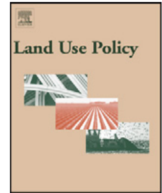
Land Use Policy 28 (2011) 898–906

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Land Use Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/landusepol



Why the public thinks natural resources public participation processes fail: A case study of British Columbia communities

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 16 February 2010
Received in revised form 18 March 2011
Accepted 21 March 2011

Keywords:
Public participation
CORE
LRMP
Community resource management
Land use planning

ABSTRACT

This study examines the experiences and opinions of a "public" which became involved in a government driven comprehensive land use and natural resource planning exercise in British Columbia, Canada during the 1990s. While it is generally assumed to be an inherently good thing, or at least a politically necessary thing, to involve the public in natural resources or land use planning, few studies have examined the experiences of the public or examined perceived failures from the public's perspective. This study examines British Columbia's CORE and LRMP planning processes, their successes and failures, as determined by residents of six communities that participated in these processes. Lessons on improving public processes from the viewpoint of that public are discussed.

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> It is a very dangerous thing to want to know what the public thinks.
> British Columbia Government Staff

Introduction

Ever since Arnstein (1969) offered her "ladder of public participation," arguing that not all participation is created equal, but that, if done correctly, it is a good thing, governments have gone through the motions of "public participation." No one doubts, at least in public, that public engagement in decisions made about natural resources and public lands is a good thing, or at least is an exercise that should be seen to be done (Chambers and Beckley, 2003; Fischer, 2000; Mitchell, 2005; Parkins and Mitchell, 2005; Rowe and Frewer, 2005). Studies have demonstrated that benefits accrue to all parties from public participation in decision making (Fraser et al., 2006; Mitchell, 2005; Parkins and Mitchell, 2005), although a few voices assert that public participation can become a cynical shell game used to give the impression of concern for public viewpoints without actually respecting them (Arnstein, 1969; Caine et al., 2007), or is too often done so poorly it comes to the same thing. Few look closely at what the participating public thinks.

This case study examines the experiences of a "public" participating in a British Columbia (BC), Canada, comprehensive land use and natural resource planning exercise during the 1990s. We examine BC's Commission on Resources and Environment (CORE) and the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) process, its successes and failures as assessed by the public in six study communities. The multi-part process of CORE and the LRMP was the provincial government's ambitious, and somewhat innovative attempt to develop comprehensive land use plans for the entire province. In part, this effort was to provide the basis for sound and integrated resource development. In larger part, the effort was supposed to respond to increasingly active public protests over natural resource development, such as forestry, that were perceived as happening at the expense of environmental values (the internationally infamous Clayoquot Sound protests and mass arrests began around the same time as did CORE). As such, the process had at its foundation a heavy reliance upon public participation, through a number of strategies, to try to ensure that a diversity of "public" values were reflected in "locally" developed, consensus derived land use plans.

Some subsequent research suggests that this process failed to meet its goals, and became entangled in controversy (McAllister, 1998; Penrose et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 1996). Our research suggests that the process became mired in controversy and failed to meet its goals because its authors made several crucial errors in how the process defined the "public" and their needs, and therefore in how the CORE and LRMP actually engaged that public. Like many governments and planners before, and regrettably after, the pro-

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doi:10.1016/j.landusepol.2011.03.005

cess, those developing the CORE and LRMPs seemed oblivious as to extant literature on best practices in public engagement. Even more problematically, few researchers or practitioners have troubled to ask the actual public what they think about participating in such processes. In this study, we examine the views of the participants themselves to define what succeeded in the BC process and what failed. Those successes and failures offer lessons on why the public is often not present in the final outcomes of public participation.

Public participation in the literature

Early literature on public participation focussed on it as a mechanism for resolving the sort of disputes that the CORE and LRMPs tried to address (Brennis, 1990; Estrin, 1979; Hurtubise and Connelly, 1979; Knopp and Caldbeck, 1990; Saddler, 1978). The literature beginning in the 1990s, began advocating for the use of consensus and the identification of "stakeholders" as representational participants (BC Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, 1991; Canada Round Tables, 1993). This was a change from the early models, which stressed public hearings, referendums, surveys, advisory committees, or public forums (IRPP, 1987). Coming out of the politically unsettled period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, authors focussed on the issue of power differential in decision making between government and ordinary citizens (Arnstein, 1969; Estrin, 1979; IRPP, 1987). Arnstein (1969) was particularly influential in this argument; her "ladder of citizen participation" made very clear that most public involvement in policy making represented either overt "non-participation" or "tokenism" of differing degrees. Only her top three rungs, partnership, delegated power and citizen control, represented true citizen participation.

