Sharing Contested Space: Participation in the Planning of UBC's University Boulevard Area

by

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ABSTRACT

Rooted in the great democratic experiment, the field of public participation has a long history and continues to evolve. In the last fifty years, a huge number of techniques and strategies have been created to involve the public in decision making. Most recently, contingent strategies and deliberative techniques have drawn the attention of practitioners; so too has the systematic evaluation of participatory processes. The goal of this thesis was to take advantage of these recent developments by building and testing an evaluation framework for public participation that is principled, robust, and responsive to different points of view.

A comprehensive, contingent evaluative framework was developed based on recent public involvement literature and applied to the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Planning process at the University of British Columbia (UBC). For each criterion in the framework, data was collected from interviews, documents, media reports, and participant observation, and triangulated to maximize objectivity. Combining the results for each criterion led to broader conclusions, recommendations for UBC, and lessons for evaluators.

The study found that UBC staff lacked commitment to adopted planning policy and were under time pressures, encouraging them to limit public influence in order to obtain approval quickly. The evaluation of implementation showed that the process was not a credible attempt to involve the public in planning for University Boulevard, and also highlighted significant issues with governance of planning at UBC. At the end of the day, the process was only marginally successful, failing to meet many internal goals and meeting few broader social goals despite the eventual approval of a plan for the area. UBC staff should give the public more influence, and enhance accountability, transparency and objectivity if they are to improve results from planning processes.

Overall, the evaluation framework was appropriate to the case study, and could be applied elsewhere. Evaluators should be aware of constraints from resources, timing, and access to information in applying the model, and should develop context-process linkages more clearly if they are to improve on this method.

Executive Summary

Background

Idealism and pragmatism are two defining characteristics of planners, who must constantly balance them in reaching for a better future in a political world. The evaluation of public participation in planning decisions is a good example of this balance. The very concept of public participation is contested, with a wide range of philosophies competing to define it. In order to be useful, an evaluation of participation must make a comparison with an ideal. At the same time it must be practical, responding to the situation at hand and to differences of opinion, if it is to be widely accepted as a fair and objective assessment.

Rooted in the great democratic experiment, the field of public participation has a long history and continues to evolve. In the last fifty years, a huge number of techniques and strategies have been created to involve the public in decision making. Most recently, contingent strategies and deliberative techniques have drawn the attention of practitioners. So too has the systematic evaluation of participatory processes. The goal of this thesis was to take advantage of these recent developments by building and testing an evaluation framework for public participation that is principled, robust, and responsive to different points of view.

The University Boulevard Case Study

Since the mid-1980's, the University of British Columbia (UBC) has been developing parts of campus for residential and other "Non-Institutional" uses. As a result of opposition from the public and the neighbouring municipality of Vancouver, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) produced an Official Community Plan (OCP) Bylaw for the UBC area in 1997. UBC and the GVRD also agreed on requirements for planning processes at a more detailed neighbourhood scale in a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), most recently in 2000. Following the OCP, UBC produced a Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) that incorporates some neighbourhood-scale planning and campus-wide infrastructure planning. Planning for neighbourhoods is being completed by UBC in the form of "Neighbourhood Plans," with one for each of 8 areas defined in the OCP.

University Boulevard is one such "Neighbourhood." It is a 3 hectare area
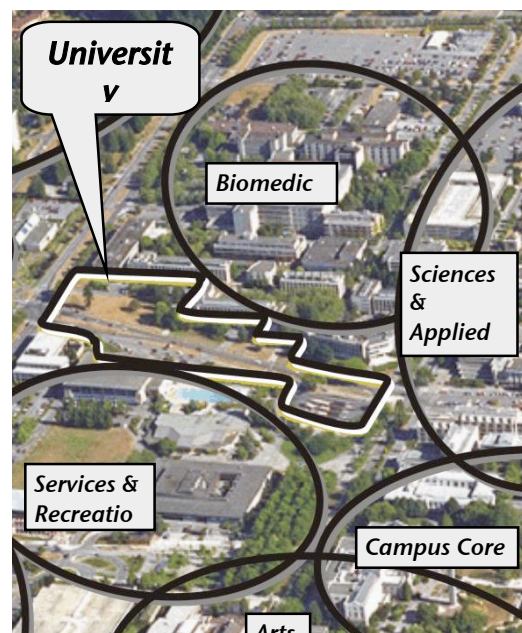
located at the social center of campus, and is bordered by a student athletic/recreational/social area, the biomedical precinct, and the science precinct. The Student Union Building and bus loop, located there, are important draws for people from across campus. As such, the space represented by University Boulevard is used and valued by a tremendous variety of people: it is truly a shared space, and one whose future is also contested by its various users.

The public was consulted on Draft #2 of the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Plan (UBNP) in spring 2003, offering a great case study for the thesis to test evaluation of participation and to help the UBC staff improve their planning practice. Planning for University Boulevard began in December 2000 and ended in October 2003, going through three major phases, each of which culminated in the production of a Draft Plan. The Draft #2 process had two important sub-phases, of which the first was primarily internal work by UBC staff and the second was the public participation process. The timeline for the entire planning process is shown below; the case study is focused on public involvement in the production and review of Draft # 2, marked as a shaded area on the timeline. Because the case study was the middle part of a larger overall process, the investigation considered the planning process to be on-going: the process for Draft # 1 was considered as part of the context and the process for Draft # 3 as an outcome.

		2001				2002				2003		
Planning Phase	J	A	J	O	J	A	J	O	J	A	J	O
Draft Plan #1												
Draft Plan #2												
University Boulevard Committee Report												
Draft Plan #2												
Draft Plan #3												

The Research Project: Design and Methods

This research considered two questions:
- ⟨ "To what degree was public participation in the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Planning process successful, and why?" and
- ⟨ "What lessons does this research teach us about evaluation of public participation?"

To answer them, a comprehensive, contingent evaluative framework was developed based on a review of the public involvement literature. This framework was applied to the UBNP process through the collection and analysis of data from interviews, participant observation, media review and document review. The research followed the "Guiding Principles for Evaluators" of the American Evaluators Association. Ethical research practices were used

throughout, and care was taken to ensure objectivity, including selection of a broad range of interviewees and the use of data triangulation. Information collected in the research was applied in three ways: to construct an accurate history of the process, to refine contingent criteria, and to evaluate the process against the refined set of criteria. In this way, the study described the process, then analyzed its three components: process design, implementation, and outcomes.

Results

A conceptual model of public participation in decision-making was developed based on the literature. It described three inter-related elements of public participation: Context, Process, and Outcomes (Figure ES-1), which structure the presentation of the study's major findings in three corresponding sections.
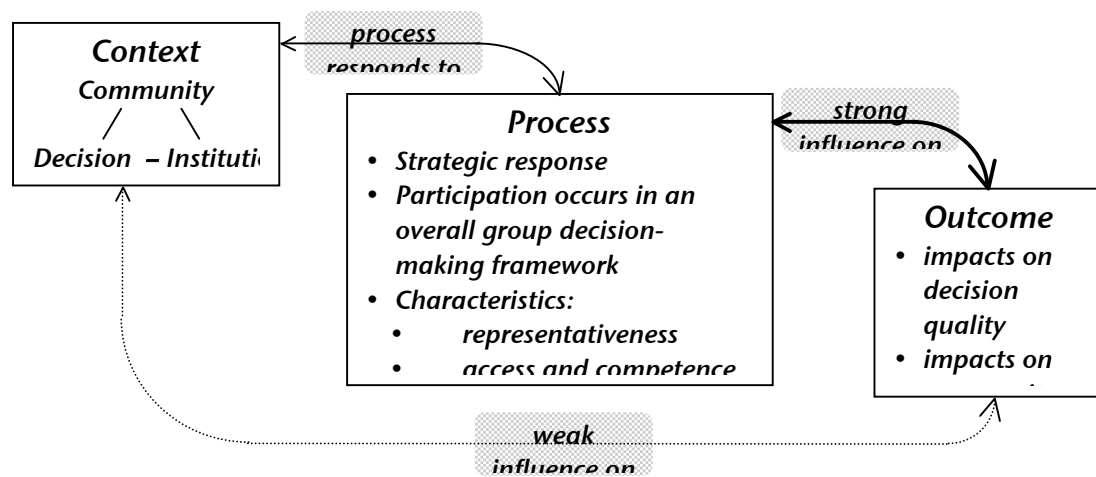

Figure ES-1: Conceptual Model of Public Participation in Decision-Making

Context

Planning at UBC is unusual in that the municipal government – in this case the GVRD – has developed an OCP but has not developed local area plans or land-use bylaws; rather, it has agreed through MoUs that UBC will produce neighbourhood plans through a mutually acceptable process. In their MoUs, UBC and the GVRD have agreed that the GVRD's role will be to review the OCP regularly and to approve Neighbourhood Plans if they are consistent with the OCP, while UBC's role is to conduct the planning process and approve plans subject to consistency as understood by the GVRD. UBC has a much greater role in conducting and governing Neighbourhood Planning than does the GVRD.

The contextual factors are summarized as they were following the production of the University Boulevard Committee's report in April 2002. At the time, the following factors were important to the planning process:
1. *a requirement that the UBNP be consistent with the OCP and with CCP principles and overall density allocations;*

2. *a requirement that the process had to comply with the 2000 MoU with the GVRD;*
3. *an enormous planning scope, equivalent to zoning, subdivision, and public realm and building design guidelines combined, indicating the need for more public influence and a more inclusive process, commensurate with the potential impacts on the community;*
4. *a part of campus that was of central importance to many people, indicating a need for a broadly inclusive process that could resolve conflicts among competing interests;*
5. *a long history of community mistrust, indicating the need for significant community influence over outcomes;*
6. *adopted policy – A Legacy and a Promise: Principles for Physical Planning at UBC – that committed to collaborative planning and therefore to providing significant public influence;*
7. *a history of presenting a single draft option to the public at any given time, limiting public influence to refining each one;*
8. *public concerns with Draft #1 and more significant concerns with the University Boulevard Committee's recommendations, indicating strong potential for public opposition and controversy; and*
9. *pressure to develop the Dentistry building and transit loop quickly, indicating the need for an expeditious process.*

The major results of the context evaluation in the thesis were that the evaluation should consider whether the process was broadly inclusive and if the community had significant influence over the outcomes. It also highlighted a conflict between the need for inclusiveness and public influence on one hand, and time pressures and UBC's history of planning practice on the other.

Process

Based on the interviews conducted with responsible administrative staff and the review of available documents, it was evident that UBC staff assumed that the public was satisfied with previous processes and decisions and thought that University Boulevard proposals were improvements. Therefore, anticipating public acceptance, their strategy was to prepare a draft plan internally and then present it to a broad cross-section of the community for approval. Table ES-1 summarizes UBC's objectives and the activities they implemented to achieve them.

Objective	Activities
Meet GVRD requirements.	*Incorporate the MoU's requirements into the process.*
Be inclusive.	*Conduct a large number of accessible meetings between February and April.*

Objective	Activities
Inform the public.	Use a website and provide *Draft Plan Diagrams* and a *Discussion Guide* to the public.
Obtain and document feedback from the public.	Develop and use a *Feedback Form* Produce a *Consultation Report* to summarize feedback.
Obtain Board of Governors approval in May.	Schedule the process in time to report feedback to the Board in May.
Obtain public acceptance.	Promote and defend the Draft Plan.

Evaluation of the Strategy

Four elements of the strategy were critical to the eventual success or failure of the process. These are summarized in the left-hand column of Table ES-2. To the right of each strategic element is a statement (or statements) that summarizes its evaluation; the symbol (✓) indicates a positive evaluation, (~) a mixed result, and (✗) a negative evaluation. This convention is used throughout the Results section.

Strategy	Evaluation
Make information readily available.	✓ Likely to enhance the public's ability to respond meaningfully.
Maximize the number of participants.	~ Could be seen as a response to calls for improved planning process. However, given known public concerns over the proposals, it was likely to produce significant opposition.
Minimize public influence by limiting their role to reviewing a completed plan.	✗ Likely to worsen the existing atmosphere of distrust. ✗ Did not match internal policy.
Time the process to culminate in Board of Governors approval in May.	✗ Likely to worsen the existing atmosphere of distrust, given that incorporation of public input was not possible on this schedule.

Evaluation of the Implementation

The characteristics of the March process were evaluated against criteria that fell into three categories: representation, information, and procedures. Table ES-3 summarizes the evaluation with a statement for each criterion.

Category	Evaluation
Representation	✓ *Participant selection was fair.* ✓ *The process was inclusive.* ✓ *With the exception of undergraduate students, participant composition was representative of community composition.* ~ *Although meeting signage was poor and advertising uninspired, events were quite accessible.*
Information	✓ *Written information was accessible and readable.* ✓ *Participants were assisted in understanding graphics at open houses. This was critical to their understanding in some cases.* ~ *Although individual communications materials did not stand alone, together they formed a complete package.* ✗ *Written communications contained biases and/or omissions, in particular the Feedback Form and the Executive Summary of the Consultation Report. Verbal communications were also biased, often having a promotional or defensive tone.*
Procedural Rules	✓ *The process was flexible when challenged, permitting the extension of the process beyond the original approval date.* ~ *The process incorporated two-way communication, but it was not of an interactive nature, and both participants and staff were sometimes disrespectful.* ✗ *UBC was unclear and sometimes inaccurate in its communications about scope and constraints.* ✗ *The process was poorly transparent: reporting was biased and incomplete, and reasons for decisions were not communicated by staff.* ✗ *The process lacked accountability, except for the attendance at the public meeting of the Chair of the Board of Governors.*

Key Findings

Looking at the evaluation of the UBNP process as a whole, UBC staff put many of the right elements in place for a successful consultation process, including identifying an appropriate set of public events and selecting potentially useful communications tools. However, their strategy failed to respond to key contextual factors, leading to loss of community trust, significant opposition, and a need to extend their timeline and revise the plan. This analysis of the process identified two overarching issues: credibility and governance.

The credibility of the process was first raised as an issue because of the bias of UBC's communications. The Feedback Form was particularly aggravating to respondents, one of whom was quoted in the Consultation Report: "You might as well ask if people like apple pie or not." Two issues with scope and constraints further weakened the University's credibility: (1) UBC insisted that plans comply with the CCP, although that did not reflect actual constraints, and (2) despite the fact that UBC's plan did not comply with the OCP, staff insisted that public input had to. Finally, the inadequate time planned for incorporation of public input confirmed that the process was not a credible attempt to involve the public in making decisions about University Boulevard. Rather, as a member of the administration put it, it was an attempt "to sell our vision in the broadest conceptual terms."

Governance issues were related to the links between decision-makers, administration, and the public. First, decision-makers were not accountable to the community because there was virtually no formal public access to them, either during the process or at Board of Governors meetings. Second, the administration's documentation of feedback was biased, overstating support for the plan and emphasizing public incapacity to contribute meaningfully. For example, where the Executive Summary of the Consultation Report said that "there was a clear indication of support for the overall vision," other sources said much the opposite, for example "opposition to the University Boulevard idea is fierce." Staff also failed to communicate rationales for decisions to the public. Communications to the Board of Governors were similarly biased; in fact, the administration presented less information to the Board than they made available publicly. Because the process was poorly transparent, the accountability of the administration to the Board and the public as well as the Board's accountability to the public were weakened. The governance of the process was poor.

Outcomes

Outcomes were evaluated based on a review of media articles and UBC documents, personal observations, and interviews. The evaluation of outcomes was limited because the evaluation took place immediately after the process when some outcomes are difficult to measure. Two types of outcomes were considered: UBC's internal goals and broadly accepted "social goals." Table ES-4 shows that UBC achieved only half of its internal goals.

Internal Goal	Evaluation
Implement planned activities	✓ *Staff implemented all planned activities.*
Meet GVRD requirements	✓ *The process exceeded GVRD requirements.*

Internal Goal	Evaluation
Obtain public acceptance of Draft #2	✗ The public opposed most key elements of the proposal, including market housing, residential towers, and opening University Boulevard to traffic. They had concerns with the pool relocation, the underground bus loop, and commercialization.
Obtain approval in May 2003	✗ Approval was not obtained for this plan; a revised plan was not approved until October 2003.

Similarly, evaluation of UBC's achievement of social goals showed only partial success. However, it also provided useful insights. The evaluation is summarized in Table ES-5.

Social Goal	Evaluation
Educate and inform the public.	~ The community was educated only about topics UBC communicated about, for example, they knew nothing of the financial implications of proposals because UBC said nothing about them.
Incorporate public input and values.	~ While plan revisions incorporated public input, they reflected the values of the decision-makers and the authors of the revised plan more than those of the public.
Improve decision quality.	~ Although decision quality was difficult to measure, the new plan appeared to reflect compromises rather than improvements. For example, density was reduced, reducing financial returns; the opportunity to explore different forms of higher density was missed.
Enhance trust of the sponsoring institution.	✗ The process did not reduce the community's long-standing mistrust of UBC, but may instead have increased their cynicism, despite changes made to the plan.

Overall, UBC was only partially successful in achieving internal and social goals.

Conclusion

This research considered the degree of success of the University Boulevard planning process, recommendations for improved planning processes at UBC, and broader lessons about the evaluation of public participation in planning. Each of these is addressed in turn to conclude the Executive Summary.

University Boulevard: Success or Failure?

On examination, it appears that UBC staff lacked commitment to adopted planning policy, and may have had concerns with the sharing of decision-making power required in a collaborative setting. Time pressures particular to the Draft #2 process probably exacerbated those dispositions, encouraging staff to limit public influence in order to obtain approval quickly. As a result, public involvement was limited to commenting at the last minute on a completed draft plan. Timing and biased communications were key in finding that the process was not a credible attempt to involve the public in decision-making. Furthermore, it was poorly governed, making it difficult to hold UBC to account for their lack of commitment.

The outcomes of the process reflected the inappropriateness of UBC's strategy and the issues with its implementation. While the plan was approved by the Board of Governors, it was significantly delayed; in eliminating the most contentious issues, it eliminated some potentially positive features; while it responded to community input, it failed to reflect important community values; and it failed to reduce the community's distrust of UBC. In answer to the first research question, the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Planning process was only marginally successful despite the plan's eventual approval.

Recommendations for UBC

This evaluation indicates how UBC might improve the way in which it involves the public in planning-related decision-making. It is not a matter of making minor adjustments to the process it has used to date, however. UBC needs to change its approach to public involvement as a whole if it is to deal with the issues it faces. In keeping with the themes from the evaluation, recommendations are split into five categories: governance, credibility and relationships, efficiency, and decision quality.

Governance

***Recommendation 1**. Adopt planning processes that improve the accountability of governing bodies.*

***Recommendation 2**. Improve the accountability of staff by requiring Board approval of the design of all planning processes.*

***Recommendation 3**. Ensure that communications with the public and the Board of Governors are completely transparent in that they are accurate and include documentation of feedback, decisions made, and rationales for decisions.*

***Recommendation 4**. Compile and adopt progressive principles and associated techniques for good planning process into a succinct policy statement to guide process design and implementation.*

Recommendation 5. Evaluate participatory planning processes on a continuing basis by building assessment into the process.

Recommendation 6. To enhance the credibility of the process, use independent facilitators, especially for significant events.

Credibility and Relationships

Recommendation 7. Use a collaborative planning process for future neighbourhood planning to reduce mistrust.

Recommendation 8. Design planning processes on the assumption that public input will result in changes to draft plans; only if the public as a whole accepts the plan should it be forwarded into the approvals process.

Recommendation 9. Clarify the goals, scope and constraints on the planning process as the first step in developing the decision-making strategy. Communicate these clearly to the public.

Recommendation 10. Ensure that all documents used in the process, including drawings and text, are unbiased and easy for the lay public to understand.

Decision Quality

Recommendation 11. Recognize and incorporate the knowledge and expertise provided by the public. In particular, design processes to engage UBC's extraordinary academic expertise.

