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**Brantford city councillors'
perceptions of citizen participation**

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Introduction

This research examines City of Brantford political leaders' attitudes and understandings of democracy in the municipal context, focusing specifically on the role of citizens and the potential for a more participatory local government. I conducted long-form, open-ended interviews with City of Brantford councillors, tying their responses into the broader discourses of participatory democracy and shortcomings of the current system. As a method, it looked to political leaders as a source of knowledge about how those in power think about their role as representatives and of improving citizen participation within the local democracy. Given their privileged position within the municipal institution, the councillors have both a depth of experience to reflect upon, and power to influence the participatory efforts of the municipality.

The results of the research and interview process show that City of Brantford councillors have a relatively limited vision as to how to make the institution more participatory. Their focus on improving participation largely came in terms of how it serves the current system of representative democracy, focusing on participation as a way to “inform” or “better” their decision-making as well as improving the system through a “task-based” model where citizens act as resources for the institution. The councillors questioned citizens' abilities to think in the “big picture,” positioning themselves as better equipped to make decisions for the good of the community. Participation was framed as an individual choice, with citizens given ample opportunities to make their voices heard. A number of councillors argued that apathy and lack of time were factors towards influencing non-participation, which seemed to disregard the impact of social and economic inequality on citizens' ability to more fully participate in that system.

This research project is broken down into four sections. The literature review gives theoretical context to the research process. The methods section explains the information sources and how I undertook the process. The results section summarizes the themes that arose in the interview process

and analyzes those themes. The final section includes a broad analysis of the interview themes, ties them into the literature review and offers prospects for further research.

At the highest level of abstraction, this research project offers a theoretical argument rooted in the promises and failures of liberal democracy. It argues that while democracy has at its roots in the people, the system has instead come to favour those with social and economic privilege, effectively amplifying power to the detriment of those marginalized and alienated from the system.

The theoretical argument takes the stance that while citizens have effectively won the collective rights of citizenship and voting, liberal representative democracy has failed in its promises of equality. Instead, the mechanisms of democratic institutions have come to reflect the free market, and this increasing encroachment of market-based principles has further alienated and marginalized the -demos from participation in government decision-making and expressions of power.

Moreover, it argues that the failures of representative democracy, which favours those with economic and social power, are well reflected in statistical analyses of citizens within those systems. This “democratic deficit” is seen in declining voter turnout, diminishing trust in those elected to positions of power, and a general malaise and feelings of powerlessness within the current system.

The failures of liberal democracy can be situated within four key themes which are significant to this project: powerlessness, exclusivity, a consumer-based conception of citizenship, and stagnant. The literature review expands upon these four themes then turns towards discourses of participatory democracy and how it might address the shortcomings within the current iteration of liberal democracy.

In terms of social justice, this research sees democracy, as Young argues, giving all people the “right and opportunity to participate in the deliberation and decision making of the institutions to which their actions contribute or which directly affect their actions” (1990, p.91). As outlined in the literature review, this research project assumes that citizen participation is a necessary condition for social justice, and a partial solution towards addressing the social and economic inequalities that are amplified

in the current system.

Pulling from a variety of theoretical sources, the literature review further argues that four themes of participatory democratic theory must be worked towards to address the shortcomings as outlined above. These four themes can be categorized as:

1) Participation must be rooted in power, that is, citizens must have influence on the “deliberation and decision-making” process. Voting in an election for a representative is considered a relatively powerless act, so efforts must be taken to bring the levers of institutional power and agenda-setting to *all* citizens.

2) Participation must be inclusive, that is, a participatory democratic system, as an institution, must ensure that all citizens are given the opportunity to exercise the power and agenda-setting that lies within it. This also means the institution must take extra steps to address the unequal social and economic structures that disadvantaged and marginalized citizens may face (Brady, et. al., 1994)

3) Participation must be deliberative, that is, a process by which all citizens are given the opportunity to contribute to the discussion and debate about the institution’s agenda and resource allocation.

4) Participation must be transformative, that is, the democratic process must transform ways of thinking, getting citizens to recognize the power of community and “develop the capacities to think of our own needs in relation to the needs of others” (Young, 1992, p.92). This process also contributes towards the cultivation of “civic skills,” (Brady, et. al., 1994) which contributes to citizens’ knowledge of the institutions in which they’re participating.