Since the 1990s the public participation literature has mushroomed. A significant volume of literature is devoted to the use of different, increasingly technical, methods for understanding public preferences and values. A second body of literature examines the use of public participation to address specific issues, including environmental assessment and the options from which natural resource managers chose in their policies. Surprisingly little literature takes a critical look at what the recipients of consultation think, nor undertakes an evaluation of methodologies from the participants' point of view. After 40 years of research and practice, several authors assert that there is still no clear consensus on what are "good" public engagement processes. Nor is the challenge posed by Arnstein so long ago meaningfully addressed: much public participation in North America continues to fall upon her bottom six ladder rungs, partnership, delegated power and citizen control have only occasionally been achieved.

Sheppard (2005, p. 1516) notes that, in Canada, public participation processes in natural resources decisions have had limited value, given the preferred use of more "traditional" methods of public engagement, such as open houses and public comment periods, which result in low public satisfaction with process and outcome, a result confirmed by other researchers (Chambers and Beckley, 2003; Duinker, 1998; De Marchi and Ravetz, 2001). Perceived success appears correlated to the level of transparency, honesty and trust created through the process. Successful processes require investments in time, capacity development, education and a clear sense of equity among participants (Sheppard, 2005; Wagenet and Pfeffer, 2007). Further, the timing of engagement can be critical: too late in the decision-making process gives the public the impression that the decisions have already been made (Diduck, 2004). Little attention has been paid to evaluating the success of different methodologies in achieving participation goals (De Steiguer et al., 2003; Finnegan and Sexton, 1999; Sheppard, 2005).

The few studies that evaluate public perceptions of a process confirm much of the above assertions. Webler and Tuler (2006, p. 718) reviewed ten processes. One of their key findings raises a caution regarding process design: even the public holds mixed perspectives on what constitutes effective public participation. However the participants did agree on the need to include all stakeholders, to share information openly and readily, to engage participants meaningfully, and to attempt to satisfy multiple interests and positions. As the authors note, "The results [of the study] challenge practitioners . . .to take into consideration the diversity of participants' needs and perspectives when fashioning prescriptions for how public participation processes are designed, carried out and evaluated. . ." (Webler and Tuler, 2006, p. 719). In other words, knowing what participants think is vital, although the authors cite few other studies examining those perspectives.

Finally, some mention should be made of the recent interest in how public participation contributes to larger goals in natural resources management. As natural resources and environmental management issues have grown (or have been recognised as) more complex, researchers are looking towards different strategies for meeting that complexity, particularly given the need to link social issues with the ecological and to do so on a larger stage. Thus researchers articulate a need for co-management, particularly adaptive co-management, with a co-requisite of social learning as a necessary response. Armitage et al. (2008) describe adaptive co-management as the opportunity for multiple stakeholders to share in the management of specific systems of natural resources. Adaptive management allows locally based management systems to develop which should allow site based solutions to emerge. Mutual learning would be an essential component of such a process. Armitage et al. (2009) add that such adaptive co-management should facilitate the development of effective governance, noting that conventional governance through centralised bureaucracies is limited in the ability to respond to rapid and complex social-ecological challenges. Or, as Pahl-Wostl and Hare (2004, pp. 193–194) put it,

> Problems are complex, uncertainties are high, prediction is possible to a limited extent only and integrated approaches to resource management are advocated. This implies that management is not a search for the optimal solution to one problem but an ongoing learning and negotiation process where a high priority is given to questions of communication, perspective sharing and development of adaptive group strategies for problem solving.

Social involvement is thus crucial in new types of resource management strategies where the ability to form relationships between multiple actors to come to cooperative decisions is key. As Berkes (2009) notes, sound adaptive management needs multiple participants as critical information for optimal ecosystem management is inevitably dispersed among groups ranging from local to national (and likely international), and from across different levels of organizations. Participatory processes would be foundational to meeting these larger aspirations of co-management and of social learning, if they are truly engaging of their publics.

British Columbia's CORE and LRMP process

The rise of public interest in natural resource management is usually traced to changes in North American society after 1945 (Hays, 1987). The 1960s and 1970s saw a further increase in public concern over environmental issues such as pollution and species extinction. The Bruntland Commission report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) brought into everyday

use the language of sustainable development. Most importantly, in the US, and later in Canada, legislation was passed that required environmentally disruptive projects to be the subject of scrutiny in a public forum. The US National Environmental Protection Act required proof that project impacts could be mitigated or compensated for, and that proof was also subject to public scrutiny and challenge. Canada's Environmental Impact Assessment Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Agency worked to: encourage the participation of the people of Canada in the making of decisions that affect the environment; and to facilitate the protection of the environment by the government of Canada (CEPA, 1994).

Building upon this history, and in response to increasingly disruptive public protests over natural resource decisions, the BC government in 1992 began a large scale exercise in public consultation on land and resource use. A multi-part, regionally based process was implemented to develop land use plans incorporating "local" goals and values as defined through public consultation. The process was designed to fit within the "round table" approach developed out of federal sustainable development initiatives (BC Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, 1991; Canada Round Tables, 1993), which drew upon the earlier public hearings held by the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987).