Efficiency

Recommendation 12. Structure decision-making processes to facilitate the discussion of options, trade-offs and implications in order to make it easier to improve plan quality.

Lessons for Evaluators

While these practical recommendations are important, this research was an opportunity to inquire about evaluation of participatory decision-making processes in general, reflected in the second research question. This project adopted a context-process-outcome model of participatory decision-making, and applied a contingent evaluation framework within it. Overall, the approach was successful in that it provided an understanding of a comprehensive set of factors while minimizing philosophical bias. It also provided insights into relationships between context, process and outcome. At the same time, however, it highlighted the need to better understand these relationships, especially those between context and process.

Practically, the evaluation was time-consuming, so replicating the method may not always be practical. On the other hand, the number of interviewees was

relatively small, and it is not clear that their opinions mirror those of the entire community despite efforts to be representative. Access to internal information was also limited, which limited the ability to draw conclusions about rationales and strategies. Finally, it was done immediately following the end of the process, so some outcomes could not be evaluated, illustrating the point that practitioners must recognize the constraints timing places on evaluations. These weaknesses and other suggestions are addressed through the lessons for evaluators listed below.

Lesson 1. Adopt best practices of qualitative research and evaluation to minimize bias, but recognize that the evaluation will remain subjective and that its value lies in its meaning and utility.

Lesson 2. Survey participants about criteria in the evaluation framework to complement richer interview data, to identify and minimize potential bias, and/or to reduce the amount of resources required to use the evaluation framework.

Lesson 3. Evaluate participation processes as part of broader decision-making and governance processes. In considering the participatory portion alone, it may not be possible to identify the appropriate evaluation criteria, or to evaluate them effectively.

Lesson 4. Carefully analyze documents that address contextual factors and rationales for process design decisions, and focus a section of interviews with process designers on context and process design.

Lesson 5. To ensure that complete and accurate information is made available about process design and strategy, either work with internal stakeholders to reduce their concerns over release of information to the evaluation, or obtain enough power from the evaluation sponsor to gain access to the information.

Lesson 6. Adopt a systematic evaluation approach based on the context-process-outcome conceptual model.

Lesson 7. Match expectations for results to the type of evaluation being conducted.

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Acknowledgements

In retrospect, the writing of this thesis began long before the project began to take shape. In fact, my interest in the area and my approach to research are rooted in the principles and values ingrained in my by my parents, to whom I am deeply grateful for their love, support and direction. More recently – and I suppose practically – I appreciate the love, support, sense of humour, and enduring patience of my wife Helen in supporting my academic pursuits and in particular in allowing me to explore the implementation of my planning ideals over the last year.

This project would not have been as fun, nor as exciting, without the abiding interest and enthusiasm of Professor Tony Dorcey, not to mention his extraordinary ability to be at once critical and unequivocally supportive of my work. As the end drew near, the thoughtful comments and critiques of Professor Leonie Sandercock and [to be determined] also helped to refine and clarify the thesis.

In a qualitative research project such as this one, those who provided information are indispensable. In that spirit, I would like to thank those who agreed to be interviewed about the University Boulevard process: I enjoyed each of the interviews and learned a great deal from each one. Similarly, other participants in this process – both community members and UBC staff – made the planning process what it was and provided valuable information for the thesis. In the last twelve months, I spoke to no one who did not care about the success of the University's eventual development.

Members of the SCARP University Town class must be thanked; especially Norm, whose clear thinking, self-assurance and commitment to principles were a constant inspiration. Other individuals also had significant roles: Susan Milley, who took on a design charrette with me on a moment's notice; the many students who were involved in the design charrette and the preparation of the drawings for presentation; Laura Best, whose leadership, integrity and sense of fun gave an incredible energy to our conversations; community members on the GVRD/UBC workshop committee... I could go on. Suffice it to say that the list of people to thank is long and that I am grateful to each of you for the large and small ways in which you have enhanced my work.

On a Personal Note

At the time of writing, a collaborative planning process is underway for South Campus, and – at this early stage – offers hope for much improved processes. At the same time, UBC continues to resist improvements to the governance of Non-Institutional planning such as University Boulevard, which raises the concern that the South Campus experience will not be carried on. It is my hope that this thesis will provide an opportunity for the improvement of both governance and implementation of planning processes at UBC. As many colleges and universities are aware, it is no easy task to manage the "town-gown" relationship. I believe that following the recommendations I have made here will benefit both the community and UBC, offering an opportunity to achieve truly excellent processes and plans, to rebuild strained relationships, and to build UBC's endowment and a sustainable, vital University community.

PART I: Introduction and Conceptual Background

Chapter 1: Starting Points

1.1   Background

In 1922, the University of British Columbia (UBC) was given a large property on the Point Grey peninsula west of Vancouver for two purposes: to build a university, and to provide endowment income to support its mission. UBC developed institutional buildings on its campus, and developed part of the land immediately east of its main gates into what is now known as the University Endowment Lands neighbourhood. From the 1950's to the late 1980's, UBC's development was limited to institutional buildings, student residences, and a research park. Faced with funding constraints, UBC established UBC Real Estate Corporation in 1988 to once more take advantage of its property endowment. The new corporation planned and initiated development at Hampton Place without consultation with surrounding government bodies or the community about its impacts. As a result of the objections raised, UBC and the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) negotiated the adoption of a municipal-style planning process.

The GVRD initiated the planning process by developing and approving an Official Community Plan (OCP) in 1997, which defined where non-institutional development could occur and what policies applied to university development. The University was responsible for local area planning, and initiated the Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) to plan for all eight neighbourhoods identified in the OCP. UBC completed the CCP in 2000, but it did not meet all the GVRD's requirements for local area plans, setting the stage for a third level of planning: eight individual neighbourhood plans. Work on these began in 2001 with the University Boulevard, Mid Campus, and Theological neighbourhoods. The Mid-Campus and Theological plans were approved in 2001, but work continued on University Boulevard, and plans for new areas were begun as the others were approved.

In 2001, four classmates and I assessed the success of public participation in the CCP planning process as a small case study for a first-year planning class. The evaluation framework we used was developed from our own experience and a brief search of planning literature. Nevertheless, it was enough to suggest that there were significant problems with public participation in planning at UBC. The next spring, we followed up with a research project to identify and prioritize methods of involvement for students, hoping to assist the University in improving its performance. The results of this study were presented to senior staff of Land and Building Services, including the Associate Vice-President, Mr. Geoff Atkins.

The next year, another group of first year student planners looked at UBC planning processes again, this time at the Mid-Campus plan. They were so concerned about the project that they asked their instructor, Professor Tony

Dorcey, to lead a class focusing on current planning on campus in the spring term, which he agreed to do. That class investigated what had by then been termed "University Town" planning, and began to work on recommendations for improving the planning process. At much the same time, the University began a public consultation process on a new draft plan for University Boulevard. This plan was extremely controversial and elicited an enormous public response that was critical of both process and the plan's substance. At the invitation of Mr. Dennis Pavlich, who as Vice-President External and Legal Affairs had recently become responsible for Neighbourhood Planning, the class presented recommendations for an improved process to the Board of Governors in April 2003.

While I had not been involved for almost a year in UBC's planning, I had reservations about the plan, and my earlier research and the other students' concerns led me to question the quality of the process as well. One of my procedural concerns was that only one development option was being presented to the public, so I organized a design charrette in collaboration with a Landscape Architecture student named Susan Milley to explore other possibilities for the area and to raise community awareness of the issues and options. While the charrette was a success, it could not resolve my concerns about the official process. Those were grounded in principles I value including fairness, integrity, respect, and community.

My sense of concern was tempered by realism and pragmatism. I knew that planning processes and public involvement processes in particular are complicated, challenging topics. I asked myself, "How do I know if this was a good or a bad process?" Administrative staff responsible for the process thought it was good – they were meeting with a huge number of groups and individuals, and their website was well-attended. On the other hand, many members of the public were very upset by the process. Was it possible to objectively evaluate the participation component of a planning process? How could it be done? This thesis grew out of my desire to address my sense of concern, and to do so in a fair and objective way to resolve the differences of opinion about the success of the process. Practically speaking, I also wanted to help University staff understand what went right, what went wrong, and what they could do to improve matters.

1.2   Research Problem, Questions and Justification

Public participation in decision-making has been discussed in many fields for some time. A myriad of practitioners now devote careers to the project, and they have remarkably varied approaches to it. They have also been learning as they go, and an immense literature has built up about the philosophies of participation, methodological options, and of course evaluation. Only recently however, have practitioners taken a long, hard look at evaluating participatory processes and arrived at some theoretical frameworks for doing so (e.g. Abelson, et al. 2003). Tony Dorcey and Tim McDaniels describe it as "an infant art"

(Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001). This project presents an interesting opportunity: to review and synthesize this recent literature to provide a robust evaluation framework, and then to apply it critically to a participation process. Where it offers UBC an opportunity to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their approach, it offers planning practitioners an opportunity to see how useful recent evaluation frameworks are, to test one way to apply them, and to identify their strengths and weaknesses as they apply to cases like the University Boulevard Neighbourhood planning process.

The thesis, then, asks the following questions:
- *To what degree was public participation in the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Planning process successful, and why?*
- *What lessons does this research teach us about evaluation of public participation?*

1.3   Research Design and Methods

The subjectivity and sensitivity of the evaluation of public participation is well known (Webler, 1995). To address those issues in this research, every effort was made to act ethically and objectively. The "Guiding Principles for Evaluators" adopted by the American Evaluation Association in 1994 are reflected in the approach taken in this research:

1. *<u>Systematic Inquiry</u>: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.*

2. *<u>Competence</u>: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.*

3. *<u>Integrity/Honesty</u>: Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.*

4. *<u>Respect for People</u>: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.*

5. *<u>Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare</u>: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.*

To answer the research questions, a seven-step process was used:
- *review of literature to develop a conceptual understanding of participatory processes and their evaluation;*
- *development of an evaluation framework based on the literature review;*
- *selection of methods to suit the evaluation framework and criteria;*
- *collection of relevant data;*
- *description of the University Boulevard process and relevant related facts;*
- *evaluation of the process; and*

- *conclusion about the process itself and process evaluation in general.*

1.4   Thesis Outline

The thesis is structured to reflect this research design, placing the literature review first, then the discussion of methods, and finally the results and conclusions. This produces a three-part structure:

PART I: Introduction and Conceptual Background. This introduction provided a brief setting of the issue and the case. Next is a review of public involvement processes and their evaluation that will permit expansion of the research questions into an evaluation framework and method.

PART II: Studying the University Boulevard Case. This part begins with the research methodology in order to clearly define the case study and explain how the research is approached. The case study itself is next, and is split into three parts. First, contextual factors are described. Second, the story of the process itself is told, and the overall strategy and process characteristics are evaluated. Last, the outcomes are described and then evaluated.

PART III: Results and Concluding Thoughts. This part returns to the research questions to summarize the results and to draw conclusions about the usefulness and application of the evaluation framework.

Chapter 2: A Review of Public Involvement

"The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you." - Sherry Arnstein (1969)

Public participation is an area of practice shared across disciplines. It is also contested because of its historical roots in democracy, empowerment, and pragmatism. Some argue that participation's purpose is to ensure the vitality of our democracy; others believe that it is to devolve power to the community at large, and still others promote participation to improve decisions made through established political and bureaucratic systems. While this diversity has created conflict, a rich understanding of public participation has also grown from these roots in fields as diverse as environment, health care, management, and urban planning. This rich mixture of ideas has created enormous potential for participation in a variety of contexts, for example community economic development planning and value-based decision-making about hydro power. It has also illuminated a range of issues that practitioners must consider. The key questions in the conversation about public participation remain (Abelson, et al., 2001; Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001):
- *"What is good public involvement?"*
- *"Why was it (not) good?" and*
- *"How do we know when public participation is (not) good?"*

This chapter reviews the history, characteristics, and key considerations of public participation, and concludes with some recent answers to those key questions.

2.1 History

Public participation must be understood in the context of democracy. The history of public participation is similar in most democratic nations, although the details may vary. In the United States, for instance, the civil rights movement played a significant role, while in Canada it did not. In democracies, the public can and does, within limits, participate in government decision-making. There is a culture of democracy that expects a government to be accountable to its people and that upholds standards and rules that protect citizens' ability to speak freely. Having said that, there is a great deal of variation in what is understood by public participation, and that has its source in different philosophies of democratic governance. This brief history begins by considering the roots of participation in democracy and follows its evolution through legalization and discussions of empowerment in the 1950's and 1960's, towards increased sophistication in the 1970's, and then to more recent trends, illustrating its complex, contested, and constantly evolving nature.

The Early Years: Democracy and Bureaucracy

Public participation in decision-making has been a topic of discussion from the early days of democracy itself:

> *"I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesom discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education." - Thomas Jefferson (to William C. Jarvis, 28 September 1820.)[1]*

In the early days of democracy in the United States, a very limited constituency had rights to elect representatives. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, popular movements resulted in broadening of the constituency, first from male landowners to all white men of 'majority' age, then to add white women of 'majority' age, and later, through the civil rights movement of the 1960's, to add blacks to the list of constituents (Langton 1978a). The constituency changed radically from being a group of hundreds or perhaps thousands of people to millions. In Canada, the story follows similar lines.

At the same time, government responsibilities and size increased with the development of a powerful bureaucracy having the discretion to make many of its decisions. In early democratic systems, citizens could communicate fairly directly with their elected representatives and therefore influence decisions. While citizens can still communicate directly with their representatives, the sheer number of decisions, bureaucrats and citizens make indirect communication through the bureaucracy more prevalent. Furthermore, bureaucratic discretion means that the people whom citizens must influence are not accountable to them by election. The participation of the public in bureaucratic decisions can be seen as compensation for the loss of direct connection with elected representatives and for the loss of accountability in decisions made by the bureaucracy. This view illustrates the potential of public participation to ensure that bureaucratic decisions are accountable to those whom they affect (Langton, 1978a; Graham, Phillips & Maslove, 1998). It is the first of three elements in the history of public participation as a way to enhance representative government.

There is a second view of the role of public participation within our established democratic governments: its function as understood by the bureaucrats who invite it. This is the "managerialist" perspective (Thomas, 1995), which developed with the growth of a bureaucracy vested with the power and responsibility to make decisions on behalf of the public. Their decisions go beyond purely technical issues to incorporate values, so they must constantly

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[1] *Source: http://www.monticello.org/reports/quotes/education.html accessed July 3, 2003.*

balance their desire to make the right decision as they see it, and their desire to make the decision the public wants – or thinks it wants (McNally, 1992). The balance is further complicated by the variation of available information and expertise between representatives, bureaucrats and the public, and the value placed on those by different people. The managerialist perspective leads to a second way that public participation can enhance representative government: it has the potential to justify controversial bureaucratic decisions and develop public support for them (Langton, 1978a; Graham, et al., 1998).

Third, public participation offers an opportunity to improve quality of decisions bureaucrats make on behalf of the public (Sanoff, 2000; Thomas, 1995; Graham & Phillips, 1998a). John Clayton Thomas states that "public involvement, though neither for all matters nor always to the same extent, is now essential for effective public management." (Thomas, 1995, p. 2) Implicit in the potential to improve decisions is another opportunity. If people are to make meaningful improvements to a decision, they must know something about the decision being made. Virtually all participation processes therefore incorporate an element of education and information. The education of citizens is a potential advantage of public participation that is implicit in the opportunity to improve decisions.

The enhancement of representative democracy points to various potential benefits of public participation in decision-making: enhanced accountability, increased support and justification for decisions, improved decisions, and public education. These provided the impetus that drove increases in public participation through the middle of the twentieth century.

1960's to early 1970's: Legalization and Empowerment

In the United States in the 1950's and 1960's, calls for public participation led to the widespread adoption of legal requirements for public participation in government decisions. As a result, public participation became a widespread practice there in the 1950's and 1960's (Kweit & Kweit, 1981). In Canada, municipal governments adopted participation in the late 1960's and early 1970's in order to improve decisions and increase efficiency. As in the US, participation became legally mandated in Canada as it became common practice (Graham, et al., 1998). Also, as legislation evolved, it began to describe participation in terms such as "early and ongoing" (the BC Local Government Act, 855(2) (BC Local Government Act [RSBC 1996], 2003)). This type of exhortation reflected an increasingly common commitment to a comprehensive participation program.

While requirements for participation programs encouraged their implementation, they also led to the routinization of public participation and the rise of a professional field of public consultation consultants, facilitators, and so on (Graham, et al., 1998; Langton, 1978a). These routine processes were often carried out with the simple goal of meeting legal requirements, often

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resulting in processes that were ill suited to the situation at hand and that were not taken seriously by those responsible for them.

The reality of participation was that it was often less successful than its potential suggested. Many processes were designed in such a way as to exclude large groups of citizens, especially the poor and sometimes racial minorities like blacks. For proponents of participation, the issue was power. In 1969, Sherry Arnstein wrote a "classic article" (The City Reader, 2000, p. 240) titled "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" in response to participatory processes that appeared to exclude or ignore citizen input. Arnstein equated citizen participation directly with citizen power, stating that "it is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future." (Arnstein, 1969) In the same article, she asserted "the fundamental point that participation without the redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless." For Arnstein and others who worked closely with poor, minority and otherwise marginalized communities, participation's great potential was to give community members influence over the future of the world in which they live.

Mahatma Gandhi said that "My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest" (Free Cuba Foundation, 1996). Participation can be viewed as a way to force the system to recognize previously unrecognized actors (i.e. as a way for the disempowered to gain better access to decision-making in the representative democratic governance system). In this sense participation can enhance representative democracy. The Swiss model of representative government, with its reliance on referenda for many decisions, is an example of one mode in which participation can complement representation. Alternatively, it can be seen as a way for those who do not believe that the system can recognize or serve their interests to make decisions (Arnstein, 1969); in this sense, participation has the potential to compete with the representative democratic system.

By the mid-1970's, public participation in decision-making had become legitimized through legal requirements and was used in many areas. At the same time, however, its effectiveness had been reduced by routinization and fundamental issues of power had come to the fore. The field was moving from early enthusiasm over potential benefits to a growing recognition that support for participation, rooted in at least three different perspectives – internal improvements to democracy, improvements to decision quality and acceptance, and empowerment of citizens – was inherently conflicted.

Late 1970's to the 1980's: Increasing Sophistication and Conflict
The 1970's and 1980's would see a continuation of the trends begun in the 1960's. Participation processes became more sophisticated through the development of an incredibly diverse range of techniques (Rosener, 1978).

Rosener listed close to 30 distinguishable techniques (more recent lists expand the number greatly (e.g. International Association for Public Participation, 2003 and Wates, 2000) and many combinations and adaptations of these exist. These range from surveys to information meetings, open houses, workshops, focus groups, and so on. Their strategic application according to the goals and objectives of the decision-making process in question has since been a mainstay of thought in public participation literature.

Continuing the trend set in the 1960's, participatory processes were increasingly used as advocates extolled potential benefits such as improved decision-making, participant satisfaction, community acceptance, and public education. However, as their experience with participation processes increased, bureaucrats and administrators raised concerns (Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001). These people saw numerous risks: slower decisions, worse decisions, and devolution of power are three of the most significant. Arranging public participation certainly delays decision-making simply by the time it takes to arrange and run the process, let alone the time required to process and incorporate public input from a consultation process, or the time to come to agreement during a deliberative process[2]. Public resistance to a decision may delay a proposal long enough to completely kill it. An ill-informed public, or at least one that does not agree with the bureaucrat, may make a decision worse in his/her estimation. Finally, providing the public with some power to influence a decision necessarily means removing that power from the bureaucracy. This may be viewed as a threat to the bureaucrat and/or to the organization in general on two levels: at the level of a simple loss of power, and at the level of a loss of a professional's status versus that of a lay person.