So, with the idea that citizen participation is a key point of struggle towards social justice, this research aims to understand how a particular set of political elites, in this case City of Brantford councillors, understand citizen participation and power in government. Through the use of long-form,

open-ended interviews, the research attempts to uncover how these elected representatives “think” about the themes that will be presented in the literature review.

The context of study section offers up a brief snapshot of the City of Brantford as an institution as well as how I came to study municipalities and some of my experiences with them. The methods section describes the participants within the study, explains the sources used outside of the interviews, which show how the City presents participation, as well as a number of ongoing initiatives which play an important role in the project. Finally, the section explains why municipalities are important when arguing for a more participatory system.

The results and discussion section expands upon a number of themes that emerged within the participant interviews. In essence, this is the “connecting of the dots” between the theoretical literature review and the primary data. It aims to show how the participants’ ideas and understandings reflect both the challenges of liberal democracy and the participatory potential of municipal government. Each theme will be presented by topic, shown how it appeared within the interviews, then tied into the theoretical approaches described in the literature review. Tensions and rifts between the theoretical understanding of democratic ideals and the participants’ own experiences will be explored.

The project’s conclusion summarizes the main points and tensions that were explored in the results and discussion sections. This section also includes a section on possible areas for further study.

Research Question/Problem Statement

This research project focuses on the City of Brantford’s elected representatives’ attitudes and perceptions of participatory democracy. The research explores how these key decision-makers understand the role of citizen participation and power within the City of Brantford’s governance.

Most clearly, this research hopes to address is the “democratic deficit”. This deficit, expanded upon in the literature review, is illustrated in increasingly poor voter turnout, declining confidence in elected representatives, as well as, most broadly, the negative impact that the capitalist system has

on the institutions that purport to operate in the name of citizens and for their benefit.

In terms of social justice this research project assumes that citizen participation is a necessary condition for social justice, and a partial solution to address political underrepresentation and non-participation that are reinforced through social and economic inequalities.

The following literature review offers a theoretical foundation to this research project. First, it defines the democratic deficit and offers research on the promises and failure of the current system of liberal democracy, which helps to situate the problems facing democracy. It also gives a brief idea of the historical context to understand the current system. Next, it offers a synthesis of the main points of the theoretical underpinnings of participatory democracy.

The promises and failures of liberal democracy

Under the liberal democratic model, the political power of citizens is expressed during the election of representatives. This gives elected officials the “authority to govern,” in the people’s interest (Cairns & Sears, 2012, p.75). Under this system, it is the act of voting that’s seen as *the* expression of citizen power, an infrequent action that asks citizens to choose a representative to act on their behalf. These leaders are considered elite by virtue of their position which gives an opportunity to “exercise much power or influence” (Merriam Webster, 2014).

The idea of an elite class of rulers is not a new one. In Plato’s *Republic*, he argued that philosopher kings were a necessity in making choices for the broader population, as they were equipped with the knowledge and expertise to understand the implications of their power (Ferrari, 2000). Plato’s predecessor agreed, similarly arguing that “governing, like other occupations, is a specialized task requiring specialized knowledge” (Cairns & Sears, 2012, p.119)

Given the increasing complexity of social and governmental structures, others have argued that there is even more of a need for an elite ruling class with the expertise and tools to understand the complexity and make decisions accordingly. John Stuart Mill, for instance, argued that the state would

sacrifice efficiency when citizens meddled in government institutions outside of electing their leaders. Besides small towns, he says, the notion of government by the people is simply impractical (Held, 1987, p.107). So, Mill's argument is that elected representatives are best able to govern a large and complex society, while maintaining some distance from the masses who are incapable of understanding such complexity (Held, 1987, p.108).

Schumpeter expressed similar ideas, seeing the electorate as “generally weak, prone to strong emotional impulses, intellectually unable to do anything decisive on their own and susceptible to outside forces” (Held, 1987, p.181). Democracy, for him, was a process, a means to the end of attaining those best suited to lead, as well as a practical way to ensure those in position of power can be kept in-check, that is to say that they cannot express undue power (Held, 1987, p.179-180).

