuring they don't simply get co-opted by the system (McAdams et al., 2001).

6) Commitment from decision-makers to an ongoing process of deep reform rather than being seduced by novelty of a one-off event/referendum/election. While it is understandable that initial endeavors may be tenuous, from the outset, there needs to be a commitment to the intent of institutionalizing PB, making it 'business as usual', while at the same time, devising ways to refresh and reenergize the PB process, ensuring it does not stagnate and become stale. This will involve a commitment to learning from successes and failures. Evaluation, monitoring and continually improving needs to be a joint venture between all players, so clear stepping stones can be built and honed on the road towards the collaborative rule making, planning, decision making and action required for effective deliberative democracy and participatory budgeting.

7) Agreement by all parties to the intent and desired outcomes the deliberative democracy initiative aims to achieve, with the process being routinely evaluated against these aims. In the example of the PB, if it is aiming to achieve distributive justice, then that needs to be clearly defined, agreed upon by all parties and broadly publicized, with the PB being evaluated against this aim and definition. If the aim is more nebulous and difficult to measure, such as distributive justice for future generations, then the criteria for redistribution need to be clarified and agreed by all parties, with mechanisms established to determine if those criteria have been met.

8) For deliberative democracy and PB to remain relevant to the important and complex, often 'wicked' issues facing us, these processes need to be more adaptive than the usual pre-orchestrated, linear project management. While on one hand it is important to plan, on the other, an awareness of 'emergent' possibilities is critical. In the Geraldton example, although numerous designs for public deliberation have been developed and accepted by the stakeholders, they have also been repeatedly altered in response to challenges and opportunities that have arisen, economically, socially and environmentally. In terms of the underlying objectives of democratic participation and future sustainability, we need a 'leaderful' society, where the many are prepared to take diverse leadership roles, and the many are able and willing to help develop the public wisdom needed to resolve the complex issues

that face us.

Conclusion

Analysis and evaluation of participatory budgeting initiatives in South America and elsewhere, have revealed that they can be highly effective but that they can also be pernicious, neither contributing to distributive justice nor enhanced democratic practices. Many of the examples of PB in the literature have been described as proceeding via trial and error: some initiatives learning as they proceed, gaining momentum and enhancing legitimacy; others, however, creating little more than additional public disaffection with the system.

PB, like democracy, should not depend on a singular participatory initiative, periodic voting. In our view, periodic elections do not constitute effective democracy any more than periodic voting for proposals constitutes participatory budgeting. For both to work effectively, they rely on a way of living together in which we have equal opportunity to co-create our collective life. In the current situation of adversarial ‘us versus them’ politics, with disaffected, often angry and/or cynical citizenry, and systems of governance that discount public wisdom, this is an uphill battle. It requires continued effort, over a considerable period of time, to create the environment, the policies and the institutions that will enable everyday people to work together with decision makers to achieve collaborative public wisdom, decisions and action.

The ‘Geraldton 2029 and Beyond’ deliberative democracy initiative has achieved significant success thus far – notably being a finalist or winner of renowned international awards for ‘Vitalizing Democracy’ and ‘Participation and Empowerment’, as well as accruing regional, national and international support and major funding for desired, far-sighted sustainability initiatives that have emanated from this process. However there have also been major challenges. Apart from a few exciting community-driven initiatives that have arisen, such as a high-tech NGO of social entrepreneurs, the Pollinators,¹⁶ most initiatives have been top-down efforts, instigated and supported by the City administration. Moreover, despite the continual efforts to have other government agencies, industry and community take ‘ownership’ of the joint processes and outcomes, this rarely occurs – the ‘heavy lifting’ is left to the City administration. It is hoped the proposed Participatory Budgeting initiative will help the broader community to be more proactive in taking the leadership in achieving the community they want.

¹⁶ See <http://wildpollinators.org/tag/geraldton/>

For Greater Geraldton, the proposed PB is not seen as an end in itself. However, because it will be an annual process that mobilizes ordinary citizens to take leadership roles in pursuit of a common goal, it is seen not only as a means of gaining forward momentum, but as an ideal chock or wedge to prevent potential regression to concentrated top-down decision making. It is hoped an annual PB will be an ideal means of continuing to bridge the ‘us and them’ gap between government and ordinary citizens. Given the gradual steps taken through ‘Geraldton 2029 and Beyond’ to grow citizens’ willingness and capacity to deliberate and government’s willingness and capacity to share in decision making, it is hoped there will be an easy transition into an effective PB environment. However, nothing is guaranteed. Since there is currently no legislative base, there will need to be continuing pressure from ordinary citizens to keep leadership committed to the process of power sharing. It should be that the current environment of cooperatively achieving mutual goals should clear a pathway towards the institutionalization not only of PB, but of broader collaborative problem solving and governance. More broadly speaking, it is hoped that this initiative will demonstrate how we can more effectively resolve the important decisions we face, co-creating the sort of world we want to live in, while leaving a desirable legacy for future generations.

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