The first part, the Commission on Resources and Environment (CORE), was to move the province towards sustainable development through "the development of an overall provincial strategy, regional strategic land use plans, increased public participation and aboriginal involvement, improved government coordination and dispute resolution processes" (Owens 1998, p. 13). Among its activities, CORE established planning processes in four regions across the province which were identified by the government as experiencing intense land use conflicts. CORE Tables were to develop broad recommendations for regional land use. Upon completion and legislative acceptance of these reports, plans for more detailed sub-regional land use would be developed through the second part of the process, the Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP). However, 12 sub-regions that did *not appear* to have substantive land use conflicts in 1992 immediately began a LRMP.

> LRMPs,
> cover sub-regional areas of approximately 15,000 to 25,000 square kilometres. . .The plans establish direction for land use and specify resource management objectives and strategies. They provide a comprehensive, broadly accepted and approved management framework to guide resource development and more detailed planning (Province of British Columbia, no date, p. 2).

If CORE plans and/or LRMPs were completed and accepted by the provincial government, the next stage would be to refine and implement the plans at the local level, usually as a sub-regional Land and Resource Use Plan (LRUP) (see Fig. 1).

During the heyday of the process, more than 50% of BC was covered by a planning process, either CORE or an LRMP.

In both CORE and LRMPs, consensus by a "Table" of participants was the expected decision making process, although each Table could decide upon *what* consensus meant. The Tables included representatives from area communities, major industries such as forestry or mining, and the provincial government. All of the CORE, and most of the LRMPs, appointed people representing sectors (i.e. stakeholders such as businesses or recreational clubs). The government terminated the CORE in 1996, with only four of six regional plans undertaken, perhaps, in part, due to the failure of two CORE Tables to reach consensus and the subsequent public outcry when government forced a closure. Fourteen LRMPs were completed and approved, although, again, some LRMPs were "finished" by the government when consensus failed. Local Resource Use Plans (LRUP) were the final stage of the process and were developed in many communities following completion of the LRMPs. Finally, in some communities, some of the structures developed to support the LRMPs, such as Community Resources Boards and Advisory Round Tables, continued to be used by communities after the completion of the LRMPs (Giesbrecht, 2003) in addition to other planning processes. As of 2010, however, the province of British Columbia appears to be distancing itself from this massive planning process, as several stakeholders have been informed by government representatives that the LRMPs will no longer form the basis of any land use discussion (Bruce Muir, Senior Land Use Manager, West Moberly First Nations, personal communication October 21, 2010). As many land use planning initiatives still rely upon those LRMPs for guidance, in 2011, this government decision might have far reaching consequences for locally and regionally based planning.

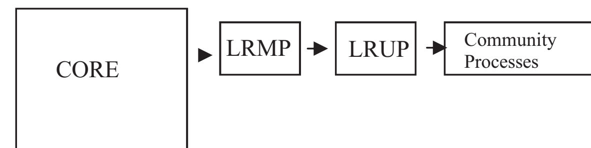

Fig. 1. One CORE and LRMP process.

The case study[2]

Methodology

This research project utilised a comparative research design involving six BC communities: Quesnel, Kaslo, Smithers, Dawson Creek, Clearwater and Powell River. The communities displayed considerable socio-economic diversity and were selected by four criteria. First, one community was included from each Forest Region with the exception of Vancouver Island (which researchers felt was over-studied). BCs Forest Regions are large administrative areas designed to co-ordinate activities between lower-level Forest District offices and the provincial Ministry offices. Forest Regions were added into the sampling criteria to ensure geographical coverage across the province. Secondly, a cross-section was selected by population size. Thirdly, communities were selected by their economic diversity and degrees of dependence upon the forest resource. Fourthly, communities were selected in which some form of public participation or consultation process had recently been completed, plus one which had not participated in CORE or an LRMP, which would serve as a control community. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the six communities.

Between 1997 and 1998, research assistants spent two summers in each community, conducting interviews with multiple informants and researching secondary data. The interviews usually included local government officials and municipal staff, such as the planners, as well as official participants in the different processes. We also interviewed local activists, business leaders, members of key organizations (such as unions or recreationalists clubs), as well as those individuals that were specifically identified as key

[2] Funding for this research was provided by Forest Renewal British Columbia.

Table 1
Study community socio-economic status and processes (from Halseth and Booth, 2003).