By the late 1980's, the inherently conflicted nature of public participation was broadly recognized. Twenty years of practical experience had exposed both opportunities:
- *increased accountability for decisions;*
- *justified well-supported decisions;*
- *improved quality of decisions;*
- *increased community influence over decisions;*
- *increased community capacity to make decisions;*

and risks of public participation:
- *delayed decisions;*
- *poor decision quality; and*
- *perceived loss of bureaucratic status.*

By the early 1990's, most practitioners agreed that public involvement was important, but its opportunities and risks had spawned two camps: enthusiasts

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[2] Deliberative processes involve participants actively and intensely in discussing decisions (Abelson, et al., 2003).

– who emphasized opportunities - and skeptics – who emphasized its risks (Thomas, 1995).

1990's to Present: Contested Process, Constant Evolution

Since the early 1990's, the field has become broader and has begun to grapple with the conflicts within it. New techniques and approaches are being tried, practitioners are learning from experience, and solutions are being proposed to problems identified so far. Most importantly perhaps a move to address the contested nature of participation: philosophical stances of enthusiasts and skeptics are being overtaken by contingent and theoretical approaches to participation.

The field has broadened through the exploration of two new types of participatory processes: multi-stakeholder and deliberative processes. Multi-stakeholder processes are based in a pluralist democratic perspective that believes that a significant role for government is to arbitrate between differing segments of society, usually represented by interest groups (Beierle, 1998). A local example of these processes is the consensus-based roundtable process used in the BC Commission on Resources and Environment (CORE) in the early 1990's (Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001). While these processes permit significant, informed participation of members of the public, they are time- and resource-consuming for both the government and the public. In the mid-1990's, significant use of these processes came to a sudden halt because of burnout of stakeholders involved in a number of different processes at once (Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001).

In the late 1990's, the philosophy of public participation began to emphasize "reciprocal obligation between government and citizen and the assumption of responsibility by citizens and communities" (Graham & Phillips, 1998a). As a result, deliberative techniques have received more attention. Like multi-stakeholder negotiations, these involve smaller groups of people who come to agreement on a topic or topics through a discussion-based process.   Unlike multi-stakeholder processes, however, participants are expected to discuss the issues from their own perspective and that of others instead of negotiating from the perspective of their constituents. The small group discussions permit participants to become familiar with issues and technical knowledge, and therefore to come to an informed decision. Citizen juries and deliberative polling are two examples of this type of process:
- *citizen juries are public advisory boards randomly chosen on a representative basis, who have a rotating membership. They reflect the idea that citizens have a civic duty to participate in city decision-making, much like jury duty.*
- *deliberative polling gathers a representative group of people; provides them with background materials that illustrate costs, benefits, and trade-offs inherent in a decision; facilitates discussion over a couple of days; and allows them to challenge technical experts and politicians. At the*

end of the period, the group is polled to provide informed input into the decision.

Deliberative processes also have their drawbacks, however, and should not be seen as the peak of progress in public participation. Most importantly, they involve only a small number of people, and are time and resource intensive. As participants become more informed and work out their differences, they can easily leave the rest of the public behind, so they may appear to have been co-opted (Beierle & Cayford, 2002). Both deliberative and multi-stakeholder processes must be understood as two more options in the suite of techniques now available to those planning public participation processes. The most significant contribution they have made is to show that it is possible to have fruitful, informed discussions with the public about complex decisions.

Not only has the field of public participation increased its range of techniques, but it has also continued to work on its most fundamental issues, and to formalize these with supporting theory and a greater depth of practical experience. One common approach has been to review the state of the art to better understand what participation is, what its components are, how they relate, and how this informs the different perspectives about participation (e.g. Dorcey and McDaniels, 2001; Abelson, 1999; Beierle and Cayford, 2002; Webler, 1995; and Graham and Phillips, 1998a). Another approach has been to develop an understanding that accommodates both enthusiasts and skeptics, usually through a strategic or "contingent" method of deciding what type of participation is appropriate when. This approach is often used by practitioners in the field (e.g. Rosener, 1978; Canadian Standards Association, 1996; Thomas, 1995; US Environmental Protection Agency, 1996; US Department of Energy, n.d.; City of North Vancouver, 2000).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is possible to reflect on fifty years of experience with participation in public decision-making. It has come a long way from its origins in democratic governance, the rise of government bureaucracy, and empowerment, developing into a vast field of practice and study. Through that time, philosophical approaches and differences, inherent opportunities and risks, and strategies and methods have all become better understood. The field is if anything more complex than it has ever been before, but practitioners are beginning to address its most significant issues. Given its complexity, it is likely to remain a difficult art to master, but one that continues to evolve through efforts to realize its full potential.

2.2 Description

The story so far has described the last fifty years of a search for good public participation. Many people have devoted entire professional lives to this search, and many more have been significantly involved in it. Given its history of conflict, it is not surprising that there is little agreement about the nature and quality of public participation:

- *"participation virtually defies generalizations and delights in reducing abstractions to dust" (Hans Spiegel and Stephen Mittenthal, "The Many Faces of Citizen Participation: A bibliographic overview, Vol. 1. Washington, National Training Laboratories, 1968, in Langton 1978a);*
- *"[participation] varies in type, level of intensity, extent, and frequency." (Sanoff, 2000, p. 8), and*
- *"[participation is] fragmented across a variety of professional disciplines among which there are few shared meanings..." (Checkoway & van Til, 1978).*

Despite the apparent lack of agreement about public participation, professionals and academics have refined their practice by developing a much more complete image of public participation over the years. There are two key elements to this image: its definition, and its elements. These are discussed first, and then I touch briefly on barriers to participatory decision-making and current trends before ending by discussing evaluation of public participation.

Definition

There is no one accepted definition of "public participation." In fact, it seems that few people can agree on an appropriate term, let alone agree on a definition once the term is decided. "Public," "citizen," and "stakeholder" are terms often used in definitions, in combination with any of "participation," "consultation," "involvement," and "engagement" (Langton, 1978b; Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001). Sometimes these are used interchangeably, while at others specific distinctions are made between the various terms for clarification. A few definitions are collected here to illustrate their diversity and to make some key points:

- *Public participation describes a broader public relating to "public institutions of society or state." (Langton, 1978b) This is the broadest of definitions, including all modes of participation and all public bodies.*
- *Citizen involvement is participation requested and organized by government or by private companies to meet government requirements (Langton, 1978a). This definition begins to focus on the organizational context of participation.*
- *"'Public participation'... ...is the deliberate and active engagement of citizens by the council and/or administration... in making public-policy decisions or in setting strategic directions." (Graham & Phillips, 1998a) This definition builds on the first two to describe the character of the process, in this case as "deliberate and active."*
- *"...citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power" (Arnstein, 1969). In this famous statement, Arnstein focuses on the transfer of power from decision-makers to the public that is inherent in a participatory process in which the public has any degree of influence over decisions.*

- *"Citizen involvement is processes for the involvement of citizens in advising and making decisions on matters under government authority that augment or supplant decision-making through established channels of representative government." (Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001). This definition points out the fact that participatory decision-making can either augment or supplant decision-making, and that it deals with matters explicitly under government authority.*

What term and definition to use in this discussion? The term "public" is proposed for use here because the subject of this thesis is a decision-making process undertaken by a public institution, not a government body per se, and the term "participation" is proposed because it encompasses alternative terms without specifying the character of a process: it is relatively unbiased. Building on the definitions above, the following definition of "public participation" is proposed:

> *"Public participation is the participation of the public in advising and/or making decisions that are within the authority of a public institution or government body, through formal processes established by, or in partnership with, that body."*

This definition explicitly recognizes that "public participation" is participation in decision-making that is within the purview of a government body or public institution. It is broad enough to include universities, government corporations that are perceived to be accountable to the public, but are not directly part of government per se. On the other hand, it is limited in that it recognizes only formal processes – not informal ones that include lobbying, influence through personal relationships and so on – and in that it recognizes only processes that are established either by the institution or government body or through a partnership between it and the public. It therefore excludes citizen-driven initiatives whose scope may overlap an area of government authority, but which do not include the government in the establishment of the initiative. This last limitation is not generally a necessary one, as a citizen-driven initiative is still a public decision about a public matter and can probably be evaluated in much the same way as partnerships or government-initiated projects. Instead, the limitation is set to focus discussion on the area of interest in this case study.

Elements

> *"What public officials should realize is that citizen participation is like a professional sport. It takes place in a public forum where there is competition between individuals and groups with conflicting goals; where the individuals and groups that participate play different roles at different times; where the playing conditions change from time to time; where the planning of strategies is a major activity; where no one group wins every*

contest; and where there is an ongoing need to evaluate performance in order to succeed." (Rosener, 1978)

Thomas Beierle and Jerry Cayford (2002) identify three elements of this "professional sport" that together create a complete description of a public participation process: context, process, and outcomes. Context refers to the "public forum" and "playing conditions;" Process refers to playing the sport itself, and Outcome refers to the end result. These are the three key pieces of a preliminary conceptual model that can be used to understand and analyze participatory decision-making processes (Figure 1). This section will describe each of the elements and the relationships between them in detail.
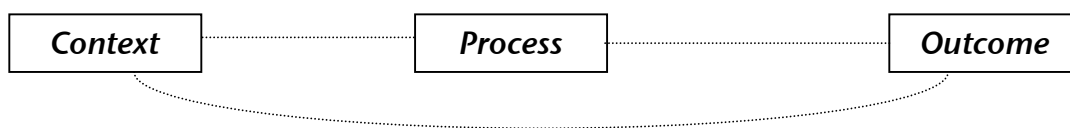
Figure 1: A Preliminary Conceptual Model of Participatory Decision-Making Processes

Context:

The broad context of public participation is governance (Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001). In Canada and other democratic nations, governance sets out a framework of expectations for the actions of public bodies to act in a manner consistent with democratic principles. These expectations have more recently been exemplified in the corporate world by controversies over Enron, World Com, and Hollinger International. Within the governance context, there is a range of influential factors. Efforts have been made over a long period to identify and categorize these influences. In 1981, Mary and Robert Kweit proposed two categories of contextual determinants of participation success:

- *characteristics of the "target organization" – meaning participants and community organizations; and*
- *characteristics of the environment – including an organization's structure and governance and the community's character.*

More recently, Julia Abelson (1999) reviewed literature across a number of disciplines to identify influences on the quality of participation. She describes three types of influences on participation quality:

- *"Pre-disposing" influences: individual and community characteristics*
- *"Enabling" influences: participatory culture, the media, and institutional actions (the process run by the institution)*
- *"Precipitating" influences: interests, interest groups, and issues*

Practical guides to planning public participation also offer insight into contextual factors (City of North Vancouver, 2000; Canadian Standards Association, 1996; US Department of Energy, n.d.), which appear in criteria they propose for making decisions about whether to involve the public and how to do so. Some examples are:

- *the significance of the decision (Canadian Standards Association, 1996)*
- *stakeholder interests and positions (Canadian Standards Association, 1996)*
- *constraints on decisions (City of North Vancouver, 2000)*
- *degree of controversy (City of North Vancouver, 2000)*
- *institutional constraints (US Department of Energy, n.d.,)*
- *decision structure (US Department of Energy, n.d.,)*

The contextual factors that influence public participation can be effectively categorized and related to better understand the breadth of context. Given the preliminary conceptual model, context is defined as "the factors that preceded and may have influenced the nature and outcome of the participatory decision-making process." It can be broken down into six categories, illustrated in Figure 2 and then described.
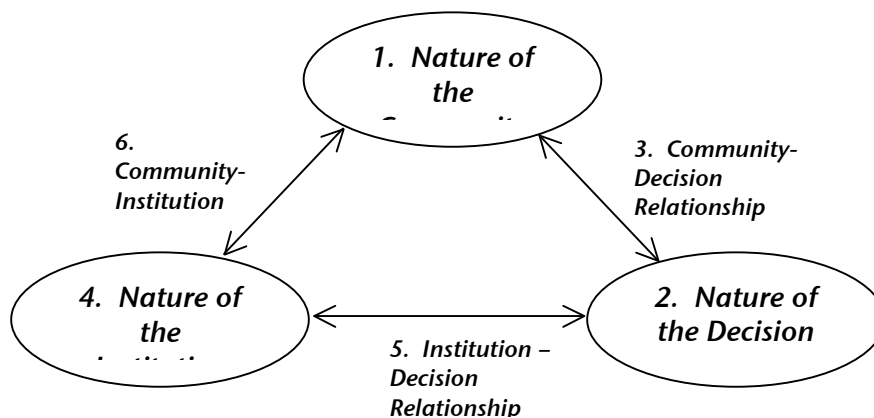
Figure 2: Contextual Factors

1. *The Nature of the Community. Community characteristics break down into individual and social elements. On an individual level, people of higher socio-economic class, education, and skill level are much more likely to participate than others. On a social level, the degree of social cohesion, amount of community identity, and level of involvement in community organizations are related to the level of participation (Abelson, 1999; Kweit & Kweit, 1981). In particular, the degree to which the community is organized to participate in decisions, and is inclined to do so, plays an important role in determining the level of participation (see the discussion of the Community-Institution relationship). A final*

key factor that plays into the dynamics of participation is the presence, power, and focus of interest groups.

2. *The Nature of the Decision. Decisions may be more value-laden, or more technical; they may be more or less complex; their geographic scope may be more or less significant; and they may involve more or less scientific/technical certainty. More value-laden decisions generally call for more public input to provide direction to administrators, while more technical decisions are often of less interest and more constrained, calling for less public input (City of North Vancouver, 2000). Decisions with more complexity require more efforts to educate and assist participants if they are to be effective. The geographic scope may include overlaps with other jurisdictions and helps define what stakeholders should be involved. Less certainty may be related to more risk for the sponsoring institution, requiring up-front work and/or early public input of knowledge to reduce uncertainty. A further characteristic of the decision is whether or not it is "structured" (Thomas, 1995): whether limitations exist on what may be decided in the process. The most common of these limitations is a previous decision. It is important to identify the potential and limitations clearly, "indicating what is really negotiable." (Graham & Phillips, 1998a)*

3. *The Community-Decision Relationship. Community interest in the decision is clearly related to the nature of the issue at hand. Its significance to them, its sensitivity, and the degree to which it will have an impact on them are all key factors that may predispose the public to participate (Abelson, 1999). Controversial decisions can also bring out more participants, but controversy is more significant in its ability to make the tone of a participatory process more conflictual.*

4. *The Nature of the Institution. The governance of the government body or institution in question is an important contextual factor. As the historical background made clear, public participation came about in part to compensate for democratic deficiencies introduced by the interposition of the bureaucracy between the public and their elected representatives. The structure of a government body or institution therefore has the capacity to strengthen or weaken the democratic relationship between decision-makers and those on whose behalf they work. Kweit and Kweit (1981) point out that more hierarchical, inflexible organizations are less disposed to invite public participation than flatter, more organic organizations. Similarly, the organization's culture can have an impact on the quality of participatory processes, depending on the attitudes of administrators responsible for them (Abelson, 1999).*

5. *The Decision-Institution Relationship. Institutional characteristics specific to the decision are critical contextual factors. First, the institution may be*

subject to legal requirements that set minimum standards for public involvement. Second, the decision in question may not be entirely within the jurisdiction of the organization, leading to a need to collaborate with other organizations, obtain approval from others, and/or develop public support for the decision. Similarly, the level of political support may reduce or increase the need for administrators to seek public support for a decision. Fourth, previous or concurrent decisions may be closely related to the decision in question, leading to a potential for either complementary or redundant processes. Finally, the organization may lack information about some aspects of the decision and may need to involve the public to obtain it (for instance, public values, local/traditional knowledge, unidentified options).

6. *The Community-Institution Relationship. Many writers mention the issue of trust as a key factor in participatory processes (e.g. Thomas, 1995; Beierle and Cayford, 2002). The analysis done by Beierle and Cayford (2002) found that "robust participation processes do a better job of transforming poor preexisting relationships than do less robust processes, but a history of conflict is not itself a significant barrier to the prospects of success." (p. 39) The condition of the community-institution relationship is an important contextual factor.*

This discussion has outlined what contextual factors are important to understanding decision-making processes that involve the public; these are shown in Figure 3. The next two sections describe the process and outcome elements before the relationships between them are explored.
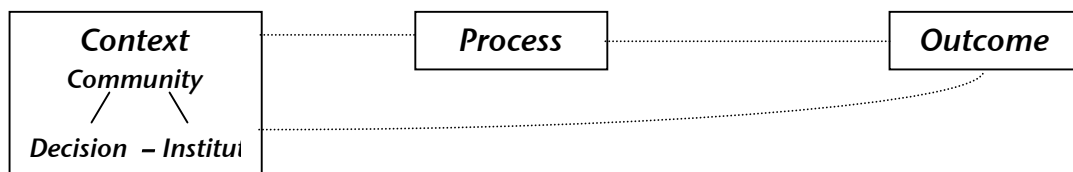
Figure 3: Conceptual Framework – With Contextual Factors

Process:
The second essential component in understanding a participatory decision-making process is the process itself. As indicated at the conclusion of the last section, it is informed by the context in which it occurs. To discuss this component, this section takes a practical approach, following much the same progression that the person responsible for the decision would take:
1. *A decision is required.*
2. *The context in which the decision is assessed.*
3. *It is decided whether or not public participation is a necessary component of the decision-making process.*
4. *Goals are set.*

5. *A decision-making strategy is developed based on the context and goals.*
6. *The strategy is implemented, resulting in a decision and other outcomes.*
7. *The process is evaluated and lessons are used to inform future processes.*

For the purposes of this discussion, it is assumed that steps 1 through 3 have been concluded and that public participation is a necessary component of the decision-making process. The discussion of process therefore begins with goals for participatory processes, considers strategic issues, and then focuses more closely on the characteristics of participatory decision-making processes themselves. It ends by summarizing key points.

Goals

The goals that people have for participatory processes stem from the historical purpose of public participation, which is to address weaknesses in our democratic governance systems. At this broad level, there are different points of view, grouped nicely into three philosophies by Thomas Beierle (1998). Managerialists see government bureaucrats and elected representatives as people whose responsibility is to "identify and pursue the common good" (p.2). Their goals with respect to public participation therefore focus on making good decisions in a responsible manner. Pluralists see government representatives as "arbitrators" between the people and groups that make up the public. They are therefore interested in managing conflicts and identifying a "relative common good arising out of [discussion among these parties]." Finally, proponents of popular democracy envision the direct participation of citizens in decision-making. For them, this participation strengthens the community and its democratic governance. The different opportunities mentioned in the historical review reflect these different perspectives.

At a more detailed and pragmatic level, the academic literature on public participation identifies widely varied objectives, including for example to:
- *make cost-effective decisions;*
- *to increase public trust and confidence in organizations;*
- *promote a sense of community;*
- *meet social needs better; or*
- *provide more relevant and up-to-date information to decision-makers (Sanoff, 2000);*

or to
- *generate ideas;*
- *identify attitudes;*
- *disseminate information;*
- *resolve a conflict;*
- *measure opinion;*
- *review a proposal; or*
- *vent emotion (Rosener, 1978).*

Clearly, these lists are long but not exhaustive. Instead, they illustrate the enormous range of goals and objectives that people bring to participation processes. Four lessons may be learned from the literature on goals for public participation:

- *different people have different goals;*
- *a short list of goals is common to many, if not most, public participation processes;*
- *even though there is agreement on common goals, these inevitably conflict with one another; and*
- *once goals are established, a long list of objectives informs more detailed decisions about public participation.*

The first three lessons are discussed next, while the fourth will be dealt with in the following section on method selection.

First, we have seen that at a broad theoretical level there are three major perspectives on the goals of participation in public decision making. At the practical level, two main groups of people who have distinct goals for public process are evident: those running participatory processes, and those participating. Those running the processes are usually concerned primarily with the success of the project, so they emphasize cost-effectiveness, timeliness, increased acceptability, and increased quality of decisions. Those participating on the other hand are more concerned with impacts on their lives, so they emphasize their influence over the decision, enhancement of their knowledge, the incorporation of their values into the decision, and the accountability of the decision and of those making it.