This understanding of the inability for citizens to rule themselves has lead us down the path to the model of “competitive elitism” as outlined by Held. It is the competitive aspect of election campaigns that lead to society “choosing” the best possible candidate, a sort of democratic Darwinism (1987, p.197). This democracy, Held says, is typified by a strong Parliamentary government, competition between political elites and their perspective parties, expert bureaucrats and, most importantly, a “poorly informed and/or emotional electorate” (Held, 1987, p.197).

Rooted in the competition of elections, liberal democracy promises that those best suited to rule, regardless of social or economic background, will rise to the top. Instead, as Thomas More found in his search for Utopia, there arises a “conspiracy of the rich,” (2010, p.94) or what Hannah Pitkin calls “a new form of oligarchy” (2005, p.336)

It is at this level of competition, the most important critique of liberal/competitive elitist democracy becomes apparent, which is the assumption that all citizens have an equal ability to attain offices of power. In reality, the growth of the capitalist economy around the world has profoundly impacted the ability of citizens to participate equally in the democratic systems which purport to

represent them. As Marshall states in the twentieth century the capitalist class system has been “at war” with citizenship, arguing that the “former has imposed modifications to the latter” (1950, p.38).

Marshall outlines the historical struggle to gain and maintain three distinct rights of citizenship; one One, civil, “the rights necessary for individual freedom,” two, political, “the right to exercise power... as a member of a body invested with political authority,” and three, social, “the right to defend and assert all one's rights on terms of equality with others and by due process of law” (1950, p.30).

This research assumes that the first two rights Marshall outlined have been firmly set in place (that is individual freedom and political power in the form of voting). However, individuals' ability to defend and assert their power equally has been fundamentally skewed by the capitalist system. As Young argues, “where there are structural inequalities of wealth and power, formally democratic procedures are likely to reinforce them, because privileged people are able to marginalize the voices and issues of those less privileged” (2000, p.34). This means that while individuals may have the “right” to gain political power by running for office, the structure limits those who can run by requiring particular resources which are more accessible to individuals who already have economic power.

Moreover, as Fotopoulos argues, the ideal of growth of the capitalist economy has led not only to concentration of economic power but also the concentration of political power (1997, p.172). By virtue of capitalism's “modifications” of democratic institutions, positions of power are most readily available to those individuals with social and economic power. This can be seen most obviously in the need to fundraise for election campaigns, making those with economic power more able to attain a seat in government. These modifications or influences of capitalism on democracy can also be seen more broadly.

The development of the current social welfare state, Young argues, has reinforced the idea that citizens rights were to be found in economic rights, or “rights of recipience” (1990, p.68). This material focus, which encourages “allegiance to the system” based on goods received, served to limit the scope

of government (1990, p.69). Effectively, this meant government was tied to the “distributive paradigm,” whereby “conflict and policy discussions,” or democratic deliberation, were limited to how and where governments would allot tax dollars. In this system, based on capital's imperative of growth, citizens are encouraged to see themselves as consumers, and to “focus their energies on the goods they want” and evaluate the “government's performance according to how well it provides them with goods and services” (1990, p.71).

In practice, this means governments' main concern is balancing spending to satisfy the interests of competing individuals and groups within society. Effectively, this limits public debate around budgeting and the distribution of public money, limiting the potential for questions outside the scope of this distribution. As Benjamin Barber asserts, this consumer-based conception of the citizen portrays them as “greedy” and “self-interested,” with “freedom chained to the most banal need.” The citizen-consumer uses choice to “transform the material conditions of the world, but never to transform himself or create a world of mutuality with his fellow humans” (1984, p.22).

The influence of capitalism on democracy can also be seen in the ever-extending realm of commodification. Leaning on Marx for his analysis, Mosco defines commodification as the process of “transforming use values into exchange values” (2009, p.129). A use value, he explains, is valuable for its ability to meet human want or need, while exchange value is based upon what it can bring in market exchange (2009, 129). This concept is particularly important for democracy and the potential for renewal. Berelson argued that one of democracy's underlying assumptions is the ability to carry out public debate, or “engage in discussion” (1952, p.317). Commodification has fundamentally shaped that process. Following Mosco's argument, televised debates for example, while purporting to serve democratic interests in informing and engaging citizens, also serve the purpose of “producing audiences and delivering them to advertisers (2009, p.136). The formal process of liberal democratic deliberation has become a commodity to be consumed by citizens. Instead of conceiving citizens as

actors within the system, they are positioned as passive receptacles of political information, effectively reinforcing the consumer-based conception of citizens.