Community	Location	Population (1996 census)	Economic base	Processes
Clearwater	East Central BC	4960	Forestry, agriculture, mining and tourism	Kamloops LRMP (LRMP received Cabinet approval in 1995) Upper Clearwater Public Input Process Clearwater Land Use Plan
Dawson Creek	North East BC	11,125	Oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture	Dawson Creek LRMP (LRMP received Cabinet approval in 1999)
Kaslo	South East BC	(1063, another 1000 use Kaslo services)	Forestry and tourism	West Kootenay-Boundary CORE (government wrote the report) Kaslo Area Roundtable Kaslo Community Forest Ainsworth Watershed Management Plan
Powell River	South west coast BC	13,130	Forestry	Greenways Trail Integrated Watershed Management Plan
Quesnel	Central BC	8468	Forestry, agriculture, and tourism	Cariboo-Chilcotin CORE (government finished the report) Quesnel Land Use Plan Baker Creek Roundtable
Smithers	North west BC	5624	Forestry, mining, agriculture and tourism	Bulkley Valley LRMP (LRMP received Cabinet approval in 1997) Bulkley Valley Community Resources Board

informants by community members. Between the six communities we conducted over 80 interviews. Interviews ran anywhere from 10 min to over an hour, depending upon participants. In addition, two to three focus groups were conducted in each community with groups such as forestry workers, environmentalists and others identified through a snowball technique. While the number of participants varied, over 60 people participated in focus groups from the six communities. Interview and focus group questions focussed on peoples' experiences, what in the process worked and what did not work procedurally, how they felt their views as a "public" were treated, whether they felt the outcomes represented public views and the impacts of the process on the community. As we recruited using a snowball technique, we did not strive for equitable gender or age representativeness. However, participants included roughly 50% male and 50% female,[3] from across an age spectrum. All focus groups and some interviews were tape recorded, with permission, and later transcribed. Analysis was conducted through researchers reviewing transcripts and field notes and independently identifying and coding for key themes and ideas. Themes and ideas were assessed for representativeness (several participants independently raised the theme or idea) as well as significance (a perhaps unique insight, but worthy of note).

During our second year, a mail survey was conducted in each community, assessing the views of community members on public participation in natural resources decision-making. Four hundred and eighty three questionnaires were completed, out of 2412 mailed, a response rate of 20%.

At the end of the third year we conducted open houses in the communities to share research results and to solicit community feedback. Those in Smithers, Dawson Creek and Quesnel were heavily attended.

This article offers a largely qualitative analysis based upon the interviews and focus groups. Some data from the survey is incorporated where significant. For a complete analysis of survey results, see Halseth and Booth (2003).

[3] In one community, a study was undertaken specifically on the impact of gender on participation. See Thornton (2002).

Results: the lessons of public participation

In this section we present our key findings on the public's concerns regarding participation in CORE and the LRMPS. Although there was considerable overlap in the discussion, we have categorised and organized these concerns as process concerns and structural issues (although a few could be seen as both).

Process concerns

The importance of participation

Participants agreed that small communities must participate in decision-making processes regarding the natural resources upon which they depend, even where they felt that the processes had failed, or had been extremely stressful. It was pointed out repeatedly that when communities take on this responsibility they possess great power: "But imagine the difference that can be made if you can start at the community level and. . .imagine how empowered the citizens would suddenly feel when they finally figure out 'by golly, we can control this ship now, this little community where we live, we can actually give direction to where we go."' (Dawson Creek) Our survey supported this finding: 89.9% of respondents believed that resource planning processes should include public participation, which "allows long term residents, who know and respect the land [to] have a valuable say in the future of the community they love." However, the survey also demonstrated that communities which had a CORE on-going had lower levels of public participation. While scholars such as Arnstein (1969) have argued that the public should be engaged in policy deliberations, this ideal is not always honoured by democratic governments nor necessarily by the public, even when they feel that inclusion is, in fact, important.

Valuing the public

Often processes were run in such a way that participants felt alienated from the discussion as their input was not taken seriously. Regular opportunities for everyone to be heard were seen as neces-

Table 2
Comments on valuing public involvement from survey.

Valuing
Recognise that public input is meaningful
Give the public a feeling that their opinion is important
Give weight to decisions about socioeconomic issues like quality of life
More involvement of workers and people who use the resources
Use surveys of local households for their input
Listen to, and act upon, public input
To have an 'engineer' tell you that you are stupid is enough to turn anyone off
Delegating power
Democratic control and response to public needs
The public in the areas affected by this should be able to veto government decisions
Let local people decide on what is best or acceptable in their area
Referendums have more clout
More clout from public opinion
Process timing
Often the public is consulted at the end of a process instead of the beginning
Public involvement before management plans are drafted and implemented
Follow-through
Binding input after thorough consultation and requisite follow-up
Following up with what the community wants, not just token input
That our contributions are taken seriously and acted upon
If consensus arrived at, then should be implemented (from Halseth and Booth, 2003)

sary. Further, a process needed to be seen as having used peoples' contributions. "If they go and it's a waste of time, they go 'I'm not going to go back there'." (Dawson Creek) This finding is supported by our survey, in which the need to value public involvement was the second most frequently cited change needed in public engagement processes. Table 2 provides a breakdown of comments from the survey on key components of valuing public involvement.