Second, despite the different emphases, the academic literature identifies a short list of goals that are common to many practitioners. To identify these, twenty-eight articles, books, and agency publications were reviewed, seven of which were based on literature reviews of their own. Of these, twenty-four mentioned one or more goals and were used to identify areas of agreement and disagreement about goals. Thomas Beierle's (1998) list of six social goals was used as a starting point because it offered a complete structure with which to compare other frequently less focused discussions. Beierle's list is based on "the premise that the environmental regulatory system has a number of [well-known] systemic ailments to which public participation may provide at least a partial cure" (p. 3). The review compared other authors' explicit statements about what public participation should achieve with the six social goals, attempting to either identify goals that were not shared in others' experience or to identify goals that Beierle had missed. The six goals were well supported in the literature, and one other goal was consistently mentioned: strengthening community. The seven goals are listed below, with a description of each one:

1. ***Educating and informing the public.*** *This goal is common to almost all participatory processes, with the exception of processes designed only to*

receive information from the public. It is supported because effective participation requires a public that clearly understands possible decisions and their consequences.

2. ***Incorporating public values into decision-making****. This goal reflects influence of the public over the decision, and is related to improved quality. It requires an institution that is interested in and willing to incorporate public concerns, needs, desires, and even dreams (Sanoff, 2000). It is supported when decisions involve value judgments and because public participation has little credibility without commensurate influence (Arnstein, 1969; Shepherd & Bowler, 1997).*

3. ***Improving the substantive quality of decisions****. There are different interpretations of this goal, as each person is likely to see quality as reflective of their own values. However, it is possible to identify areas where a proposal has evolved in ways that identify and resolve issues, improve solutions to problems, or meet a wider range of needs. For spatial planning, this means an improved quality of the resulting development (The United Kingdom Department of the Environment, 1994). Improving decisions is clearly a concern for all stakeholders, although they may disagree about what "improvement" looks like.*

4. ***Increasing trust in institutions****. In the long term, this goal envisions institutions and the public becoming more able to work together on issues (City of Vancouver, 1998), reducing the amount of suspicion and the resulting time spent working through misunderstandings.*

5. ***Reducing conflict****. Like increased trust, a reduction in conflict results in less time and emotional energy spent battling others, either within the public or between the public and the institution (City of Vancouver, 1998). Equally, a reduction in conflict represents an increase in shared values, or at least agreement on a set of decisions that meet different values (Chess & Purcell, 1999). In the long run, it is a part of building community.*

6. ***Achieving cost-effectiveness****. Beierle dropped this last goal from his list in his later book (Beierle & Cayford, 2002), possibly because it is a characteristic of the process rather than an outcome. Nevertheless, it is included here because it is well supported in the literature, where it is interpreted broadly. From the emerging perspective of a responsible community making decisions together (Graham & Phillips, 1998a), this goal is really better stated "using community resources effectively." As such it would encompass both community time and energy on one hand and institutional money and resources on the other. In this sense it is a value shared by all participants and a significant social goal.*

7. ***Strengthening community***. *This is a convenient term for a goal that was variously described in the literature as "a sense of ownership" (Gregory & Rowley, 1999), "[build] a sense of community; reinforce community values while building social capital; ... increased confidence and skills; better friendships and sense of belonging" (Sanoff, 2000) and "redistribution of power" (Arnstein, 1969). It is included not only because it was noted by a number of authors, but also because it reflects the strong current in theory of public participation begun by Arnstein and carried on by Saul Alinsky and others. In particular, a recent article by Michael Hibbard and Susan Lurie (2000) points out that*

> *"the efficacy of participatory planning... also depends on... the presence of dense social networks of those things that enable the actions of individuals working toward a collective goal – what has come to be called social capital." (p. 188)*

It is important to point out that one can argue for almost all of these goals from any of the three broad theoretical perspectives. Take the managerialist for example. This person is most interested in the quality (goal 2) and acceptability of a decision (Thomas, 1995), and cost-effectiveness is clearly another important factor (goal 6), although internal costs are likely to receive more attention than costs to the community. Enhanced community consensus about the decision is an indication that a broader constituency finds the decision acceptable (goal 5). Often, controversial issues or a history of poor community-institutional relations can create a conflictual situation; building trust is therefore an important goal if people are to resolve their differences (goal 4). Returning to the issue of decision quality, many public decisions affect communities and involve value judgments. For this reason, high quality public decisions must go beyond organizational goals to take into account the public's interests and values (goal 3). In order to effectively identify their interests and values as they pertain to the decision in question, the public needs to understand the potential decision(s), the context, and implications: the public must be effectively informed and educated (goal 1). Finally, although there is more to it than this, the process of educating and informing the public, reducing conflict between groups in the public, and increasing trust in institutions may all contribute to the strengthening of community (goal 7). This last goal is more likely held by institutions that foresee future needs for community support than those that feel able to carry decisions without it. In short, one can argue that for the managerialist, the first six goals, and to a variable extent the last, are important. For the other two perspectives too, most of the goals are important, although their emphasis and reasons may of course be different.

The third lesson about goals is that it is difficult to achieve all of them, even if there is agreement that they are all important. For example, reducing conflict between citizen groups and the sponsoring institution is important to producing

a good decision for all concerned. However, time and resource constraints faced by the institution and limitations on the community's ability to participate at length may restrict the potential for approaching agreement.

In summary, there is agreement on the range of potential goals for public participation, but they are emphasized differently by different people; also, the goals are not entirely complementary – tradeoffs between them are often required. The next section describes careful process design, which is the key to performing as well as possible with respect to these goals, and which follows in part from the detailed objectives.

Method Selection

The first step in developing a strategy for making a decision with the involvement of the public is to define and prioritize process goals, based on the context (the decision, the institution, the community, and the relationships between them). The fourth lesson from the literature on goals addresses the next step: the task of program design, including strategic and methodological issues. The design of an effective public participation program involves the structured application of public involvement methods to meet goals. A process designer must ask themselves some questions:

- *Who should be making decisions about the process?*
- *What are the stages in the process?*
- *What are the objectives for the various stages?*
- *How should I (we) select between various participatory mechanisms, for example workshops, advisory committees, open houses and hearings, and combinations of these?*
- *Once that is done, how should I (we) approach each of the selected methods, with respect to timing, location, length, frequency, agenda, tone, and so on?*
- *Who should be invited to the events, and how and when should they be contacted?*
- *What information is needed before, during, and after the process, in what form, and provided to participants by what mechanisms?*

While this list is by no means exhaustive, it illustrates the main point about strategy and methods: designing an effective public participation process is not an easy task. It requires significant up-front thought and time, a fact that has been recognized for a many years (e.g. Rosener, 1978). The following tasks are necessary in planning for participatory decision-making.

1. *outline the whole decision-making process and define objectives for each stage;*
2. *identify the stage(s) where the public can best be involved given goals and objectives;*
3. *select a method or combination of methods to effectively address the goals and objectives throughout the process; and*

4. plan implementation of methods with attention to accepted characteristics of effective public processes.

The first step in designing for public participation is to place it in the context of a complete decision-making process. So-called "rational" decisions generally move through a series of stages, for example problem identification, conceptualization, idea generation, identification of options, evaluation and selection of options, refinement of options, and finally decision. Conceptualization, idea generation, and identification of options can be termed "divergent thinking" in which the discussion is widened, while later activities can be termed "convergent thinking" in that they help to narrow the range of possible decisions and move toward closure (Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk & Berger, 1996).

Participation in decision-making can take place throughout the process, or it can be limited to certain stages. In order to decide when to involve the public, the second step is to develop objectives for different parts of the decision-making process. Objectives naturally vary with the decision-making progression, and they build towards the overarching goals identified for the process. For example, for a conventional urban design project, Table 1 shows how objectives could vary with design stages.

	Stage	Objective
Divergent Thinking	Site Analysis	To understand the site – environmental, social, cultural, symbolic, functional, and other elements/issues. To identify community strengths and weaknesses. To build community understanding of their neighbourhood.
	Options Identification	To identify a range of options that begin to address issues/strengths/weaknesses. To learn about the site through design, and to revisit analysis in light of new knowledge.
Convergent Thinking	Options Evaluation	To assess how well options address needs/issues, and how they relate to other plans and designs. To discuss trade-offs inherent in each option, and how they are valued by the community.
	Option Selection	To decide which of the options is best, and/or what features of options are most desirable in light of values, technical issues, and existing decisions.
	Option Refinement	To enhance the selected option. To incorporate other public values into the option.
	Final Decision	To approve the refined option. To identify ramifications of the option for other plans and designs.

Table 1: Objectives for an Urban Design Project

The third step is to select between different types of participatory mechanisms, or methods. Here, contingent models of public participation become of interest. Recent examples include guides prepared for the Canadian Standards Association (1996), the City of North Vancouver (2000) and the UK Department of the Environment (1994). All use a series of steps and questions to guide the designer through the process of making decisions about public participation. A similar approach, that of John Clayton Thomas (1995), has the advantage that it provides direction about the type of methods that are appropriate in different situations, where others do not do so explicitly. The disadvantage of Thomas' approach is that it is narrowly construed, based on only two goals: decision quality and acceptability, and saying nothing directly about the enhancement of democracy. Despite that theoretical weakness, his application of the model to thirty case studies strongly supported the need for public involvement, usually more than was used by the managers in the case studies (Thomas, 1995, pp. 187-188).

1. [What are the quality requirements?]

2. Do I have sufficient information?

3. Is the problem structured?

4. Is public acceptance necessary for implementation and unlikely without involvement?

5. [Who is the relevant public?]

6. Does the relevant public agree with the agency's goals?

7. Is conflict on the solution likely within the relevant public?

KEY:

(A) Autonomous Managerial

(B) Modified Autonomous

(C) Segmented Consultation

(D) Unitary Consultation

(E) Public Decision

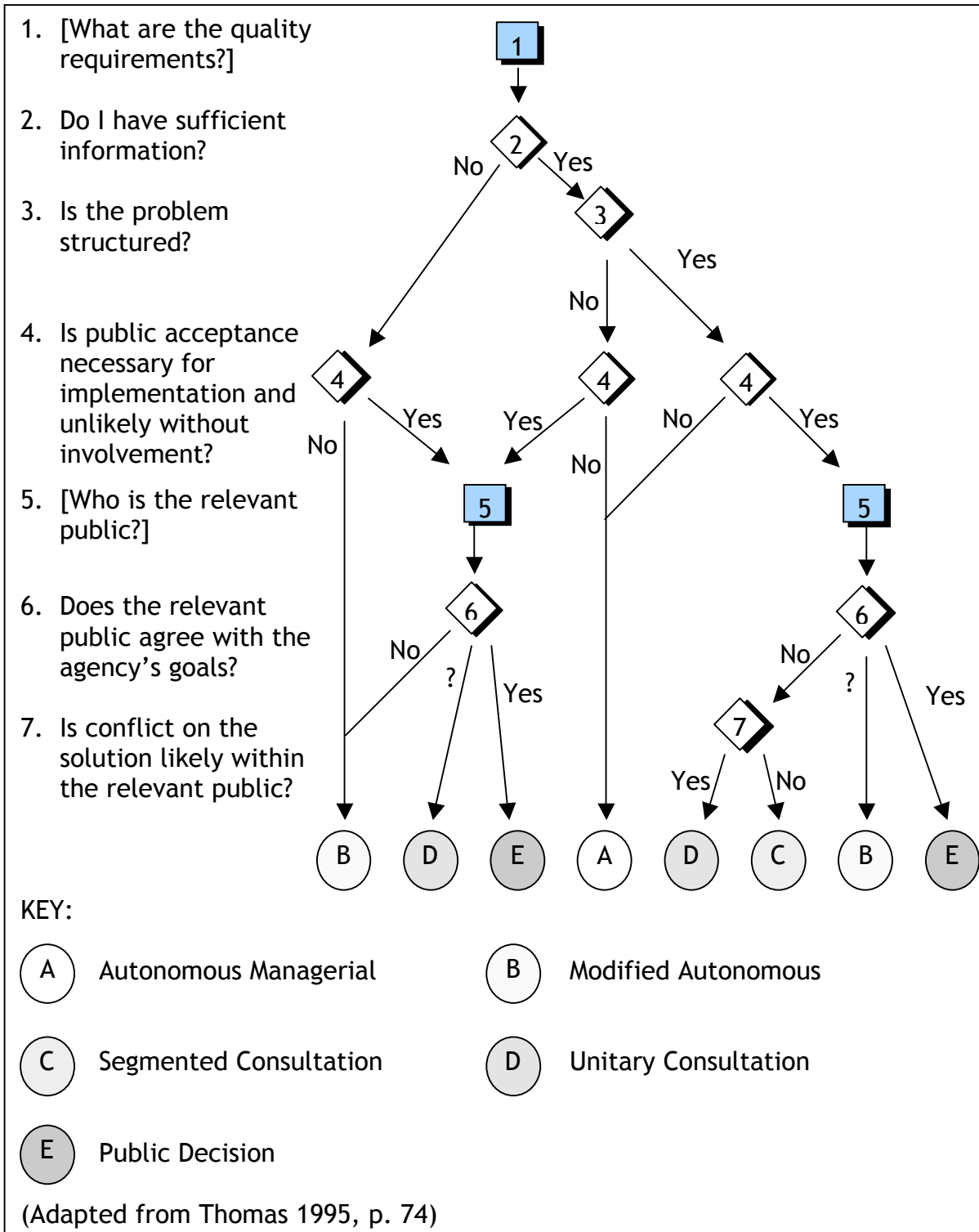(Adapted from Thomas 1995, p. 74)

Figure 4: The Effective Decision Model

Because it provides direction on the selection of methods, Thomas' model will be used as an example. It provides a series of seven questions that guide the selection of public consultation methods (Thomas, 1995, p. 41). It is important to note that the second and fourth questions directly reflect Thomas' goals and therefore define the need for public participation as well as selecting the most desirable methods: this model overlaps the goal-setting stage of process design and illustrates the need for process designers to be flexible and iterative in how they plan for participation. Figure 4 summarizes Thomas' model, which he calls the Effective Decision Model, showing how the answers to his seven questions lead to different types and structures of participation processes.

The first question is "What are the quality requirements that must be incorporated in any decision?" It refers to policy or managerial constraints on the decision to be made. These may include technical constraints, previous policy decisions, budgetary realities, and legal frameworks, to name a few. It is important to be cautious here: the "requirements" may actually be long-held assumptions that are hard to identify; these may be constraints only in the mind of the designer, and not in that of the public. An example of this situation is a budgetary constraint on a building development that is seen to limit the capacity to build a green building. Viewed as a simple capital constraint, the budget is restrictive; as a constraint on capital that is offset by operating costs, the budget is much less constraining. It is important to identify these requirements up-front, but it is equally important to be willing to recognize them and to be able to respond when participants in the process see it differently.

The second question is "Do I have sufficient information to make a high quality decision?" One of the most common rationales for involving the public in a decision is to obtain information that decision-makers do not have. There are three types of this information: (1) creative ideas, (2) technical information, and (3) information about public values. If information is required, then public involvement is necessary; if not, then it may or may not be.

The third question is "Is the problem structured such that alternative solutions are not open to redefinition?" Often, a decision is presented to the public as a choice of a limited number of alternatives, based in part on the quality requirements mentioned above. While limiting options makes decisions simpler, they eliminate options or elements of options that may be preferable to the public (and perhaps even the decision-makers). For example, a company that produces hazardous waste may wish to expand a disposal facility to accommodate growth, and may present to the public locational and design options it considers acceptable. A hazardous waste facility is often viewed by the public as a LULU – "locally unacceptable land-use" - leading them to reject all the options out of hand. They might also suggest that the company instead increase its efficiency through re-use and recycling, eliminating its need for a new facility and reducing its dependence on the old one. Reducing unnecessary

structure in this case could lead to the adoption and approval of a decision that is better for all concerned.

Michael Hibbard and Susan Lurie studied a comprehensive planning process in Jackson Hole, Wyoming to understand why it failed to reach its potential to resolve differences between
community members and arrive at beneficial solutions to problems (Hibbard & Lurie, 2000). One lesson they learned was that "clarity on what is at issue" is essential. In their case study, the community's overriding concern was cultural change, as its composition had begun to reflect rich owners of holiday or retirement homes rather than the long-term rural residents. However, the land-use planning process was clearly unable to address this issue. They concluded that:

> "An early and honest discussion about what [the process] could and could not do might have removed some inappropriate pressure from the system and even generated parallel processes to name and deal with the issue of how social changes were affecting people's sense of themselves in relation to their community."
> (p.193)

The next questions are acceptance-related. The fourth question comes in two parts "Is public acceptance of the decision critical to effective implementation?" and "If so, is that acceptance reasonably certain if the manager decides alone?" If acceptance is critical, and it is not certain if the manager decides alone, then public participation is necessary. Even if the manager is quite certain of its acceptability, it is wise to err on the side of caution, for example by checking informally with members of the public before deciding on what level of participation to adopt.

At this point, Thomas returns to his goals by pointing out that if you have enough information, and there is no need for public acceptance, then public participation is not necessary. In a disaster scenario, for example, the existence of the disaster is enough information, and public acceptance is not necessary – nor desirable given time constraints – to making decisions about response. If participation is necessary, then answers to the questions of quality requirements, information needs, problem structure and public acceptance have begun to define the best options. The last three questions go on to define the appropriate method(s) for inviting public participation more clearly.

Like the fourth question, the fifth is in two parts: "Who is the relevant public?" and "Does that public consist of an organized group, more than one organized group, unorganized individuals, or some combination?" It asks both about who should be involved and about how that involvement should be structured. As part of asking who the relevant public is, a process designer will want to ask two further questions: "How representative should participants be of the community

as a whole" and "How inclusive should the process be?" These questions highlight the inevitable tradeoff between more shallow, large group discussions, and more in-depth, small group discussions. Between them, the answers to these questions begin to define a method or group of methods to be used for the participation process in terms of:

- *the use of large and small forums;*
- *the degree of focus on one or more groups;*
- *the degree to which the general public is targeted;*
- *the use of a combination of methods to balance their strengths and weaknesses in an overall strategy;*
- *the timing and location of events for accessibility, and the removal of other barriers to access; and*
- *the character of communications used to inform the public about events, and to communicate with them about matters up for discussion, including the use of more than one language, visual information, Braille, etc.*

The sixth question is "Does the relevant public share the agency goals to be obtained in solving the problem?" If the goals are shared, then there is little concern over sharing a significant amount of decision-making authority with the public; if they are not, then power-sharing should be limited. Sharing power is confounded in practice because the legal framework for public decisions (in Canada at least) often limits the ability of government representatives to devolve their power. At the same time, the retention of power may be in conflict with stated institutional goals such as community-building, in which case the decision may be made to share more power even in the face of possible disagreement on overall goals.

Last but certainly not least, question seven asks "Is there likely to be conflict among the public on the preferred option?" If there is likely to be conflict, participation methods that encourage identification and resolution of those conflicts are preferable over those that treat groups separately. From a pluralist democratic perspective, identification of conflicts may make any compromise in the eventual decision more acceptable because the public is aware of disagreements. From the perspective of a deliberative public working for the good of the community, the resolution of conflicts and development of agreement among the public and the decision-makers is an important asset of methods in which disagreeing groups meet. However, careful management of conflict is important if a timely decision is to be made. A case can be made for separate meetings, at least initially, if conflicts run so deep as to jeopardize meaningful discussions. Equally, separate meetings may permit useful in-depth discussion of issues. Anticipating and responding to potential conflict within the public is a delicate and difficult one for the manager.