Habermas, in “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,” echoes these concerns, arguing that the privatization of media, as the purveyor of public knowledge, served to change citizens’ role from actors within the political system to mere consumers. He states that the “since the middle of the nineteenth century, the institutions that until then had ensured the coherence of the public as a critically debating entity have been weakened” (1962, p.175). The fundamental laws of the free market “also pervaded the sphere reserved for private people as a public, rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated reception.” (1962, p.161)

Further to that, he argues that the capitalist privatization of media, once an open and public practice, turned public discussion into a commodity to be consumed. “Radio stations, publishers, and associations have turned the staging of panel discussions into a flourishing secondary business,” while “professional dialogues from the podium, panel discussions, and round table shows, the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of the stars in radio and television, a salable package ready for the box office” (1962, p.164). This “transformation” has further reinforced the consumer-based conception of citizenship, positioning democratic deliberation as a package for citizens to consume instead of participate in.

The emergence of social media driven by the Internet brought about a new democratic potential at the end of the 20th century. Some heralded these online platforms as a way to host “Habermasian forums,” where all citizens could gather electronically to participate and deliberate within the public sphere (Loader & Mercea, 2011, p.757). This new age of digital democracy, they hoped, would be rooted in participation that was inclusive and deliberative, halting the flow of political power into the hands of those with social and economic power. However, these new technologies proved not as fruitful

as the democratic optimists had hoped. Instead, these new platforms were still “likely to be shaped by the existing entrenched social and economic interests of contemporary societies,” and “frequently favoured white, wealthy males to the exclusion of other identities” (Loader & Mercea, 2011, p.758). Howard also pointed out the exclusionary potential for social media, since “there are still significant portions of the population either without the technology or without the information skills to participate... online” (2005, p.183) Similarly, while there is a potential for users to take up their own causes online, these social media platforms are often dominated by the “commercial model of social media” which functions as “a means to target consumers” at a relatively low cost (Loader & Mercea, 2011, p.761). While these trends do not spell the end of an electronically-facilitated democratic renewal, the shortfalls of those technologies play an important part of this project.

With these points in mind, a bleak picture of the current democratic system emerges. The fiscal competition of elections under liberal democracy tends to favour those with economic and social privilege, meaning “women, people of colour, and poor people have continued to be grossly underrepresented in positions of power” (Cairns, 2012, p.79). Simply put, Pitkin argues that this form of representation has “supplanted democracy instead of serving it... becoming a new form of oligarchy, with ordinary people excluded from public life” (2005, p.335). Under the influence of the capitalist economy, democracy has become a spectacle fostered by private media, forcing citizens to consume instead of participate; to watch instead of engage in decision-making. Representative democracy, as Barber argues, “is incompatible with freedom because it delegates, thus alienates political will at the cost of genuine self government and autonomy” (1984, p.145). This project aims to better understand the tensions between representative and participatory systems, seeking the representatives' understandings of the potential for a more democratic institution.

Democratic deficit defined

Within the current system, there has been an increasing trend of discontent. In an unprecedented

result, the last Ontario provincial election saw over 30,000 citizens decline their ballot. While non-voting may be a sign of political apathy or distrust in politicians, the spike in declined ballots, not seen since 1975, seems to show that many citizens do not accept what is offered to them, opting instead to choose “none of the above” (Canadian Press, 2014).

This decline of official democracy is seen in a number of statistics. The first, a “diminished confidence in political institutions,” focusses on Canadian citizens’ attitudes towards the ability of governments to act in citizens’ best interest (Simeon & Lenard, 2012, p.55). A World Values Survey between 1981 and 2006 compared the proportion of citizens in advanced industrial democracies who felt confident in their legislatures. They showed that Canadians were becoming less and less confident in Parliament. Such declining levels of confidence were not demonstrated in other public institutions, such as the courts (Simeon & Lenard, 2012, p.54).