Many people complained about the large number of public processes already going on. All of our study communities except Dawson Creek were also involved in other local or regional planning processes. While local participants often came to a CORE or LRMP with experience in public processes, that expertise was usually overlooked or discounted by professional participants. Multiple processes also contributed significantly to public burn out and mixed personal and professional agendas. In some cases, the COREs and LRMPs either co-opted or disrupted long running planning processes without allowing their resolution. Our informants pointed out that the now overlapping processes had no apparent relationship and demonstrated little learning from between processes. Further, they were concerned that too much of what happened in past processes was simply forgotten. "They always say that if you don't pay any attention to the past, you're doomed to repeat. Well, we do that all the time in planning stuff because people don't really know what happened before and they hash the same stuff all over again, and it's just as hard the second time as it was the first time." (Quesnel) Both the CORE and the LRMPs dealt with resources or lands where other processes, for better or worse, had already reached recommendations, but in most cases those outcomes were ignored completely by the new processes.

Levelling the playing field

The ability to participate fully depends upon a level playing field. Without this, the process became skewed, reflecting the viewpoints and concerns of the most powerful participants, such as the forest industry in the case of the CORE and LRMPs. This issue of who has power and who does not could take several forms. For example, in our study communities participants from different sectors had different levels of funds. Industry representatives had access to considerable funds. Smaller groups did not. Further, industry sector representatives were usually paid to be sitting at the Table. Smaller stakeholders, recreationalists or small business interests, were usually volunteers taking time from their jobs and their families. Participants did not suggest penalizing industry, but that the process should take into account the demands upon the participants.

Trust

The research literature indicates that trust is a significant factor in successful processes, particularly where different participants are believed to have different levels of power and this case study confirms that finding. Given the significant impacts that individual attitudes, special interests and conflicts can have on a process, it is not surprising that our study participants identified trust as an important issue. Certainly, a lack of trust was present in those LRMPs and COREs which failed to achieve consensus or were hostile processes, while trust was cited as a factor in the success of the Smithers' LRMP.

Community members in all communities except Smithers stated that they did not trust the provincial government or the processes they set up. This lack of trust frequently stemmed from a belief that the government did not care about what the public thought, linking the issue of trust to that of valuing the public's views. In our survey 45% of respondents believed that public opinion was not heard by the government. Forty nine percent said that the government did not value public input. Some respondents noted that "the Ministry (Government) hold all the cards" so they can direct the process as they wish. As a result, there were repeated calls in the survey for greater "honesty and accountability by Government" and "accountability by politicians." Respondents stated that "it would be nice if government would listen rather than just pay lip-service." Unfortunately, the research literature on public participation rarely discusses how to address issues of trust or mechanisms to ensure its development.

Structural issues

Access to trusted data

Community participants emphasized that the data used to inform a process and its source must be, and be seen to be, free of bias. In several communities participants were worried as their data originated from the industries and government agencies who were themselves process participants. The study participants indicated that they did not always feel that they had full information (government was holding back) or that the data were "selectively" presented so as to favour certain options over others. Thus, not everyone felt they had a sound basis of information from which to make informed judgements.

Timelines

In every community, people also indicated that time limitations meant limitations on the quality of the process and the outcomes. Decisions could not be rushed without time to reflect. Given the huge amount of time needed for meetings, studying background documents, receiving public input, and reaching consensus a sound participation process could take two to four years. There are drawbacks to this extensive time requirement; the most serious is that the time commitment will limit an average citizen's ability to participate.

Planning for outreach and education

One of the initiatives that people expected with the CORE and LRMPs was public outreach and education. The leaders of a process, and the government agency supporting it, had an obligation to ensure that people not involved in a process nevertheless understood it, its goals and expected outcomes, and the public's potential roles. Almost everyone we spoke with felt that the CORE and LRMP process, as well as some local processes, failed in their public outreach efforts.

To be fair, getting the "public" interested in anything like the CORE or LRMPs is a challenge. Public apathy on one hand and potential solutions on the other have been studied over the last half century and the problem is no closer to being solved. Both the public and Table participants identified issues that affected community awareness of the CORE and LRMPs. It was widely agreed that it was important to increase public understanding of the issues, but not on who was responsible for that task. One suggestion for dealing with this issue was to ensure adequate funds for education purposes. People in Smithers pointed out that it was unwise to assume that everyone had the same level of education and understanding. Education initiatives had to be targeted to several different audiences.

Other comments stressed the need to creatively engage people. Standard press releases or ads in local newspapers simply did not attract attention, although our survey indicated that local newspapers were the primary source of information for our respondents. A number of different information devices might be needed as well as different means for community access. However, it was also easy for the public to become intimidated, both by the information format and the nature of the discussions. Ill-informed individuals were unlikely to come before a technical committee, limiting input to the Table.