Answering the seven questions permits a process designer to select among five general types of decision-making approaches (Thomas, 1995, pp. 39-40):

A. *Autonomous managerial decision, in which the manager makes the decision independently*
B. *Modified autonomous decision, in which the manager gathers information from the public, and then makes the decision independently.*
C. *Segmented public consultation, in which the manager discusses with public groups separately, and then makes a decision influenced by the various groups.*
D. *Unitary public consultation, in which the manager discusses with the public together, and then makes a decision based on that influence.*
E. *Public decision, in which the manager and public discuss the decision and then make it together.*

While this model and others like it are useful, they assume that a decision-making process can be defined up front by such questions. In reality, the information required, problem structure, and nature of public conflicts often change over the course of the decision-making period. So too do objectives, and even the context. Also, methods may be complementary to one another, so the use of a number of approaches can together produce a better overall approach. To be most effective, contingent approaches such as Thomas' need to be applied flexibly and need to be understood within the framework of an evolving decision process.

Having applied a contingent model, the process designer must decide among the myriad of specific methods used today. One could fill a book writing about the pros, cons, and potential uses of the various public participation methods out there. In fact, the Urban Design Group has done just that for participatory methods for urban design (Wates, 2000), and the International Association for Public Participation has prepared a more general list ("Public Participation Toolbox," 2003). Rather than being familiar with the suite of different methods available, a process designer needs to be creative with the methods of which they are aware, to build on their experience and that of others, and to learn as they go. Above all, they should not be limited by the conventional description and use of a method, nor should they feel limited to using only those methods that are commonly used or legally required.

At this point, a process designer has:
- *identified goals and constraints;*
- *developed a decision-making strategy that responds to the relevant context and builds on overall goals; then*
- *worked out how the decision-making objectives and participation in it change over the process;*
- *thought through decisions about what general type(s) of public participation methods are desirable when; and finally*
- *picked methods to fit within the overall decision-making strategy.*

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These are the nuts and bolts of a strategic participatory decision-making process. The next section discusses the essential characteristics of effective participatory processes.

   Process Characteristics

Earlier, it was pointed out that participatory decision-making has to be understood first within the context of a group decision-making process. In the same vein, Thomas Webler states that "By and large, participation is interaction among individuals through the medium of language" (Webler, 1995, p. 40), emphasis in the original). It follows that participatory decision-making is interaction among individuals through the medium of language (communication) that leads to decisions (action): it is "communicative action."

Over the last 20 years, many planning theorists have built on Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative rationality and American pragmatism (Fainstein, 2003) to create the communicative model of planning. This line of thought has received so much attention that it has been termed by some "a dominant consensus among planning theorists" (Mandelbaum in Huxley and Yiftachel 2000). In the same article, Huxley and Yiftachel describe the focus of this theoretical approach to the practice of planning as facilitating communicative interchanges, where planning's importance lies in its ability to contribute to better debate, discussion, and deliberation about shared futures. They go on to say that "the assumption is that using the right decision-making process will enable planning (however defined) to reach its progressive, even emancipatory potential." (p.334) This widely accepted theoretical approach provides a good starting point for discussing "good process" in terms of its character.

At the same time, Huxley and Yiftachel (2000), Fainstein (2003), and others (e.g. Abram, 2000) make some significant critiques of communicative planning. These critiques focus on (1) the fact that it deals only with communicative processes without considering (directly) power structures or desired outcomes, and (2) the fact that other types of processes (i.e. that do not communicate with the public) are in some cases able to make good decisions. Power certainly is a significant issue in public participation (Arnstein, 1969; Davidoff, 1965; Thomas, 1995; Sanoff, 2000; Checkoway & van Til, 1978) that is not addressed directly by communicative theory (Sandercock 1998). In fact, communicative theory deals with how planning is (or should be) done, and therefore cannot concern itself with contextual power structure directly. However, the exercise of power can be addressed by communicative theory, as John Forester showed in relation to information (Forester, 1982). Communicative theory can inform good process because it can illustrate the modes through which power is expressed.

Obtaining and using public knowledge and values can enhance decision quality. The question is not whether other (non-communicative) processes can reach good decisions, but whether or not communicative processes can lead to better

decisions. In the same way that it relates to power, communicative theory informs good process because it illustrates how better decisions can be made. The discussion of the character of participatory decision-making in this review is grounded in communicative theory, recognizing that it addresses power only as it is exercised in the planning process and good decisions only as they have the potential to result from good process.

Leonie Sandercock's description of the concern of communicative action theorists (Sandercock, 1998) provides a useful framework for understanding good process:

> *"[Their concern is] critical reflection about the appropriate processes for learning and deciding, such as assuring representation of all major points of view, equalizing information among group members, and creating conditions within group processes so that the force of argument can be the deciding factor rather than an individual's power or status in some pre-existing hierarchy." (p. 96)*

The first characteristic Sandercock mentions is representativeness. In terms of attendees, some types of participation require more or fewer people – they are more or less inclusive. In terms of the individuals who attend, the democratic roots of participation demand that they form a representative sample of those who may be affected by the decision to be made. However, representativeness in numbers is necessary but not sufficient at a group process level. If their points of view are to be represented equally, participants must be heard equally. This demands that the process ensure that they are heard, and that other participants (including those leading the process) listen, and indeed actively seek out their contributions.

Even at the level of participant composition, ensuring representativeness is not an easy task. Participation varies among people having different power, socio-economic status, and degree of perceived interest (Checkoway & van Til, 1978). When it comes to organizations participating, community group cohesion and resources are significant determinants of their ability to participate (Hibbard & Lurie, 2000). Policymakers everywhere are familiar with the NIMBY syndrome (Not In My Back Yard), and LULU (Locally Unwanted Land-Use) and BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything) are only somewhat less common terms. Organized groups or individuals having significant resources (relative to other citizens) can and often do act in their own perceived best interest, often in reaction to decision-makers pursuing the "common good," and sometimes in attempts to stop decisions altogether. In some – but certainly not all – cases, these groups may alter decisions in ways that are detrimental to other groups less well represented (i.e. with less power).

Sandercock's second characteristic is equal access to and competence with information, which is critical in participatory decision-making. John Forester's 1982 article Planning in the Face of Power addressed the role of information as a source of power in planning, pointing out different types of misinformation and suggesting that the planner's role in a democratic process is to anticipate and counter unnecessary misinformation. In most planning processes, the public has less technical expertise and information than do planners and technicians, resulting in an imbalance of power. In order to counter this imbalance – indeed, simply to ensure that the public can discuss plans in a meaningful, useful way – information for decision-making has to be (1) true and accurate, (2) appropriate and legitimate, (3) sincere and trustworthy, and (4) communicated in a manner that is understandable to the public (Forester, 1982, p. 75). In a complementary way, a participatory process can incorporate a significant educational and capacity-building component to assist participants to become competent in making the decision at hand.

The third characteristic of communicative action is process conditions that permit reasoned argument to overcome the influence of power in decision-making. Forester (1982) identifies three ways in which power is exerted in a decision-making process. The first is in the decision-making itself. The second is in setting the agenda for making the decision: deciding what is and is not to be discussed, and what responses are possible. The third is in defining the "felt needs and self-conceptions [of the public]" (p. 76). An excellent local example of defining felt needs and self-conceptions is the proposition that "Vancouver is a no-fun city." This statement has been incorporated into the very identity of the city; while it supports the loosening of restrictions on "fun," it also deflates our community self-image. In an ideal democratic process, participants would have equal power in each of these three respects. In reality, this is never the case and it would be an unfair demand in the context of the existing power structures of government and society. Still, the communicative action analysis suggests the extension of the democratization of decision-making from the decisions themselves to the setting of agendas and scoping of decisions. Communicative action thus extends its concerns about the influence of power from the process itself to decisions about the process.

Transparency and accountability also help to clarify if not reduce the influence of power in decision-making. The first is a mechanism to ensure that the public is aware of what decisions are made and how, such as public access to documents produced by the government. Its dictionary definition is "free of deceit [synonym: guileless]; easily understood or seen through (because of a lack of subtlety)" (Princeton University, 1997). The second is a mechanism to ensure that action is matched to words, that the implementation of a decision or an agreement matches the understanding of those involved in making it. "Accountability in its simplest terms is the obligation to answer for a responsibility that has been conferred." (1975 Report of the Independent Review Committee on the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (Wilson Committee),

quoted in Citizens' Circle for Accountability, 2003). For example, election is intended to ensure accountability through the threat that a representative will not be re-elected if his/her decisions do not represent the values or opinions of their constituents. Transparent and accountable processes act to level the power exerted in decision-making.

Summary

Decision-making processes are designed through a strategic process that responds to the situation in which they are to take place. Goals and constraints are identified for the process based on its context, after which objectives are set for different decision-making stages. The potential for public involvement is assessed for the different stages, and methods are chosen to suit. Regardless of how and when public participation occurs, processes that incorporate it can be characterized by their representativeness, participant access to and competence with information, and the degree to which decisions are made based on reasoned argument. These characteristics are shown in Figure 5.
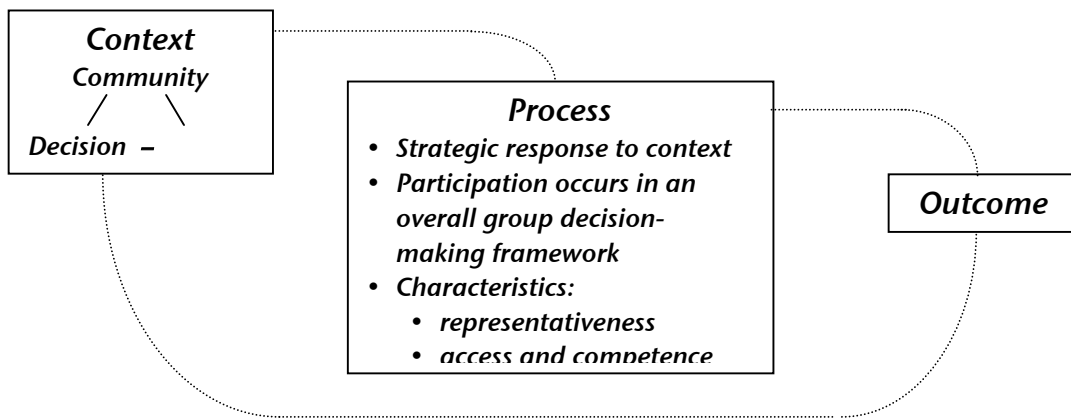
Figure 5: Conceptual Framework – With Process Factors

Outcomes:

The outcome of a decision-making process appears at first glance to be simply a decision or set of decisions. However, the process of making the decision(s) can lead to other outcomes. Decisions that involve public participation in particular have implications for the decision-makers and their relationships with the public. The potential outcomes of a process fall into categories that parallel the goals described in the "Process" section.

- *Decision quality: the decision made through a participatory process may be improved or worsened. Quality may be seen differently by different people, who may for instance value financial impacts more or less than environmental impacts.*
- *Decision efficiency: the process may be more or less cost-effective. This outcome is dependent on the nature of the process as well as the quality*

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of the decision. Because costs are borne differently by different people and because their perspectives differ on quality, this outcome is often contested.

- *Relationship to public values: the decision may incorporate public values to a greater or lesser extent. This outcome is related to decision quality in that many people would agree that a better (public) decision recognizes and responds to public values. However, there may be little clarity about public values given the varied nature of the public. Understanding this outcome involves first identifying values held by the immediate and broader communities, then exploring where they conflict and agree, and finally seeing how those are reflected in the decision.*

- *Community knowledge: the process will usually result in an increase in knowledge on the part of the sponsoring institution and the community. This knowledge may include – but is not limited to – values, contextual issues, technical constraints, and local knowledge.*

- *Level of trust: in many cases, a public institution and a community begin decision-making processes with a low level of trust for one another. Institutional actors often believe that communities have little knowledge and ability, and that they are unable to see beyond parochial concerns, while communities often have a hard time believing that institutions are interested in listening to them or in responding to their needs. Processes have the potential to deepen that divide, or to build trust.*

- *Amount of conflict: decisions involving many parties have the potential to address differing values and interests, reducing conflict, but they can also increase conflict between different community groups, and between the community and the sponsoring institution.*

- *Community-building: as a result of participation in making decisions about their community, people develop relationships with one another and enhance their skills and knowledge as a group. These changes may have positive long-term impacts on their sense of community, their ability to work together, and their ability to contribute to the on-going maintenance and improvement of their community.*

Thomas Beierle and Jerry Cayford surveyed some 239 cases to measure their performance with respect to many of these outcomes. They found that
> *"Considerably more public participation cases in our database produced good outcomes than produced bad outcomes. As a group, the cases were most successful in educating and informing the public and least successful in building trust in institutions. Falling in between were the results for incorporating public values into decisions, improving the substantive quality of decisions, and resolving conflict among competing interests. As an indication of the outcomes of a varied set of stakeholder processes, the case study pool gives an optimistic view of what such processes can accomplish." (p. 33)*

In their research, Beierle and Cayford highlighted "[a] tension between achieving social goals among participants and failing to engage the wider public" (p. 33). This manifested itself in a number of ways, for instance avoiding or downplaying some issues in order to agree on others; involving only a small group of participants, and educating small numbers of participants but not doing the same for the general public. This tension between the inclusiveness and intensive discussion is raised by other authors, particularly within literature on deliberative processes (e.g. Abelson, 2003).

Beierle and Cayford (2002) also looked at relationships between the potential outcomes. They found that most were closely correlated. For example, the degree to which trust was built correlated closely with the degree of public influence – measured by the incorporation of public values. "In low-trust situations, then, the public may need to be granted more influence to convince them of the legitimacy of the public participation process" (p. 68).

The research on goals – and therefore potential outcomes of participatory processes – showed a high degree of agreement on what they are, that a given process can achieve most of them, and that processes may make trade-offs in order to achieve their goals. These trade-offs could have long-term impacts on the decision's acceptance, stability and implementability. While it is important to be aware of the outcomes of a process, it is also necessary to understand the role of context and process in producing them – the topic of the next section.

Relationships Between Context, Process, and Outcome

Beierle and Cayford (2002) assessed relationships between the three elements in an effort to learn what factors influenced outcomes. To begin with, context and process generally occur before outcomes, so the relationships between them are most often one-way. However, context may change during a process, indeed because of it, and some outcomes may develop as the process goes on, so there is some room for bidirectional influences. The strength of the relationships, however, is less defined than the direction of influence. The authors used a case survey method to compare the success of some 239 case studies of participatory processes. They found that contextual factors such as the quality of pre-existing relationships, the level(s) of government involved, and the type of issue were only weakly linked with the eventual degree of success (p. 40). However, it was not possible to conclude that contextual factors have no significant influence on outcome given such a short list of factors. On the contrary, they were able to "infer that preexisting conflict and mistrust have more impact on the success of public participation when the public participation processes are less intensive" (p. 39). This may suggest that one type of process may be more suited to a given context than another, an idea that requires further research with other contextual factors. The emphasis of many practical guides on a contingent approach (i.e. one that is different in different situations (e.g. Canadian Standards Association, 1996)) reflects practitioners' sense that contextual

factors should inform the design of decision-making processes that potentially involve the public.

The influence of process characteristics on success was much stronger than that of context (Beierle and Cayford, 2002, p. 54). In decreasing order of influence, responsiveness of the process sponsor, motivation of participants, quality of deliberation, and degree of public control all had statistically significant impacts on process success. Processes were more successful when:
- *sponsor personnel and participants were involved in active deliberation, adequate resources were available, communications were good, and high-level decision-makers were involved (p. 50);*
- *participants had positive attitudes towards the process (p. 51);*
- *deliberation quality was rated "medium" or "high," although there was little data about this issue for processes with poor deliberation (p. 52); and*
- *when there was a high degree of public control, although the correlation between high public control and success was weak.*

In another study, Lauber and Knuth (1999) "studied how citizens perceived the fairness and quality of the process and identified the criteria on which they based their perceptions." Like Beierle, they were able to show that there was a significant correlation between procedural fairness and outcomes, although it was impossible to say whether or not the relationships were causal. This correlation showed that citizens' perceptions of procedural fairness are related to their eventual acceptance of decisions.

Beierle and Cayford concluded that more intense, deliberative types of processes were generally more successful, although this success may be due in part to leaving out the general public or ignoring issues.

Summary:
Figure 6 illustrates the conceptual model that results from this review of context, process, and outcome. Participatory decision-making processes can be understood as strategic responses to a range of contextual factors including characteristics of the community and the institution that is sponsoring the process. The strategy is composed of a group decision-making process driven by goals and
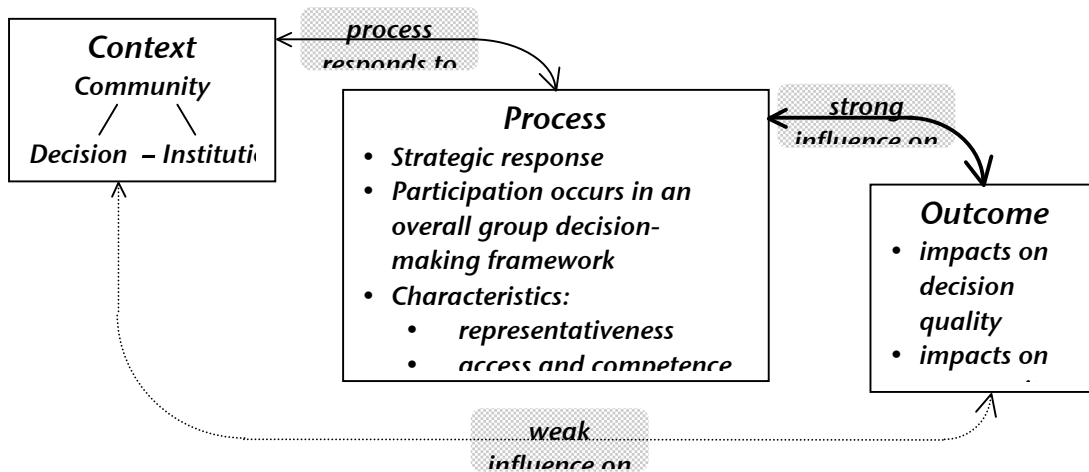
Figure 6: Conceptual Framework – Refined

objectives and incorporating different methods of inviting public participation. The process is characterized by the representativeness of participants, participant access to and competence in information and decision-making, and the interplay of power and reason in the making of decisions. Most participatory processes have the potential to produce a series of desirable outcomes. The degree to which they are successful in doing so is influenced strongly by process design and implementation.

Evaluation

"Evaluation of [citizen involvement] is very difficult and an infant art" (Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001). While there are a myriad of case studies of public participation, and some broader studies, it was not until recently that serious efforts have begun to be made to evaluate large numbers of cases using similar criteria. Many studies describe cases and draw recommendations for good practice or identify lessons learned without beginning with a robust framework for analysis (e.g. Helling, 1998). Even when an analytical framework is made explicit, evaluation of public participation often incorporates a large qualitative element and is an enormously subjective activity (Webler, 1995). Evaluation of public participation has proven difficult because criteria are often ill-defined and it is difficult to apply them objectively.

Chess and Purcell (1999) state that in many cases, evaluation criteria are based on process objectives, but these are rarely explicit, and even if they are, objectives of participants and planners vary widely. Similarly, Checkoway and van Til (1978) pointed out that "how one views the world through ideological perspectives – elitist, Marxist, or citizen theorist – directly affects how one evaluates any particular participatory exercise." Managerialists prefer easily measurable indicators of success, and therefore select more quantitative measures, such as the number of people involved or the completion of program activities. Pluralists may assess the degree of stakeholder satisfaction with the

process and the plan. Populists in turn may be more inclined to assess the degree of community influence over the process, and the extent to which the community was strengthened by it. It is clear that even the selection of appropriate, objective criteria may be difficult because of philosophical differences over public participation.