When asking non-voters why they didn’t participate in the 2000 federal election, Pammett and LeDuc found that many citizens were simply uninterested, as they deemed the possible parties and politicians unlikeable and their platforms unimportant (2003, p.5). These non-voters also may have felt their vote didn’t matter, and that the election was a forgone conclusion (Pammett & LeDuc, 2003, p.17). EKOS president Frank Graves summed it up when he pointed to the declining trust in Canada’s political institutions, “voters seem to think that all choices lead to the same outcome... the corrosive belief that the public interest has been subordinated to other interests in modern politics” (2014).

Voting has been on the decline for decades. Between the 1988 and 2004 federal election, voter turnout fell substantially, dropping from 75 per cent turnout to only 61 percent (Simeon & Lenard, 2012, p.53). In 2011, voter turnout hit a low not seen since 1898, dipping below 60 per cent (Elections Canada, 2011) Even more troublesome is the downward trend of youth participation in the federal election, which, while slightly higher in the 2011 campaign, is consistently lower than other demographics. During that campaign 20-24 year olds showed some of the lowest levels of voter turnout

amongst all demographics (Malatest & Associates, 2011, p.6). This is of particular importance as research shows that political behaviours are shaped from a young age, with young non-voters likely to continue to steer clear of participating in elections as they age (van Hamel, 2011, p.4).

The municipal level of government, of which this research takes particular aim, seems hardest hit by the changing democratic taste of citizens. Between 1982 and 2010, voter turnout hovered in the mid- to high-40 percent range, dipping to a low of 40 percent in 1997 (Association of Municipalities of Ontario, 2010).

While issues of motivation and voter frustration help to illuminate the failures of the official act of democracy, it is the structural inequality of the broader institutions that plays a more important role in this project.

To begin, “people who live in poverty over extended periods of time are the least likely to gain political representation and have few immediate or natural allies in either civil or political society” (Hickey and Bracking, 2005, p.851). For example, barriers into the campaign mode of representative democracy mean many citizens are unable to enter that arena. In 2010 the top six contenders for Brantford’s mayoralty spent over \$165,000 to run their campaigns, averaging \$27,000 each (Marion, 2011, “Big bucks”). While not simply a case of “more money, more votes,” those numbers show how the electoral system is biased towards those with economic power, privileging individuals with strong personal finances or networks of wealthy contributors.

There is also an unequal distribution of ability to participate in “unofficial” democracy. Moving beyond social and economic status as indicators of political participation, Brady et. al attempted to link the resources of time, money and “civic skills” to political participation in the United States. Defining participation broadly, such as “working in campaigns, making financial contributions, contacting public officials, attending protests, and getting involved either formally or informally on local issues,” the authors found the skills needed to politically participate are “more likely to be possessed by the

economically advantaged,” aided by greater access to education and free time (1994, p.275).

Similarly, Soss & Jacobs showed that “higher and lower income Americans... participate at dramatically different rates as a result of a variety of intersecting factors; and as a result, the voices that government officials hear from and respond to are systematically biased in favour of those with higher levels of income, education, and other closely related attributes” (2009, p.100).

To review the broad argument, the failure of liberal democracy is a tendency towards a passive, consumer-based citizenry, most likely led by those with the social and economic privilege. Moreover, democratic institutions are practically inaccessible to those who would most benefit from policies and programs which identify and address root causes of inequality.

Participation as the next step towards strong democracy

A potential solution to the problems of liberal democracy concludes this literature review. This section presents a few key tenets of participatory democratic theory that can address the exclusionary, alienating, passive nature of the current system.

Benjamin Barber's conception of “strong democracy” encapsulates the fundamental idea behind a “more” democratic system that this project aims to inform. Such a participatory system “rests on the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogenous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature” (1984, p.117). Barber's conception of a “strong” democracy is particularly effective for this project, as it emphasizes the institution's role in the potential transformation of individuals from selfish consumers to active citizens.

With participatory democracy positioned as the next logical step in the struggle for rights that Marshall outlined, this project outlines four fundamental elements that the councillors will be given an opportunity to reflect upon. These four key elements are as follows.