> I think the other problem with it is - you see everything for the next five years and you realize how much is being cut, and you feel mind-boggled, and you feel completely powerless to do anything. You feel almost hit over the head. It's so huge. And when it comes down to responding time, it's like, well how can you respond except to say, "I don't like it". (Kaslo)

Attracting the right participants

Attracting people into active participation is a serious challenge, particularly for smaller communities. The Smithers LRMP attracted a strong group of participants, however other communities complained of difficulties in attracting individuals not interested in "grinding old axes." Community members identified two related issues, people choosing to not participate, and the challenge of trying to encourage people to participate.

Apathy was an often cited problem. Local processes suffered as much as did the provincial processes. A core group of community members came to serve the community. In some cases, this was a useful phenomenon. Such participants had particular knowledge and skills gained through past participation. In some cases this phenomenon was a problem, as regular participators had a singular issue that they brought up time and time again, often disrupting a process' progress. One long term consequence of a few regular process participants was that the few frequently became overwhelmed and stopped participating.

The personal circumstances of community members often limited participation, significantly affecting the relevance of a process to those living with its decisions. "Somebody said that most of the people that come to these meetings... are older and they have enough money that they don't have to worry about working all day and night...So you get their opinion but it's not really reality for everybody else." (Dawson Creek). While acknowledged in the literature, this phenomenon needs better research, particularly with regard to the problem of demands on participants' time.

Dealing with personality

While it is difficult to plan for, and rarely raised in the research literature, our participants stressed the fact that the personality of participants was fundamental to the success or failure of a process. By this they did not mean the position or the role of the individual but rather their personal sense of self and attitudes. A process, they told us, "lives or dies by the people at the Table." The nature of these processes, using consensus, meant that participants needed to be open-minded, cooperative, flexible in their opinions, willing to respect others, and capable of admitting when they were wrong. If individuals did not possess these traits, the process could become hostile, threatening and unsuccessful in achieving consensus.

In two communities, the processes were described as being particularly hostile and divisive, often breaking down in to shouting matches. Participants came openly to the Table with axes to grind, sabotaging reasoned decision making. In one community, forestry workers stated in newspapers and interviews that they intended to sabotage the process. Others pointed to a bitter polarization of factions: "It's domination....It's the power trip. It's manipulating and dysfunctional." (Anonymous).

On the other hand some Tables were highly successful in completing broadly supported recommendations. In Smithers, that success was largely attributable to the collaborative approach of the participants, and the recommendations of the Table were strongly supported by the community as the process was seen to be inclusive.

Last, all the communities mentioned difficulties caused by the attitudes of government officials running or participating in the process. Officials were described as being dictatorial and officious, which significantly limited their effectiveness.

The limits of stakeholder representation

Within the literature, stakeholder representation is the norm for public participation processes. Little research has analysed whether such representation is truly effective. Its key virtue lies in the fact that process organizers find it easier to use. With the exception of Smithers, each process we studied used stakeholder representation. Participants represented an interest, such as a recreational club or business, rather than the community. At the Table they confronted representatives of powerful industries (often one of a few major employers in the community) (field notes 1997). Our study participants identified significant drawbacks to stakeholder representation. One is that representatives may become captives of that sector; they are unable to step out of their vested interest enough to understand the needs of another:

> All of a sudden you're representing the company you work for or the particular recreation group you represent, or whatever it may be. And you don't think of yourself then as a member of the community where you live. You think of yourself as a member of this group, and this special group has a special interest and I've got to protect that interest at that Table. (Dawson Creek)

We speculate that it is this issue of sector loyalty that led to some LRMPs and CORE becoming hostile, unproductive events. In Dawson Creek, we were told that early on some stakeholder representatives became discouraged by the process and remained at the Table only through personal intervention by the coordinator. Some

participants reported that it was a case of stakeholders fighting it out to the end.

Stakeholder representation challenges the reaching of consensus, since consensus relies upon the group as a whole to work towards a shared decision. Common interests are not often identified in a competition of sectoral interests. The process is further compromised when some stakeholders have greater resources and influence. In several communities some representatives represented more than one sector, or the same representatives served on several sub-committees. In these cases, regardless of the outcome the appearance of impropriety was enough to cast doubt on the legitimacy and validity of the process and its report.

In the survey, less than 5% of the respondents thought that the process was "inclusive." Comments received indicated that respondents felt that "special interest-groups should not be allowed to dictate the process," that "less attention [should] be paid to professional lobbyist groups" and that process managers should "remove the special interest-groups from the process and listen more to the people directly affected who live and work in the community."

Concerns about stakeholders took other forms. In all of our study communities the boundaries of the COREs or LRMPs involved multiple and distinct communities. This was cited as leading to differences at the Tables that were related to differences between the communities in terms of economic opportunities, social values and population demographics. In Clearwater, for example, participants stated that they were held captive to the desires of Kamloops, a much bigger community. Community members frequently identified these differences as a significant contributor to process difficulties, particularly when the plan had to be agreed to by all.