Classification

Researchers have attempted to bring clarity to the evaluation of public participation in two ways: by classifying evaluation methods, and by drawing coherent principles from either theory or practice. There are three key ways to classify evaluations of participatory processes:

- *Theory- or practice-based evaluations (Chess & Purcell, 1999). Theory-based evaluations build a set of criteria from a theoretical position about what participation should achieve or how it should be conducted, while practice-based evaluations begin with 'best practice' and focus on experience as a source of knowledge about what is 'good' participatory process.*

- *Process- or outcome-based evaluations (Beierle & Cayford, 2002). Process evaluations focus on how participation happens, including the choice of techniques and how they are implemented. Outcome evaluations focus instead on the results of participation, such as improved decisions or enhanced community. With respect to outcome-oriented evaluations, timing is a critical issue. There are different types of evaluations depending on when they are conducted (Innes, 1999, pp. 632-633): (1) midcourse evaluations to improve process; (2) end-of-process, to evaluate participant satisfaction and identify "first-order outcomes;" and (3) retrospective evaluations, well after a process is over, to identify value and stability of decisions, and durability of relationships. The ability of the evaluation to address outcome criteria is limited by the stage at which it is done. For instance, mid-course and end-of-process evaluations can rarely address how much a community is strengthened because the results of community-building often take years to appear.*

- *Quantitative or qualitative evaluations. While qualitative evaluations provide in-depth information, they are also time-consuming and may not be easy to repeat in different situations. Quantitative evaluations can permit comparison across different processes in a less time-consuming way, but do not provide the same richness of information (Halvorsen, 2001).*

While most evaluations incorporate some qualitative and quantitative aspects, and many also assess process and outcome, theoretical and practice-based frameworks are fairly exclusive categories. In developing a good evaluative

framework, it is useful to review some of these frameworks, and to compare the criteria obtained from theory and practice to see if there is a match.

Recent Evaluation Frameworks

In the last few years, researchers have relied on a theoretical foundation to develop a consistent, defensible set of evaluation criteria. The advantage of using theory as a starting point is that a coherent framework is possible, while the disadvantage is that it is only acceptable to those who agree with the underlying theory. Two researchers developed theoretical evaluations based in democratic theory: Thomas Webler for process, and Thomas Beierle for outcomes. A third group of researchers, Bruce Lauber and Barbara Knuth, developed criteria based in social psychology.

- *Thomas Webler worked for some time in developing and conducting participation processes in environmental decision-making. He became frustrated with evaluating a process based on either outcome – because of problems with identifying the common good – or participant satisfaction – because it is inherently subjective. As a result, he looked to theory as an ideal, a 'yardstick,' with which to compare real processes, and to the quality of the process rather than the outcome. Starting from a democratic perspective, he identified two "meta-criteria" – fairness and competence, which should be met in any participatory process. He developed these criteria on the basis of Jurgen Habermas' critical theory, which proposes that communicative action – talk that is action-oriented, like planning and design – should be rational and fair. He called this the "ideal speech" situation. However, Webler recognized that Habermas did not account for the reality that most participants are not equally competent: power, access to knowledge and expertise make it difficult for participants to have a fair, rational discussion. As a result, he changed the "ideal speech" criteria to account for issues of competence. His criteria fall into three categories: representation, including the selection and composition of participants; procedural rules, including quality of deliberation and degree of participant control of decisions about the process; and information, including its selection, quality, and interpretation (Webler, 1995).*

- *Thomas Beierle, meanwhile, chose to focus on outcomes. He looked for a framework that "identifies the strengths and weaknesses of a number of different participatory mechanisms, is 'objective' in the sense of not taking the perspective of any one party to a decision, and measures tangible outcomes" (Beierle, 1998, p. ii). Beierle started with democracy, asking what problems participation was intended to fix. An evaluation would then ask whether participation had achieved its goal of fixing the problems with the democratic system. Based on this analysis, Beierle identified a number of social goals, listed in detail earlier in this paper.*

- *For a third perspective, Bruce Lauber and Barbara Knuth approached the evaluation from a social psychology perspective, asking what criteria citizens actually use to evaluate participatory processes. In social psychology studies, other types of decision-making, such as legal procedures, have been assessed, and fairness was often found to be "a major consideration in how people form their subjective impressions of these procedures" (Lauber & Knuth, 1999, p. 20). They used these studies to identify criteria that related to the quality and fairness of participatory decision-making, and then refined and checked them with participants in a moose management program, taking the theory into the world of practice. The result was nine independent criteria used by citizens to evaluate participatory processes: (1) agency receptivity to citizen input – incorporating honesty and integrity, (2) participants' influence over the decision, (3) degree to which the agency was well informed and had good reasons for decisions, (4) adequate participation – equal opportunity to speak, ability to voice opinion, and representation, (5) enhancement of relationships among stakeholders, (6) citizens' knowledge, (7) cost, (8) time used, and (9) stability of the decision. The first four related closely to procedural fairness, while the others dealt with other aspects of process evaluation.*

Despite theoretical differences, there is significant overlap between the criteria. For example, Webler's starting point in "ideal speech" and Lauber and Knuth's in social psychology produced similar criteria – participants' influence, honesty, integrity, representation, ability to speak, and knowledge. Similarly, Lauber and Knuth's outcome criteria compare well with Beierle's criteria – compare "cost and time used" with "cost-effectiveness"; or "enhancement of relationships" with "reducing conflict."

In contrast to these theoretical evaluations, a common approach is to use practical experience as the basis for a consistent set of evaluation criteria. The strength of this approach is the weight experience carries for practitioners, while its weakness is that it may lack coherence and completeness. Practice-based evaluations can be conducted in a host of ways, for example evaluation by participants or by managers responsible for processes, and using a range of methods, for example surveys or interviews. The following list provides a sampling of practice-based evaluations:

- *In 1998, the City of Vancouver evaluated public participation in a range of planning processes – from the city-wide CityPlan process to small-scale neighbourhood plans, and decisions about non-physical matters. Criteria were developed by a group consisting of both participants and planners. Criteria covered both process and outcome concerns, including for example representativeness, resourcing, the degree of participant control, quality of information, incorporation of participant input, and development of good, long-term relationships (City of Vancouver, 1998).*

- *Chess and Purcell reviewed many evaluations of North American processes that incorporated public meetings, workshops, and citizen advisory panels (public advisory committees) to explore definitions of success and to consider the implications for practice. They found a diversity of criteria for success, and distinguished the origins of these criteria as coming from either theory or participants. The researchers concluded that the studies they reviewed supported, but did not prove or disprove some practitioners' rules of thumb: (1) clarify goals, (2) begin participation early, (3) adapt methods to suit process goals, (4) incorporate various forms of participation, and (5) collect feedback on the process. While Chess and Purcell were most interested in what works – and presumably what doesn't work – there is more to be gained from their research: the studies they list had a number of criteria in common. These included for example process-related criteria such as timing, representation, cost, participant control and access to information; and outcome-related criteria such as participant influence (or perceived influence) on decisions and improved decisions. This list of criteria illustrated the range of available measures, but the authors did not attempt to endorse any of them.*

- *Where Chess and Purcell looked at the broad North American experience, the UK Department of the Environment's Planning Research Programme (1994) looked at "Community Involvement in Planning and Development Process" in Britain. The researchers were asked to assess the effectiveness of community involvement. In a literature review, they were unable to find any examples of the application of criteria for effectiveness of involvement, so the team developed their own criteria, based on their terms of reference, the literature, and the concerns of people who responded to their early work. As work on case studies proceeded, the study team confirmed and refined their criteria, resulting in eight outcome-based criteria: achieving the "objectives of all," resolving conflict, improving product quality, an agreed process, efficient use of resources, stimulates commitment, and builds community capacity. This evaluation framework had the advantage that the criteria have been verified by field-testing.*

- *The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) provided an evaluation matrix in their Guide to Public Involvement (Canadian Standards Association, 1996, pp. 113-114) that focused primarily on operational aspects of public involvement. They asked questions in three categories: relevance – were the right actions taken; results – what were the results and impacts of the process; and cost-effectiveness. "Relevance" questions could be asked during the process, an on-going assessment of its direction and success. One example is "Are the public information, communication, and media relations activities appropriate?" Results questions focused on*

similar themes, for example asking "What is the impact of communications and media relations activities on the results?" Finally, cost-effectiveness questions focused on what could be done better next time: "What alternative communication strategies could have been used to better support the process?" This approach to evaluation has the advantage that it can be used in virtually any situation, and the disadvantage that it does little to differentiate between good and bad processes: it would be nice to know, for example, what an "appropriate" communications strategy would be.

Towards a Comprehensive Evaluation Framework

It is clear from the preceding discussion that there is a myriad of approaches to understanding public participation and its evaluation, all of which have their advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, evaluation of participation is as contested as participation itself. The issue has become how to move forward from these different approaches to a complete evaluation framework for participatory processes. Such an evaluation must directly address the conceptual framework used to understand the process in question (Weiss, 1998).

Researchers have used evaluation to directly address different elements of public participation. This research has had two purposes: to learn more about public participation in general (theory-building) and to evaluate actual processes using that understanding (theory-testing). Evaluators have:
- *assessed the quality of process;*
- *assessed the success of outcomes;*
- *proposed strategic principles for the selection of processes in different contexts;*
- *assessed the influence of context on outcomes; and*
- *assessed the influence of process on outcomes.*

To date with respect to process evaluations,
> *"it is significant that much of what practitioners have developed over the years through long and extensive experience as rules of thumb is now being found to be consistent with a growing body of literature based on more explicit theorizing and experimentation." (Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001, p. 292)*

As discussed earlier, there is a similarly high degree of agreement on outcomes. However, relationships between elements have received less attention: only Beierle and Cayford (2002) carefully evaluated the relationship of process and outcome, only Thomas (1995) has carefully tested a strategy for selection of processes, and little work has been done to relate context and outcome. These are the weakest elements of the conceptual model and therefore also the weakest elements of an evaluation framework.

Julia Abelson has recently proposed an evaluation framework for deliberative processes that reflects the strongest points of the conceptual framework, combining Beierle's criteria for outcomes with Webler's criteria for process (Abelson, et al., 2003). However, it may not apply as well to less-intensive approaches. The literature has not yet come to grips with evaluation in a contingent world: how to build an evaluation framework that can be applied across different contexts and types of process.

In summary, evaluation of public participation is still in its infant stages. Different researchers use different sets of evaluation criteria, based in part on their philosophical approaches to public participation itself. However, recent theoretical developments have permitted researchers to better structure their evaluations, and it is now possible to see a high degree of agreement about the range of evaluation criteria. Because public participation processes are by nature "contested space," the issue of subjectivity is unavoidable, but can be addressed in part by using more than one method. It may now be possible to achieve a relatively unbiased evaluation of a public participation process using commonly accepted criteria within a complete conceptual framework.

2.3   Summary

Public participation is a contested, complex and evolving field. It has its roots in often conflicting democratic and management theories and philosophies:

- *pluralists believe that direct participation leading to resolution of differences in the community should be used to make decisions;*
- *populists believe that the community should make decisions itself, through devolution of decision-making power to community members; and*
- *managerialists believe that bureaucrats – as experts who are given discretionary power by elected government – should make decisions on behalf of the community.*

Public participation is a complex phenomenon. It occurs within a broad context of community and institutional characteristics, and within the narrower context of a particular decision or set of decisions. Decision-making processes have varying goals and objectives at various stages, and a tremendous variety of methods are available to permit the public's participation. The implementation of methods is a complicated task, requiring attention to a range of characteristics that may influence the method's effectiveness. At the end of the process, a range of outcomes are possible – some intended, some not. Finally, the contested nature of participation is reflected in different views of participants about the importance of various outcomes and process characteristics, and all of these may interrelate and conflict.

The complex and contested nature of the field has driven the evolution of a greater understanding of the concept. It is now possible to clarify the elements of participatory decision-making processes, to understand the nature of those

elements, and to investigate the relationships between them. For instance, practitioners now agree on "rules of thumb" to guide process implementation (Dorcey & McDaniels, 2001). Gaps remain primarily in understanding the relationships between context, process and outcome.

The relationship between context and process has long been addressed through ad hoc contingent approaches – matching methods to context. Recent efforts have been made to develop and test theories about how best to do this, leading to more robust process design. Along with the understanding of relationships between process and outcome, this effort represents a first step in filling the gaps of our knowledge of participatory decision-making processes.

The evaluation of public participation reflects its complexity and contested nature, and remains "an infant art." Nevertheless, the range of issues to be considered appears to be well-established, and recent efforts to develop and structure a more complete picture of participatory processes have led to more robust, defensible evaluation frameworks.

Let us return to the three questions posed at the beginning of this chapter:
- *"What is good public involvement?"*
- *"Why was it (not) good?" and*
- *"How do we know when public participation is (not) good?"*

This review has shown that there is general agreement about the characteristics of good participation. We also have a general understanding of how contextual factors and process characteristics relate to process success. However, issues of measurement and latitude in interpretation and emphasis make evaluation of the quality of public participation difficult.

Finally, public participation holds great potential to enhance decisions and build community, and to do so cost-effectively. The challenge is, in each individual case, to understand how best to achieve that potential, and to pull together the many elements that are necessary to do so.

PART II: Studying the University Boulevard Case

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This chapter outlines the questions asked by this research, its scope, and its underlying assumptions, and describes the methods used to answer the questions. In Chapter 1, my personal background and resulting potential to be biased were discussed. For an evaluation to be accepted by a wide range of people, it cannot be based on a single philosophical position and it should be well-supported. As a result, it is essential that the issue of potential bias be addressed throughout the research design and implementation. For that reason, special attention will be paid in this section to describing how the potential for biased findings was minimized. There are four main areas in which bias may present itself: the evaluation framework, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. Potential bias was addressed in the following ways:

- *maximizing the objectivity of the evaluation framework – maximizing the validity of selected criteria, clearly stating criteria, and using a contingent approach rather than choosing a particular philosophical perspective;*
- *collecting a range of types of data and using a representative sample of interviewees;*
- *being explicit about my own bias and background;*
- *relying on multiple, balanced sources wherever possible in data analysis; and*
- *reporting in as balanced a manner as possible, presenting direct quotations where appropriate.*

The following sections describe the research design, data collection and analysis, and documentation of the evaluation.

3.1   Research Questions

From February to April 2003, the University conducted a 'public consultation' process that presented a draft plan for the University Boulevard neighbourhood at the University of British Columbia. The process was the subject of significant criticism from the public and the School of Community and Regional Planning, but the University defended its process, describing it as an extensive consultation that went beyond minimum requirements. This difference of opinion highlighted two questions about the participation of the public in planning decisions: to what degree was this public participation process successful; and how can a public participation process be objectively evaluated? This research was an attempt to answer these questions, and to draw conclusions about evaluation of public consultation that may be applied elsewhere. Two key questions guided the study

- *To what degree was public participation in the University Boulevard neighbourhood planning process successful and why?*
- *What lessons does this research teach us about evaluation of public participation?*

Based on the two questions, the goals of the research were:

- *to develop a robust evaluation framework for public participation;*
- *to describe the participatory process in this case;*
- *to understand what participation process considerations may be particular to this planning process;*
- *to analyze the process by applying the chosen evaluation framework;*
- *to provide recommendations for the improvement of public participation in planning processes at UBC; and*
- *to identify lessons learned about evaluation of public participation processes.*

3.2 Scope

The subject of this research is participation in the physical planning process for the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Area at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC. The process began with the development of a first draft plan in 2001, which was rejected by the Board of Governors. A second draft plan was prepared in stages from October 2001 to February 2003, and it was presented to the public from February to April 2003. Although the University aimed to complete planning for the area in May 2003, the plan was revised and presented to the public in June and September. It was eventually approved in October 2003. Rather than consider the entire process, this research focuses on the portion that resulted in the presentation of the second draft plan in spring of 2003. This part began with UBC Board of Governors concerns over the first plan in September 2001, and ended in May 2003, after UBC reported on the consultation process. As such, the research is a snapshot of an unfolding planning process that involves participation of the public.

The scope of the case can be defined first by what it is and what it is not, and second by its characteristics (Babbie, 1998). Here, the case considered a physical planning process, rather than a policy development process: the key result of the process was a plan that had incorporated the arrangement of three-dimensional space in an urban context as a significant element. The design was at a "neighbourhood" scale, not at a regional, municipal, or parcel scale. It considered an area roughly 300 m by 100 m in size, about 3 hectares, and addressed building massing and siting, roadway and building design, land uses, and servicing and transportation. It took place on a university campus in British Columbia Canada, not in a conventional Canadian municipal governance system. The process had elements of public participation, so it was not purely technical. It incorporated a number of types of public participation, including on-line information and feedback, Open Houses, Presentations, Citizen Advisory Committees and Public Meetings. Participation was initiated by the University, not by citizens. Finally, it was an incomplete process, in the sense that one of its outcomes was an extension of the planning and participation process. In summary, the University Boulevard case studied here was: an incomplete physical planning process at a neighbourhood scale that incorporated public involvement, initiated by the University on whose lands it

took place, in a governance system that was different from a conventional municipal system.

3.3   Critical Assumptions

Every research project makes some assumptions in order to frame and scope the project; this project is no exception. The following is a short list of the key assumptions that underlie this project.

- *It is possible to evaluate a participatory decision-making process fairly.*
- *It is possible to evaluate one part of a participatory decision-making process, by treating other parts of the process as context and outcomes.*
- *A method that does not focus on detailed qualities of interpersonal interaction is adequate to evaluate participation when it does not encompass significantly deliberative processes.*
- *It is possible and appropriate to understand participatory decision-making primarily in terms of formal processes, excluding informal interpersonal relationships and their effect on the design and implementation of the formal processes themselves.*

3.4   Type of Research

This was an evaluation of a particular case of participation in physical planning. It was informed by two research methods: evaluation research and case study research, and was primarily concerned with two tasks: description and explanation. In his book Case Study Research: Design and Methods *(Yin, 1994) Robert Yin defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." (p. 23.) Further, a case study is preferred when "a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the researcher has little or no control." (p. 20) These criteria were met in this study, and the description of a case study fits very well with the situation at hand. Yin also describes the role of case studies in evaluation research – they serve to:*

- *"explain causal links in real-life interactions;*
- *describe the context of an interaction;*
- *describe the intervention itself; [and]*
- *explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes." (p. 25)*

In public participation processes, causal links between context, process, and outcome are common, unresolved issues of study (Beierle & Cayford, 2002). The context of any participatory decision-making process includes established power structures, attitudes of those planning and participating in the process, previous decisions and decision-making processes, and many other factors. A clear description of the goings-on in and around participatory processes is important in any evaluation because they have the potential to significantly affect the

process. A complete description of participatory decision-making itself would require analysis at various scales, from its role in participatory democracy to the interplay of different personalities, skills, and attitudes characteristic of small group interactions (Fairness and Competence in Public Participation: Evaluating Models for Environmental Discourse, 1995). While some of these characteristics may be measured quantitatively, most require qualitative information – like that available from case study methods – for effective evaluation. Finally, participatory processes rarely have clearly articulated goals, and often different participants have different goals for the process: there are no clear outcomes. Participatory decision-making processes such as this one are an excellent subject for evaluation using case study research methods.

3.5   Evaluation Strategy

Qualitative research like this case study generally follows a four-stage process (Kirk & Miller, 1986): research design, data collection, analysis, and documentation. In this research, these stages were broken down further into a seven-step process. The following list shows the research steps and their relationship to the four stages.

> *Research Design:*
> *   review of literature to develop a conceptual understanding of participatory processes and their evaluation;*
> *   development of an evaluation framework based on the literature review; and*
> *   selection of methods to suit the evaluation framework.*
>
>
> *Data Collection:*
> *   collection of relevant data.*
>
> *Analysis:*
> *   description of the University Boulevard process and relevant related facts; and*
> *   evaluation of the process,*
>
> *Documentation*
> *   documentation of analysis and conclusions*

This section describes each of the seven steps to explain how the research was structured and conducted. It begins with a statement of principles and then describes each of the seven steps outlined above.