1. Participation is power- As Arnstein argues in “Ladder of Citizen Participation,” not all opportunities to engage with government are created equal. Simply put, she argues that “citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power” (1967, p.216). While governments may offer opportunities to weigh in on government decision-making, these efforts often fall under her categorical terms of “tokenism” and “non-participation,” whereby those in power attempt to "educate" or "cure" the participants of their beliefs. Moreover, while citizens may be asked to give their feedback on government, the power to make those decisions rests firmly in the hands of the few. At the pinnacle of her ladder is “citizen power”, which “guarantees that participants or residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and management, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which "outsiders" may change them” (p.219).

In arguing for strong democracy, Benjamin Barber also identifies the need for direct citizen control. Under his model, “active citizens govern themselves directly here, not necessarily at every level and in every instance, but frequently enough and in particular when basic policies are being decided and when significant power is being deployed” (1984, p.151). Power then, is the right and opportunity to take part in the agenda-setting and decision-making within democratic institutions. However, it is not enough to offer all individuals and groups equal opportunity to take part, which brings us to the next key element of participatory democratic theory.

2. Participation is inclusive- Recognizing that the social and economic realities of individuals may hinder their ability to participate in the deliberation that is required, participatory efforts must aim to address that inequality. Young, in arguing for an inclusive democracy, said that “the field of struggle is not level; some groups and sectors are often at a disadvantage” (2000, p.50). Her vision of an inclusive democracy “involves more than the formal equality of all individuals and groups to enter the political process, but entails taking special measures to compensate for the social and economic inequalities of unjust social structures” (2000, 50). Moreover, as Arnstein argues, the redistribution of

power lets those marginalized by the bureaucratic structures of governance, “to be deliberately included in the future” (1967, p.116).

This highlights the role of the institution in addressing social and economic inequality. For example, it is not enough to host an open forum for citizens to have their voices heard, as that opportunity privileges those without some of the practical barriers that portions of the population may face. In addressing these inequalities, the institution may offer free child care, which reduces the burden of participating on parents who may be unable to afford a babysitter. While only one example of many, the concept of “extra steps” illustrates the institutions' potential role in addressing participatory barriers for citizens.

3. Participation is deliberative- This section draws heavily on the ideas that Jurgen Habermas conveyed in his theory of communicative action. The rational-critical debate amongst individuals relies on citizens' own capacities to make rational arguments towards a search for mutual understanding and common goals (1984). In this arena, citizens come together and use rational argumentation to make their case for particular decisions, reaching mutual understandings that will steer the democratic institution's policies and practices into the future (Flynn, 2004, p.436).

It hinges upon justifying decisions, where “persons should be treated not merely as objects of legislation, as passive subjects to be ruled, but as autonomous agents who take part in the governance of their own society, directly or through their representatives” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, p.3). These “reasons,” they argue, “are meant both to produce a justifiable decision and to express the value of mutual respect,” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, p. 4).

This idea of deliberation and a gathering of citizens is a direct response to the alienating and individualizing tendencies of liberal democracy as outlined above, and helps segue into the final key element of participatory democracy.

4. Participation is transformative- When citizens come together to deliberate, they benefit as

individuals. As Young argues, in this arena citizens “develop the capacities to think of [their] own needs in relation to the needs of others”. This process, Barber says, “mandates a permanent confrontation between *me* as citizen and the “Other” as citizen, forcing *us* to think in common and act in common” (1984, p.153). Citizens, in the words of Pitkin, “discover that (some of) our personal troubles are widely shared, and are in fact implicated in public policy” (2005, p.340)

It is the sum of these individual transformations that contribute to the transformation of the whole. Shifting the conversation from “what’s in it for me” to “what’s in it for us?” As Barber argues, “Community grows out of participation and at the same time makes participation possible, civic activity educates individuals in how to think publicly as citizens” (1984, p.152).

With these key elements outlined, the next portion of the literature review explores a key theoretical aspect that informs this research project, the tensions between the models of representative and participatory democracy.

Participatory democracy within a representative system

One of the fundamental difficulties of thinking practically about participatory democracy is that there are few examples of truly democratic rule. The reality is that representative democracy has become the norm, making it difficult to think about what dramatic changes to that system would look like.