In contrast, Smithers voluntarily participated in a process and in 1991 formed the Bulkley Valley Community Resources Board (CRB) to undertake the LRMP. The CRB was composed of 12 volunteers selected from among interested participants attending a public meeting. These volunteers considered sectoral interests, but did so collectively (field notes 1997). We theorize that this deviation is one of the key reasons that Smithers was the only process to be clearly supported by community members. As one community member observed: "The community has to figure out what it needs on its own. You can lead by example but let people use their own ideas and initiatives."

As a form of a control population, Powell River was useful in confirming the issues of stakeholders as their small processes were also stakeholder-based and also poorly regarded by the community. These findings suggest that more research is required into the successes and failures of the use of stakeholder or sectoral representation as the "public" in public participation processes.

The drawbacks of consensus

All but one of the study communities used consensus to make decisions. Consensus seemed desirable, as no one wanted to force a majority decision on land use upon a potentially vocal, disenfranchised minority. In practice, however, our informants had mixed feelings about consensus. It can be a long painful process, particularly if participants hold very different views or if the issue is controversial. As one person stated, "Consensus is a good approach as long as I don't have to be involved in trying to reach it." (Quesnel) Another was blunter: "the word 'consensus' sounds wonderful. In real life, it does not work." (Clearwater) Consensus was viewed negatively in communities where the processes were adversarial or where participants felt threatened or not heard by more powerful participants. In these cases, "consensus" became majority rule in disguise.

Other people were positive in their assessment. While they acknowledged that seeking consensus was time consuming and cumbersome, many felt that the obligation to reach consensus meant that participants were motivated to seek solutions meeting the interests of everyone, leading to more creative solutions.

Our communities did suggest some key issues to consider before using consensus, including first determining if consensus is the most appropriate tool for the particular process and issue. Consensus might be less appropriate in situations where issues are deeply polarizing. To use consensus successfully the other concerns raised in our study must be addressed: the process needs to have a flat "playing field," with every participant equal in knowledge, resources, and standing. Enough time must be allocated for this long slow process. It needs to be accepted that good faith efforts at consensus might fail. In this case our communities suggested having back up plans in place from the beginning. Finally, what is meant by consensus needs to be clearly laid out early on. Without early planning, a process might be stuck not knowing what to do about a loud minority. As the research literature rarely questions the utility of consensus, this is a significant finding from the case study.

Discussion and conclusions

The failure of the CORE and the LRMPs to address some significant components of public participation, components clearly identified as missing by our research communities, led, in our opinion, to the process failing in the court of public opinion. With one exception, Smithers, the public in our research communities was almost universally disparaging of the process they had participated in, whether CORE or LRMP. Quesnel and Kaslo participated in COREs so poorly received that no consensus could be reached. A government representative wrote the report, forcing choices upon the communities. In response, the citizens of Quesnel publically burned in effigy the chair of the CORE. Quesnel participants reported an extremely hostile process; four reported nervous breakdowns as a consequence of participating. One reported that the chair physically threw objects at her. Some felt this was as a result of "the forest industry against everyone else." Others argued it was simply a gender bias (Thornton, 2002). In Kaslo, there were mixed perceptions about the success of the participation processes. Many had bad impressions of the CORE process while others thought the CORE Report captured a realistic assessment of opportunities. However, local processes were spoken of positively. In both Quesnel and Kaslo, the ordinary public participants reported extremely high levels of stress during participation, and indeed during our interviews and focus groups appeared to still be suffering from residual stress (field notes 1997, 1998). Worse, in our opinion, the legacy of the process in all of our study communities, except Smithers, was a community divided against itself; tensions between different constituencies appeared exacerbated, and many participants reported that they were subsequently treated with suspicion or hostility by other community members (field notes 1997, 1998). This is not the mark of a sound public process.

Smithers was the sole "successful" process case study and was selected because of that success. However, Smithers' success is difficult to generalise as Smithers is a somewhat unique community. At the time of the study the community was popularly thought to have the highest per capita number residents with PhDs in Canada (although we could never find the demographic data to confirm that rumour); what it most certainly did have was a handful of retired but powerful and engaged planners and a long history of actively engaging in several local planning initiatives (field notes 1997). Regardless of the source, demographically Smithers it is a

very different community from other "resource towns." We posit that that community history created, in large part, the population's willingness to take on, and take on successfully, a new process (see Giesbrecht, 2003 for a better discussion of the Smithers process).

Many of our results confirmed the theory and practice of public participation as discussed in the research literature, while also confirming a tendency on the part of governments to ignore such literature. Such ignorance, whether deliberate or otherwise, is, we posit, the reason why CORE and the LRMPs were viewed as failing by the public, why the implementation of the LRMPs and LRUPs in many areas of the province have not resulted in decreased public challenges to resource decisions, and why the province many years later appears to be distancing itself from the process outcomes.