Guiding Principles for Evaluation

Carol Weiss (1998) defines evaluation as "the systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or policy, compared to explicit or

implicit standards, in order to help improve the program or policy" (p. 18). The American Evaluation Association adopted a set of guiding principles for professional evaluators in 1994. These principles assume "that evaluators aspire to construct and provide the best possible information that might bear on the value of whatever is being evaluated. The principles are intended to foster that primary aim" (p. 1). These principles are reflected in the methods used for this evaluation. Together with the definition of evaluation, they provide a framework to guide the selection and implementation of an effective evaluation.

> *"Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.*
>
> *Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.*
>
> *Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.*
>
> *Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.*
>
> *Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare." ("Guiding Principles for Evaluators," 1994)*

Research Design

Research design consists of the first three steps of this research process: literature review, development of an evaluation framework, and selection of data collection methods. These were necessary before research was begun in earnest.

Step 1: Literature Review

Both academic literature and practice-oriented documents were reviewed to develop an understanding of the "state of the art" in participatory decision-making processes and their evaluation. In the first phase, immediately available review articles and books were read to develop basic knowledge of the field. To deepen and broaden that review, two methods were used to find more references: identifying and obtaining relevant work cited in documents from the first phase, and searching article databases and libraries for works that referenced public participation and related topics.[3] More recent documents and

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[3] As noted in Chapter 2, many terms are used to describe public participation. At various times, searches were made using the terms "public participation," "citizen participation," "citizen involvement," "public involvement," "community participation," "community involvement," "public consultation," and "community consultation."

those that dealt specifically with evaluation were selected. The process of reading documents and obtaining the most relevant citations from them continued iteratively throughout the evaluation as unanswered questions or previously unidentified issues arose. The understanding of public involvement developed through the literature review increased the evaluator's competence in evaluation of public participation and provided a basis for systematic inquiry into the University Boulevard process itself.

Step 2: Development of the Evaluation Framework

Having identified research questions, the first step in research design was to select a general approach that is appropriate to the subject of the research. First, critical information about participatory decision-making processes is highly qualitative in nature, so an appropriate evaluation approach had to be compatible with a qualitative subject. Second, the University Boulevard neighbourhood planning process had already begun when the decision was taken to evaluate it, so an experiment would have been difficult or impossible to do. Furthermore, the fact that participatory processes are so closely related to their contexts makes it virtually impossible to replicate them, making experimental design inappropriate. Participatory decision-making processes are decision-making processes, so their outcomes include decisions. Although they often impact participants, they are distinct from programs whose primary aim is changing participants, such as medical programs that improve participants' health. Therefore, the overall research design could not be limited to comparing participants and non-participants. A different sort of comparison might have been to compare two similar processes in different contexts, or two different processes in a similar context. However, resource and time constraints inherent in a master's thesis made such comparisons impossible for this project.

Given the nature of the research subject and the constraints on the research, a "one-group" design that takes place after the program is complete was selected. The disadvantage of this approach for many program evaluations is that "it leaves room for differing interpretations about how much change has occurred and how much of the observed change was due to the operation of the program" (Weiss, 1998, p. 193); the advantage of such a design is that it can provide a good preliminary assessment of the program. It was used for this research on the understanding that the evaluation would be preliminary, and that significant efforts would be made in each phase of the research to ensure objectivity despite its preliminary nature.

Starting with the "one-group" approach, the next steps were identification of an evaluative framework and then selection of data collection methods to suit the criteria to be evaluated. The development of an evaluation framework can rely to a greater or lesser extent on theory about how a program works, what its outcomes are, and the relationships between process and outcome – program theory (Weiss, 1998). Weiss stated specifically that "qualitative evaluation is highly compatible with the idea of program theory" (p. 265). For this project,

the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2 provided a ready source of accepted theory on which to base an evaluation framework. The combined process-outcome framework suggested by Julia Abelson et al. (2003) was used as a starting point for this research (Table 2).

Representation	Procedural Rules	Information	Outcomes/Decisions
Legitimacy and fairness of selection process *Representativeness (geographic, demographic, political, community)* *Participant selection vs. self-selection* *Inclusiveness vs. exclusiveness*	*Degree of citizen control/input into agenda, rules, selection of information and experts* *Deliberation (amount of time, emphasis on challenging experts, mutual respect)* *Credibility/legitimacy of process (what point in decision-making is input sought, who is listening)*	*Characteristics (accessibility, readability, digestibility)* *Selection and presentation (who chooses information and experts)* *Interpretation (Adequacy of time to consider, discuss, and challenge the information)*	*Legitimacy and accountability of:* • *decision-making* • *communication of decisions* • *responses to decision and input* *More informed citizenry* *Achievement of consensus (broad understanding and acceptance of decision)* *Better decision(s)*

Table 2: Initial Evaluation Framework[4]

In the interests of systematic inquiry, the American Evaluators Association (1994) states that:
- *"Evaluators should adhere to the highest appropriate technical standards in conducting their work, whether that work is quantitative or qualitative in nature, so as to increase the accuracy and credibility of the evaluative information they produce.*
- *Evaluators should explore with the client the shortcomings and strengths both of the various evaluation questions it might be productive to ask, and the various approaches that might be used for answering those questions."*

In order to "increase the accuracy and credibility of the evaluative information," the first challenge was ensuring that the initial evaluation framework was as objective as possible. There are different ways of ensuring objectivity. One approach is to maximize validity (it gave the right answer) and reliability

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[4] *Abelson, et al., 2003.*

(yielded the same answer repeatedly under the same conditions) as applied to qualitative research (Kirk & Miller, 1986). If it was not already a complete and objective framework, the challenge was to improve it. To do so, validity and reliability were assessed in turn.

Validity

In their book <u>Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research</u>, Jerome Kirk and Marc Miller define three types of validity (p.22-23):
  * *apparent validity – when a measurement is obviously accurate;*
  * *theoretical validity (or "construct" validity) – when a measurement obtains a result predicted by a strongly supported theory (e.g. a thermometer is calibrated in boiling water on the theoretical assumption that water always boils at the same temperature); and*
  * *instrumental validity (or "criterion" validity) – when a measurement obtains the same results as a measurement that is accepted as valid.*

To assess the validity of Abelson's framework, the three measures of validity were taken in turn. In this case, the literature review suggested that evaluations of participatory processes are never obviously accurate because of the subjectivity of the subject matter and the evaluation, meaning that the framework could not be apparently valid. Second, while there certainly are theories about public participation, the support for a given theory may depend on one's perspective. Furthermore, some of the theories are new and relatively untested. The lack of a strong and accepted theory made it impossible to measure theoretical validity in this case. Similarly, the measurement of instrumental validity was confounded because "...there is little comprehensive or systematic consideration of these matters in the academic literature..." (Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

In his book <u>The Practice of Social Research</u> (1998), Earl Babbie identifies another weaker but useful measure of validity that is related to instrumental validity:
  * *content validity – a measurement is valid if it is based in a commonly agreed meaning.*

Essentially, content validity is a measure of the degree to which people agree that a term is appropriately defined. Three measurements of this validity are important: the number of people who agree on the measure, the degree to which they agree, and the degree to which those people are representative of the group of people who are competent in the field.

In order to measure the framework's content validity, the criteria were listed and compared to criteria found in the literature. Twenty-seven documents were

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reviewed, seven of which incorporated literature reviews of their own[5]. Because the philosophies of public participation are so varied, it was crucial to compare Abelson's criteria to criteria that span the range of philosophical approaches as well as covering both practical and theoretical work. The references included both theoretical frameworks and practical evaluations, covered the health, environment, risk management, and planning sectors, represent a variety of people from a government body to a participant group to a multi-agency committee, and represent a broad mixture of perspectives from populists to managerialists. While they are a relatively small sample, they are representative of those who are competent in the field.

The following process was used to structure the assessment of content validity:
1. *additional criteria were identified from the review to complete the framework;*
2. *the number of people who mentioned the criterion was used to gauge agreement;*
3. *the relative similarity of descriptions of each criterion was used to gauge agreement; and*
4. *where there was less agreement, the perspective of the sources and their descriptions were used together to clarify sources of disagreement.*

The results of this analysis were:
- *Additional criteria were identified; these were usually practical in nature, dealing with issues of process design. One example was the criterion that methods should be matched to goals, which was mentioned by most sources.*
- *It was possible to clarify the meaning of the criteria.*
- *About half the criteria were strongly supported, including about half the process and outcome criteria and most of the criteria relating context to process design.*
- *Some criteria received medium levels of support, despite the fact that they appeared to reflect "common sense," for example the criterion that adequate resources should be available to conduct the process well. In many of these cases, mention of the criteria varied with the source's emphasis either on evaluation or practice. Resourcing was mentioned*

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[5] *The sources reviewed were: Abelson, et al., 2003; Arnstein, 1969; Checkoway & van Til, 1978; Chess & Purcell, 1999; City of Vancouver 1998; Canadian Standards Association 1996; City of North Vancouver, 2000; Francis, Cashden, and Paxson 1984 (in Sanoff 2000); Graham, Phillips & Maslove, 1998; Graham & Phillips, 1998a; Graham & Phillips, 1998b; Gregory & Rowley, 1999; Halvorsen, 2001; Innes 1999; Lach and Hixson 1996 (in Sanoff 2000); Langton, 1978a; Langton, 1978b; Lauber & Knuth, 1999; Middendorf & Busch, 1997; Petts, 2001; Rosener, 1978; Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Sanoff, 2000; Thomas, 1995; The United Kingdom Department of the Environment, 1994; Urban Design in Action, 1986; US Department of Energy, n.d.; US Environmental Protection Agency, 2000; Wates, 2000.*

regularly by sources with a practical emphasis and infrequently by evaluators.

- *A few criteria were weakly supported. These appeared to be more appropriate for some types of participation than others, for example participant control over agenda-setting, which was supported for deliberative or community-driven processes. Because they appeared to be more descriptors of the process than evaluation criteria, they were treated in the framework as criteria whose definition was contingent on the type of process, an approach used by the Canadian Standards Association (1996) to broadly characterize processes (p.29-30). The CSA showed how a characteristic such as "Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood by everyone associated with the process" maps across a range of purposes: if the purpose was to "Share Information," then the proponent is responsible for setting roles and responsibilities and communicating them; if the purpose was to "Share Decisions," then the stakeholders agree on the establishment of roles and responsibilities. This use of weakly supported criteria in this way fits well with the contingent model outlined in Chapter 2.*

The analysis was both difficult and useful. On one hand, it illustrated the difficulties in developing a defensible, comprehensible set of evaluation criteria given the wide variation and lack of systematic approaches in the literature. On the other hand, it suggested that there is a relatively strong level of agreement about what aspects of participatory processes to consider in an evaluation if it is approached in a contingent manner. In summary, it was not possible to assess the validity of Abelson's framework except as regards its content, but the exercise provided a greater degree of clarity about the range, use, and definition of evaluation criteria.

Reliability

"Reliability depends essentially on explicitly described observational procedures" (Kirk & Miller, 1986). As such, assessment of the reliability depends on how it is applied to a case. Earl Babbie (1998) suggests that using previously tested measures, based on an accumulation of the literature, is one way to ensure reliability of a method. In this case, the criteria have been applied in various different ways in various different situations and assessing each of them is impractical within the constraints of a Master's thesis. Rather than attempt to assess the reliability of the framework itself, then, the focus turned to ensuring the reliability of its application. Therefore, reliability will be dealt with in more detail in the discussion of method selection.

Verifiability

Some researchers prefer to ensure "verifiability" in qualitative studies (Creswell, 1998). Morse et al (2002) defined and described the term:

"Verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study."

In keeping with that description, Creswell (1998) suggests that at least 2 of 8 methods be used in a study to ensure verifiability:
- *prolonged engagement and persistent observation;*
- *triangulation of data sources;*
- *peer review and debriefing;*
- *refinement of the hypothesis in light of negative or disconfirming evidence;*
- *clarification of researcher bias;*
- *confirmation of information with informants;*
- *use of thick, rich description; and*
- *external audit of the research.*

Triangulation of sources, faculty review, refinement of the hypothesis (for each criterion), clarification of bias, and confirmation of information were all used to ensure verifiability in this research.

Summary and Description of the Proposed Framework

The assessment of validity and reliability produced two results. The first was a generally supported evaluation framework having a greater degree of clarity about the range, use, and definition of criteria. The second was an understanding that special attention had to be paid to the application of the framework if the evaluation was to be reliable.

*Before proceeding to discuss the collection of data and its use in the evaluation, it is useful to describe both the framework and the approach necessary to its successful application. The evaluation framework is itself contingent, reflecting the understanding of participatory processes developed in Chapter 2. It is shown in Table 3, and is split into four sections: criteria respecting response to context, contingent criteria, process criteria, and outcome criteria. The first section consists of criteria that evaluate the strategy employed in the development of the process itself. The second section consists of criteria whose definition must be refined to suit the evaluation to its subject. The process section is next, and is further broken down into three categories. The first category is **Representativeness**, which evaluates how participants are chosen and in what ways they are representative of their community. **Procedural Concerns** is the second category. It addresses issues of legitimacy (relationship of participants to decision makers), reasonableness (flexibility and resourcing), accountability, and transparency. **Communication and Information** is about both the type and quality of information as they affect participants' ability to*

participate. The last section consists of a list of the social goals of public participation, expressed as potential outcomes. Finally, Table 3 shows the degree of agreement next to each criterion. These ratings are very general and should be understood only in the context of the preceding discussion of the assessment of content validity.

Application	Criterion	Agreement[1]
Criteria Regarding Response to Context	• *The choice of approach and techniques reflected organizational and planning goals.*	*H*
	• *Timing of participation was congruent with stages in the decision-making process and followed from process goals.*	*H*
	• *Goals were established and process and decision constraints were identified at the beginning of the process.*	*H*
	• *The process design responded to resource limitations, the nature of the community at hand, local circumstances, the type of decision, and issue-specific concerns.*	*M*

Contingent Criteria	• *There was an appropriate level of inclusiveness (i.e. number of people participating) (Representation section).*	*M*
	• *Participants were assisted in understanding relevant information (Information section).*	*M*
	• *There was an appropriate level of citizen control over goal-setting, participant selection, information gathering and dissemination, selection of experts, and boundary definition (Procedural Rules section).*	*M*

Process Criteria	*Representation*	
	• *Participants were representative of the entire community across an array of characteristics such as demographic, cultural, political and geographic characteristics.*	*H*
	• *Access to events was assured through elimination of barriers, including provision of resources to community members.*	*M*
	• *Selection of participants was fair and legitimate.*	*L*
	Information	
	• *Information was easy for participants to understand, easy to access, made available in a timely manner, and unbiased.*	*M*
	• *Information was complete and expert.*	*M*
	Procedural Rules	

Application	Criterion	Agreement[1]
	• *Goals, constraints on the process, and constraints on the decision were clearly communicated to all those involved in the process.*	*H*
	• *The process was honest, incorporating two-way communication with respectful relationships.*	*H*
	• *Decisions were transparent: the ways in which public input was interpreted and in which it informed decisions were communicated clearly to all those involved in the process.*	*H*
	• *Adequate resources were made available for the process.*	*M*
	• *Decision-makers were accountable: they were directly involved in the decision-making and participation process, not indirectly via bureaucrats.*	*M*
	• *The process was flexible within a framework in that it could adapt to changing context and lessons learned.*	*M*

Application	Criterion	Agreement[1]
	• *The decision was broadly accepted, and conflict within the community was reduced.*	*H*
	• *Public input and values were reflected in the decision.*	*H*
	• *The process was cost-effective.*	*H*
Outcome Criteria	• *Participants were educated and informed.*	*M*
	• *The substantive quality of the decisions was improved.*	*M*
	• *Trust of the sponsoring institution was enhanced.*	*M*
	• *The process provided tangible benefits to the community: closer relationships and an enhanced sense of community.*	*L*

1. H = High; M = Medium; L = Low. These are qualitative assessments based on the analysis described in this Chapter.

Table 3: Evaluation Framework

There are clearly interrelationships between different categories and criteria. For example, high-quality deliberation is more easily achieved in a smaller group, so it is related to inclusiveness; equally, the ability to reach consensus is usually enhanced with greater opportunity for deliberation, so it is also related to inclusiveness. However, the criteria stand alone to a large extent: it is also possible to have quality deliberation and greater inclusiveness in a larger group through discussion in a set of sub-groups. In this case, of course, cost will increase. These examples illustrate the interdependence of the criteria as well as their distinctiveness.

Because the evaluation framework is contingent, it must be applied in two steps. The first step is to evaluate the response to context. The context is first described, and elements of a process design appropriate to it are established. Then the response to context is evaluated using the process elements as a benchmark. The second step is to evaluate the actual process and outcome(s). First, the contingent criteria are suited to the type of process that actually

occurred. Then process characteristics and outcomes are described and evaluated. The second part of the evaluation fits it to the actual circumstances, permitting the evaluation of intense small group processes differently from broadly inclusive processes, and even of processes that combine the two. The contingent approach is useful because it allows the evaluator to evaluate both the process design and the process itself fairly.

Step 3: Selection of Methods

In the development of the evaluation framework, it became clear that the reliability of this evaluation would depend on its careful application – on the data collection, analysis, and reporting. This section begins by describing issues of reliability in qualitative research and what was done to address those issues through the selection of data collection methods.

Kirk and Miller (1986) identify three types of reliability: "quixotic reliability," "diachronic reliability," and "synchronic reliability." "Quixotic reliability" refers to a single method of observation that yields the same measurement every time. A quixotically reliable measurement, however, may be inaccurate whatever its reliability, for example a "party line" response to a researcher's question. "Diachronic reliability" refers to the coherence of two observations made at different times. Unfortunately, this measure of reliability assumes that relevant conditions remain the same over time, something that is very rarely true in human relations. Finally, "synchronic reliability" refers to coherence between observations made in the same period. This measure of reliability suggests the comparison of observations made by different methods to identify agreement and disagreement between methods or sources. Like validity, reliability is a difficult issue in the evaluation of participatory processes. However, in this one-group research design, "diachronic reliability" does not apply, leaving considerations of "quixotic reliability" and "synchronic reliability" to guide the evaluation. In this case, it was anticipated that "party lines" were likely from both institutional actors and members of the public who were concerned about process. This likelihood suggested that collecting data from sources on all sides would be necessary if the results could be considered reliable. "Synchronic reliability" would be the measure of choice to ensure the reliability of the evaluation.

The data sources available for the evaluation were:
- *individuals involved in the process: administrators and participants (in interviews);*
- *my personal observations as a participant in the process;*
- *relevant documents produced before, during and after the process; and*
- *media reports about the process.*

To maximize reliability, each of these was used in the application of the evaluation framework. Table 4 lists the criteria and the data sources consulted

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for their evaluation (Frechtlin & L. Sharp, Eds., 1997), and illustrates the reliance on multiple sources of data for virtually all of the criteria.

Criteria	Individuals	Personal observations	Documents	Media
The approach and techniques reflected organizational and planning goals.	X	X	X	
Participation was timed to be congruent with the decision-making process and it reflected goals.	X		X	
Goals were established and process and decision constraints identified at the outset.	X	X	X	
The process responded to contextual factors.	X		X	X
There was an appropriate level of inclusiveness.			X	
There was an appropriate level of citizen control.	X		X	
Participants were assisted in understanding relevant information.	X	X	X	
Participants were representative of the entire community.	X	X	X	
Access to events was assured through elimination of barriers.	X	X	X	
Selection of participants was fair and legitimate.	X		X	
Goals, constraints on the process, and constraints on the decision were clearly communicated to all those involved in the process.	X	X	X	
The process was honest and respectful, incorporating two-way communication.	X		X	
Decisions were transparent.	X		X	
Decision-makers were accountable.	X	X	X	
The process was flexible within a framework.	X	X	X	
Information was easy for participants to understand, easy to access, made available in a timely manner, and unbiased.	X	X	X	
Information was complete and expert.	X	X	X	
Adequate resources were made available for the process.	X			
The decision was broadly accepted, and conflict was reduced.	X	X	X	X
Public input and values were reflected in the decision.	X		X	
The process was cost-effective.	X			
Participants were educated and informed.	X	X	X	
The substantive quality of the decisions was improved.	X			
Trust of the sponsoring institution was enhanced.	X	X		X
The process provided tangible benefits to the community.	X	X		

Table 4: Potential Data Sources for Evaluation Criteria

Data Collection

This is the fourth of the seven steps in this research. Ethical concerns are often significant in evaluation research (Weiss, 1998). These become particularly

important in data collection and subsequent research steps, and are the subject of UBC's Behavioural Research Ethical Guidelines, administered through a review process[6]. Therefore, special attention is paid to reliability and ethical concerns in the data collection phase. These issues are also discussed in subsequent sections on data analysis and reporting. The collection of data from each of the data sources is discussed in more detail below: interviews, document review, media review, and participant observation.

Interviews

The primary considerations in selecting and conducting interviews were maximizing reliability through representativeness and ensuring confidentiality, particularly for "expert" interviewees – those who were responsible for the design and implementation of the planning process. Interviewees were selected to be as representative as possible of the community involved in the process. The research plan called for interviewing at least two members of each of the following groups:

- *faculty;*
- *staff;*
- *students;*
- *nearby residents; and*
- *members of the University administration responsible for planning.*

As research progressed, the number of interviews varied from the original intent, leading to an eventual total of eleven interviewees:

- *because of time limitations and conflicting schedules, only one nearby resident was interviewed; and*
- *because it became clear that verifiable information about events leading to the participation process was important, four members of the University administration were interviewed.*

It was desirable to interview participants having a range of experiences of University planning processes and having a range of perspectives about them. Of seven participant interviewees, the perspective of only two were known in advance of their interviews; nevertheless, they were a diverse group on a variety of criteria. Table 5 lists key characteristics of the participants (some details were withheld to protect anonymity).

Designation	History (long-time > 10 yrs)	Previous involvement in UBC planning processes	Level of trust before the process began
Faculty 1	long-time faculty	long-time	low
Faculty 2	long-time faculty	long-time	low
Resident 1	long-time resident	about a year	open-minded

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[6] *This project was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board in July 2003.*

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Staff 1	long-time staff	none, but involved in internal decision-making	high
Staff 2	long-time staff	long-time awareness, little involvement	low
Student 1	undergraduate student (< 4 yrs at UBC)	involved in tuition consultation	low
Student 2	graduate student (< 2 yrs at UBC)	none	high

Table 5: Participant Characteristics

Because the interviewees were drawn from participants, and few participants were supportive of the draft plan, a bias against the substance of the draft plan was anticipated. Questions of participants about substantive matters therefore only compared the quality of the plan before the process with that of the revised plan produced after the process.

Ethical research procedures were used throughout the interviewing process. During the participation process, a variety of people from the various stakeholder groups were encountered. Interviewees were recruited from those personal contacts. The interviews were requested by mail, and were given a week to decide whether or not to be interviewed. Meetings were then scheduled via email or phone. At the beginning of each interview, a "subject consent" form was read by the interviewee and signed (if clarification was necessary, it was provided). Interviews were conducted in private, and documented by means of hand-written notes and an audio recording. In one case, the audio recording did not work, and in another, the recording ended before the end of the interview. Audio recordings were combined into a type-written transcript. Where no recording was available, notes were used as the basis for a transcript. In every case, the transcript was sent to interviewee for their review. It was made clear that corrections were welcome, but none were requested. Electronic transcripts were password protected and audio tapes and paper transcripts and interview notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet. These will be retained for five years and then destroyed.

The interviews were structured to match the framework for description and evaluation of the process described earlier. They were tailored to the type of interviewee: interviews for administration interviewees included questions about the conduct of the process and its context, while interviews with participants focused on their experience and reaction to the process. The interview forms are attached as Appendix F. The interviews generally followed the interview forms, although the order and wording of the questions changed from interviewee to interviewee in order to enhance the flow of conversation during the interview.

In some cases, questions were added to confirm information obtained in a previous interview or to obtain more details about a topic addressed by someone else.

Document Review

Publicly available materials, including consultation materials and reports, meeting minutes, and publicly available memos were collected. These included:

Minutes from:
- *University Boulevard Neighbourhood Planning Technical Advisory Committee meetings between September 4, 2001 and December 19, 2002*
- *University Boulevard Neighbourhood Planning Advisory Planning Committee meetings between May 3, 2001 and July 2, 2003*
- *UBC Board of Governors meetings between November 16, 2000 and May 15, 2003*
- *Public Open Houses dated May 29 and September 10, 2001*

Planning documents for the University Boulevard Neighbourhood, including:
- *for the 2001 draft: draft plan and drawings*
- *the Findings and Recommendations Report of the UBC Committee on "University Boulevard," (February 2002)*
- *for the February 2003 draft: Draft Plan Diagrams, Discussion Guide, Feedback Form, and Consultation Report*
- *for the June 2003 draft: Draft Plan, Draft Plan Diagrams, Discussion Guide, and Fact Sheets*

Other relevant planning documents:
- *UBC Main Campus Plan (1992)*
- *Governance Study for Electoral Area 'A' (undated, circa 1998)*
- *Official Community Plan for Part of Electoral Area 'A' (July 1997)*
- *GVRD – UBC Memoranda of Understanding dated 1994, 1996, 1997, and 2000*
- *Principles for Physical Planning at UBC (July 1999)*
- *UBC Comprehensive Community Plan: Issues and Options Report (DRAFT, 1999)*
- *UBC Comprehensive Community Plan (December 2000)*
- *Advisory Planning Committee for the UBC University Boulevard Neighbourhood Plan Planning Process Terms of Reference (2002)*
- *UBC TREK Principles, Goals, and Strategies (November 2002)*
- *UBC Mission and Vision (January 2003)*

Planning documents for the March 2003 Draft Plan were assessed for readability, digestibility and accessibility. Readability was assessed using the Flesch-Kincaid readability scoring tool included in Microsoft Word 2000 (version 9.0.2720, copyright 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation). "Reading Ease" rates text on a 100-point scale; the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the

document. "Reading level" rates text on a U.S. grade-school level. Digestibility and accessibility were measured by asking participant interviewees. Finally, documents were compared to measure their completeness.

Documents were used as a source of demographic information about the University community. The consultation report provided an analysis of demographic information about participants in the consultation process collected via feedback forms. While data was available about participants' membership in general categories such as faculty members, students and residents, no information was available about participant gender, cultural background, age, or other common demographic information, and it was not possible to distinguish between faculties, nor between different resident groups. Furthermore, many residents were part of the institutional community, making it impossible to clearly break down the community into component parts.

Media Review

Published articles were retrieved from the Ubyssey student paper's website archive and from the Can News Net search engine. Can News Net includes local coverage by the Vancouver Sun, the Province, and the Courier newspapers. Articles from June 1988 to December 2003 were collected from Can News Net and from January 2001 to December 2003 from the Ubyssey.

Participant Observation

In his book Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, John Creswell (1998) describes observing as "a special skill." DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) define participant observation as "the use of the information gained from participating and observing through explicit recording and analysis of this information" (p.2). For them, both participating and observing skills are important. Participation encompasses a range from non-participation to complete participation (p. 18-23). They describe observation as "explicitly and self-consciously attending to the events and people... it also includes a kind of self-observation" of the researcher's experience, biases and impacts (p. 68). They suggest mapping scenes, counting, actively listening to conversations, and taking extensive field notes. Similarly, Creswell suggests defining a clear role for yourself, developing protocols for recording both descriptive and reflective information and your own reactions.

Although I attended various events and observed what went on, I did so as a simple participant, without the intention of using observations for research purposes. Therefore, I was a "complete participant." Because I was not planning to use my observations for research, however, I did not clarify my role as a researcher, nor take notes or photographs, nor journal my experiences. My role and lack of intention meant that my memories of the events could have been subject to significant bias, and these would not have been transparent because they were not recorded. Because my participant observation

techniques were not rigorous, the evaluation relied as little as possible on this data source, except for easily verifiable and non-contentious information.

Analysis

The analysis covers two steps in this research: the description of the process and its evaluation. The two are similar because the questions asked are similar; the distinction is that the evaluation draws a conclusion from the information, while the description focuses on the facts as presented in the data.

Step 5: Description

Data from each of the four sources – interviews, documents, media and observation – were used as appropriate to describe the process, its context and its outcomes. For much of the background material, official public documents provided a reliable source of information. Information regarding decisions leading up to the process, the characteristics of the process, and its outcomes came from more varied sources, guided by Table 4.

To sort the interview information, interview transcripts were analyzed using Atlas Ti software to identify and tag segments of text that related to each of the criteria in Table 4. Segments of text that related to elements of the conceptual framework and other significant themes that arose during interviews were also identified. For example, for the decision context, information about the committees most closely involved in the process was identified and tagged. Information from all interviews was then compiled into quotes relating to each criterion, element, or theme. Documents and media articles were also reviewed for information relating to each of the criteria, as were my own observations. Together with interview data, these formed the basis of the description of the process.

Having collected a broad base of information, the accuracy of results was ensured by checking for consistency among data sources. For example, information obtained from an interviewee was checked against other interviewees' statements, documents and other available evidence.

Step 6: Evaluation

The process was evaluated criterion by criterion, based on the balance of evidence available. As patterns or themes emerged, they were highlighted. As with the criteria, information relating to themes was then compiled and checked to ensure balanced conclusions were drawn about them. A summary was written for each phase of the evaluation.

Documentation

Documentation of the process and its evaluation was broken into three elements – context, process and outcome – following the conceptual framework. Throughout the documentation, descriptive and evaluative text was

distinguished as much as possible, and data was presented first, without analysis. That approach permits the reader to weigh the evidence presented with a minimum of prejudice. Furthermore, quotes were often substantial to allow the reader to understand the context in which statements were made. In order to maintain confidentiality, quotes were identified only by the broad group to which the speaker belonged (e.g. administration, community member). This approach provided enough information that the reader could evaluate the appropriateness of the source, but protected interviewee identity (Frechtlin & L. Sharp, Eds., 1997). Conclusions were drawn about the research questions after all of the evidence had been gathered, analyzed, and summarized. In keeping with the preceding approach to the evaluation, the conclusions were based on the balance of available evidence.

3.6 Summary

This research considered the questions "To what degree was public participation in the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Planning process successful, and why?" and "What lessons does this research teach us about evaluation of public participation?" To do so, an evaluative framework was developed based on a review of literature on public participation. This framework was applied to the University Boulevard participation process through interviews, participant observation, media review and document review. Ethical research practices were used throughout the study. Interviewees were selected with the intent to obtain a range of perspectives, and the characteristics of selected interviewees reflected that intent. Care was taken in the research design, data collection, data analysis, and reporting phases of the research to ensure objectivity to the greatest extent possible. Identity of interviewees was protected as much as possible. Information collected in the research was applied in two ways: to construct an accurate history of the process, and to analyze against the evaluation criteria. In this way, the study described the process, then analyzed its three components: process design, implementation, and outcomes.

Chapter 4: An Introduction to the University Boulevard Case Study

4.1   Introduction

At its inception in 1908, UBC was established in central Vancouver near the Vancouver General Hospital. In 1922 it moved to its present site on the tip of the Point Grey peninsula. UBC is situated within the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) in Electoral Area 'A,' which includes areas within the regional district but outside municipal boundaries. Electoral Area 'A' includes Pacific Spirit Regional Park and the University Endowment Lands (UEL), which includes the neighbourhood of University Hill (Figure 7). The park forms a strong physical edge between Vancouver to the east and the community that includes UBC and University Hill to the west.

Since 1922, UBC's developed areas have expanded to cover over 400 hectares, including substantial residential and student housing, academic areas, farmland, and some private research facilities ("A Brief History of the University of British Columbia," 2003). At the same time, the University Hill neighbourhood to the East has developed into an affluent suburban enclave, consisting mostly of large single-family homes with a small mixed-use center just east of Wesbrook Mall on University Boulevard. In the mid 1980's, major provincial cut-backs resulted in the resignation of Dr. K George Pederson as President and a huge increase in tuition of 75% over three years. Dr. Pederson was replaced by Dr. David Strangway, who developed a number of strategies to secure more funding for UBC. Among those strategies was the founding of the UBC Real Estate Corporation in 1988 to develop the University's real estate assets for capital fund or endowment purposes ("A Brief History of the University of British Columbia," 2003).

Legend

OCP Boundary	Pacific Spirit Park
UEL	Hampton Place

Figure 7: UBC Planning Areas[7]

UBC Properties' first project, initiated in 1989, was a "mixed density urban village" (UBC Properties Trust, 2003) called Hampton Place (Figure 7). The University began the development with no consultation with neighbouring residents, other municipalities, or the University community (Cavanaugh, 1989). When they started clearing the land of trees, community groups, the Musqueam nation, and students protested (Moya, 1989), with some climbing the remaining trees to prevent further cutting ("TERN," 2003). Although residents have gradually become part of the University community, the development of

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[7] Aerial photo from: http://www.ocp.ubc.ca/ocp/maps.html, accessed 2003/07/02.

Hampton Place spawned suspicion and distrust of the University among its neighbours (Griffin, 1996d). As the scale of development plans became more clear, the City of Vancouver became concerned that University residents would rely on City amenities but would not pay taxes to support them (Bula & Gram, 1995). The City called on the Provincial government to conduct a study of governance at UBC, citing a potential conflict between UBC's dual roles of developer and legal approval body (Griffin, 1996c). Concerns over governance were echoed by the student Alma Mater Society (AMS) and others (Griffin, 1996a), who called for a moratorium on campus development until governance issues were resolved. As a result, a governance study was commissioned in 1997 (Ford, 1997), and concluded in 2000 with the decision to maintain the status quo with minor adjustments (University of British Columbia, n.d.; Munro, 2000).

The GVRD responded to community concerns by requiring the development of an Official Community Plan (OCP) prior to any further development on UBC lands (Griffin, 1995). During the development of the OCP, the community raised concerns over competition with merchants along 10th Avenue (Griffin, 1996a), loss of forested area in South Campus ("Point Grey `new town' planned," 1996), transportation and housing types and occupants. These were partly but not completely addressed through revisions (Griffin, 1996b).

The OCP was followed by a more detailed Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) in 2000, and a series of eight Neighbourhood Plans (NPs), two of which were completed in 2001 (University of British Columbia, 2003). This planning process was jointly laid out by the GVRD and UBC and is implemented by the University ("GVRD - UBC Memorandum of Understanding," 2000). The history of planning at UBC was summed up in a Vancouver Sun editorial in April 2003:

> *"[In the 1990's, President Strangway] didn't show any respect for public process in his effort. And when his administration bulldozed ahead with its Hampton Place residential development on the edge of the campus without any regard for community opinion, public anger boiled over. One result was the comprehensive consultation process that resulted in the current area plan. A lot of issues needed to be addressed. UBC has been for all intents and purposes an electorally distinct little fiefdom on the edge of the city of Vancouver. It has conducted its affairs without much regard for either local residents or regional objectives." ("Let's get on with it: Community plan may not be perfect, but it represents real progress," 2003)*

The University Boulevard Neighbourhood was the third major neighbourhood to be planned by UBC, beginning with a first draft in 2001. A second draft was presented to the public in the spring of 2003. The plan and the process spawned significant interest on- and off-campus, major controversy, media

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coverage, petitions (George Spiegelman, personal communication March 22, 2003), and student projects (Anhorn, Caswell, Enns & Davidson, 2003). The public rejected the plan presented by the University, which was forced to revise it substantially and to extend the public participation a full five months. A revised plan was eventually approved by the UBC Board of Governors in October 2003 and by the GVRD Board of Directors in November 2003.

The University Boulevard process presents an interesting opportunity to inquire about the quality of the planning process, and to understand what happened and why. This chapter provides an overview of the neighbourhood planning process for University Boulevard and makes clear the scope of the case study. The next chapter describes the University Boulevard neighbourhood planning process as it actually occurred, including context, process, and outcomes.

4.2   The Neighbourhood

The University Boulevard Neighbourhood planning area is located along University Boulevard between East Mall and Wesbrook Mall at the eastern edge of campus (Figure 8). It is approximately 300 x 100 m, or 3 hectares in size, about the same as 3 Vancouver city blocks.
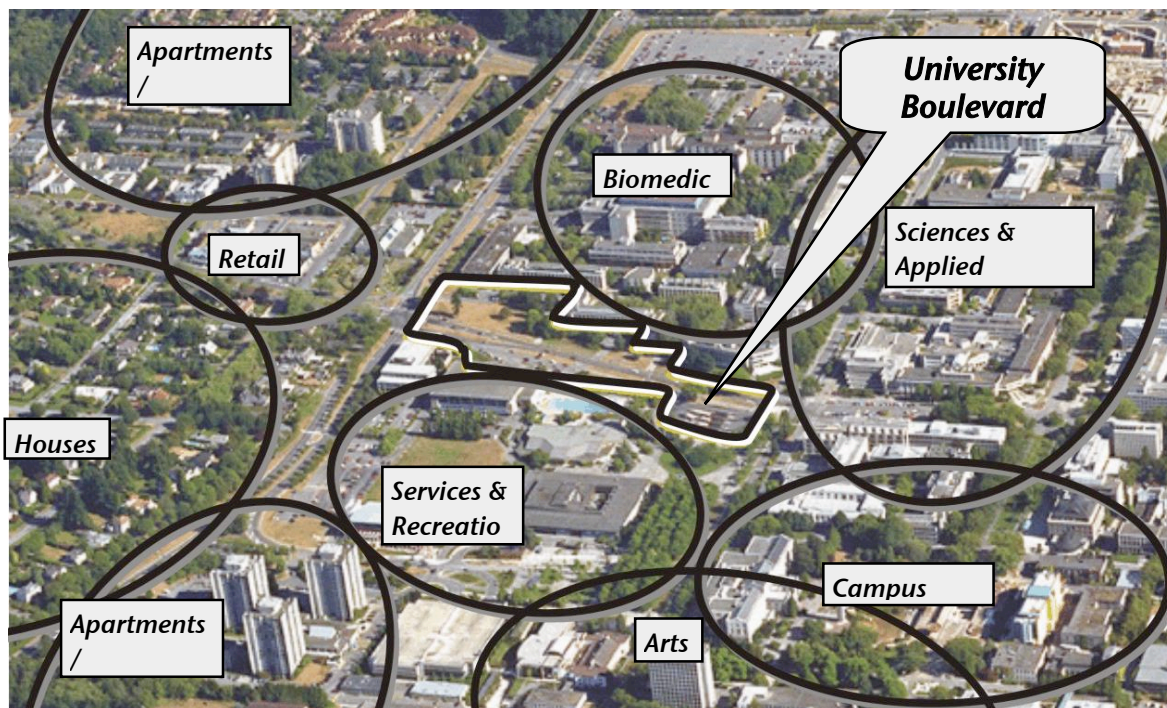

Figure 8: Oblique Aerial Photo of University Boulevard and Area[8]

The area is situated at the main entrance to the campus. Immediately north is a student-centered service and recreation area; to the East is the commercial center of the University Hill neighbourhood; the other two sides of the plan area

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[8] *adapted from the June 2001 draft University Boulevard Neighbourhood Plan, Figure P-2*

are institutional in nature, with biomedical buildings to the South and science buildings to the West. Currently, all transit buses terminate at the bus loop at East Mall and University Boulevard. All in all, its location gives University Boulevard a central role in the University, and adjacent University Hill.

4.3 The Process and the Plans

The planning process for the University Boulevard Neighbourhood Plan began officially after the approval of the CCP in December 2000. At the time, work had already been done on the Dentistry building which was to be built on the Southwest corner of University Boulevard and Wesbrook Mall. A first draft plan was produced in June 2001, and a President's committee recommended changes to that plan in 2002. A second plan in March 2003 and a third in June 2003 have since been prepared and presented publicly. Consultation on the last plan continued into September of 2003, and the Board of Governors endorsed the plan at their October meeting. The timeline in Figure 9 shows the entire planning period.