However, our research has raised several issues that we believe warrant better investigation in the future. One such issue is the use of consensus as a mechanism for reaching conclusions. The extant research literature rarely questions the utility of consensus. While we did not complete an exhaustive review of all public engagement literature, we could not find mention of any critical research on the use of consensus as a tool or goal; rather such literature uses the term consensus without reflection upon the concept itself (see for example, Jackson, 2002). Indeed we could find only a few articles that even suggest there might be challenges in using consensus in participatory processes (Coglianese, 1997, 1999, 2001; Coglianese and Allen, 2004; Giordana et al., 2007; van den Hove, 2006; van der Kerkhof, 2006); few of these studies are based upon applied research. Yet the use of consensus was raised as a significant challenge by some of our communities. We believe that both the effectiveness of consensus and its misuse (hiding the fact that some members of a process might have been coerced into that "consensus") in public consultative processes need further study in applied settings.

Another issue that is almost never mentioned in the literature, but became a significant issue in our study, is the role of the personalities sitting around the engagement tables. This is likely well known by any public engagement practitioner (who spends considerable efforts at figuring out how to mute the hostile or disruptive public member or sometimes their own hostile or disruptive colleague or government representative) but needs much better study as to its impacts on a process and its mitigation. Further, related, work is likely required on the consequences to members of the public of participating in such processes. We were deeply troubled at the evidence of the consequences of participating in the CORE and the LRMPs in our study communities: nervous breakdowns, people afraid to walk down their community's streets and socially and politically divided communities. If this is a widespread phenomenon, it must become a part of planning for better engagement.

The above two issues are related to two other issues that are noted in the literature, but are not well discussed: those of trust and power. Both of these became crucial concerns within the CORE and the LRMPs. Both, of course, are interrelated. The BC process suffered in a number of our study communities from putting together tables of individuals with different levels of personal and professional power. Ordinary citizens were asked to sit at the table with high ranking government officials and senior management from industry, sometimes the very industry by which they were employed. Further, some members had vastly better access to resources. This power differential remained unacknowledged during the process. We posit it was likely responsible, however, for the high levels of stress apparent in community members regarding the process. Managing group processes must always take into account the potential for differential power among participating individuals and/or agencies. The impacts of that differential power perhaps requires better study. The circumstances in Smithers suggests it can be overcome or ameliorated, but whether this could be replicated is not certain. If power corrupts a process we must both understand that fact and develop mechanisms for avoidance and/or mitigation.

The lack of trust at the process tables was also, in part, related to the unresolved issue of power and of participating individuals' willingness to use their power (personalities). In part the issue of trust is perhaps also related to cynicism on the part of the public over the outcomes of most public consultation processes: public input is not seen as affecting the final decision. As our community members noted, if governments and other agencies ask but do not listen, the public will quickly stop bothering to participate. While noted in the literature as a necessary requirement, better discussion of the importance of trust, how it is created and maintained, and how to regain public trust once lost would greatly assist in the planning of less ritualistic public consultation.

Finally, our findings suggest that more research is required into the successes and failures of the use of stakeholder or sectoral representation as the "public" in public participation processes. While alternatives can be found in the literature, stakeholder representation appears to have become a norm and much literature is devoted to the proper identification and recruitment of process stakeholders. Our research suggests that such divisions of the public had profound consequences for the success or failure of the CORE and LRMP process. We feel a better assessment of the pros and cons of the use of stakeholders is long overdue.

It should be noted that while our study generally found significant concerns on the part of the community members participating in CORE and the LRMPs, other studies have had more positive findings. Mitchell (2005) cites a study of another, single, LRMP which, examining the question of participant "empowerment" through a process, concluded that over two-thirds of participants experienced a high or moderate increase in their sense of empowerment, which might indicate a positive perception of their experiences. Penrose et al. (1998) assessed public satisfaction with one of the same CORE we examined and found, in contrast, that people were generally positive about the experience. Day et al. (2003) noted that while the CORE were not well received, the LRMPS were, noting that 12 out of 15 achieved "consensus." However they note some similar concerns to those we have highlighted. Similar general findings exist in Jackson and Curry (2004).

Our two years in the community building research relationships elicited a complex telling of peoples' experiences and perceptions. Many of our findings are supported by a less detailed review of these planning processes by Thielman and Tollefson (2009). Conflicting findings are not unexpected in such research: the public might hold several sets of perceptions over a complex occurrence.

Times are changing for communities and for governments who rely upon natural resource extraction. Changing economies, and changing social values force a rethinking of how, where and why decisions about natural resources are made. In British Columbia, as well as elsewhere, the how, where, and why of decisions increasingly depend upon public opinion. A vital part of that "public" are the communities with an economic dependence on the natural resources being decided upon.

It has become clear that public will be expected to have, *and will expect to have*, a greater say in natural resource allocation and land use planning. Changes in markets, products and governmental regulations, and in the skills required to find employment in the new natural resource economy, will have drastic effects upon communities. The result is that communities must be prepared to participate in resource planning. To do so effectively is key, and it is perhaps time that those planning public participation processes learn from those whom they would engage.

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