This is the crux of this research project, the tension between participatory systems of democracy and the current liberal representative system. Barber argues that “representation is incompatible with freedom because it delegates, thus alienates political” (1984, p.145). Fotopolous agreed in that “the concentration of power [within the representative system] is incompatible not only with freedom in the sense of autonomy but even with freedom in the negative sense of 'freedom from' oppression” (1997, p.175). While this research maintains the critical eye upon the ability of representatives to represent the interests of all citizens, the transformative potential of participatory democracy must begin at some

point. Those *currently* in power have the tools and the opportunities to implement measures which have a participatory aim.

Fung, in modelling citizen participation in complex governance, offers a typology that extends beyond the spectrum that Arnstein presented. In the “Democracy Cube,” participation is located along three dimensions: “who participates, how participants communicate with one another and make decisions together, and how discussions are linked with policy or public action” (2006, p.66). In essence, Fung outlines the variety of ways citizens can take part in governance, while recognizing the complexities of the current institutions which have formed over the past two centuries. One of the problems of “direct participation” that Fung points out is that there is “no canonical form” to such a system, so “modes of contemporary participation are, and should be, legion” (2006, p.68).

However, the mechanisms of participation, he argues, can address political inequality within liberal democracy by either “replacing authorized decision makers whose actions have become systematically unjust with direct citizen participation or creating popular pressures that compel authorized officials to act justly (Fung, 2006, p.71). In effect, participatory efforts can act as a “check and balance” to the inequalities of the current system.

Moreover, Fung offers the concept of “mini publics” which contrast the institutional “problems” of competitive elections and expertise-driven bureaucracies that this project argues against (2006, p.68). These mini-publics are of particular importance later on in the project when it comes to neighbourhood-level decision-making models that the councillors offered in their interviews. So, following Fung's argument, in recognizing the complex nature of the current system, participation and representative democracy must, at least temporarily, co-exist in the drive towards a re-peopled municipal institution.

Why municipalities?

This research project argues that if there is going to be an effort to address the democratic

deficit and failures of liberal democracy, it must start at the local level.

Local governments are uniquely positioned to accomplish the task of incorporating a participating public, both in terms of the relatively small scale of the population involved, as well as the concrete outcomes of democratic decision-making and agenda-setting. In arguing for empowered participatory government, Fung and Wright emphasize that it “extends the application of deliberation from abstract questions over value conflicts and principles of justice to very concrete matters such as street paving, school improvement, and habitat management” (2003, p.15).

If, for example, local citizens came together to plan a public park in their neighbourhood, the successful building of that park and its amenities would serve as a consistent reminder of the input they had into that process.

While this is a relatively simple example, other municipal and local board powers could have radical implications if their decision-making was made fully public. These powers include municipal policing (in urban contexts), education, libraries and the provision of social services (Municipal act, 2001).

Benello and Roussopolous, in making the case for a participatory democracy, argue that “people's desire for a community in which they control the decisions that affect their lives has been, from the beginning, part of the very nature of society” (1971, p.3). Municipalities in Ontario hold power, through the Municipal Planning Act, to decide how our neighbourhoods and parks take shape, how they look, and what buildings go where (Municipal act, 2011). This is of particular importance to a participatory shift in our democracy, the ability to “see” the effects of power.

Municipalities are also uniquely positioned in Canada as they do not have the barrier of political partisanship. In an extensive study of Members of Parliament leaving office, Loat and MacMillan found that “time and time again, MPs told us how decisions by party leadership seemed opaque, arbitrary and even juvenile, and how party demands inhibited their ability to serve their constituents”

(2014, p.164). Representatives at the municipal level, therefore, do not face the same barriers as those with party ties, which means there is one less barrier towards participatory democracy.

Barber argues that the nation-state democratic institutions founded hundreds of years ago are not capable of dealing with increasingly globalized and borderless problems. While national governments and international bodies seem to be mired in the bureaucracy of cross-border agreements, cities are already dealing with those problems, such as climate change, as they are on the front lines of dealing with their fallout. Cities, he states:

“Are the public spaces where we announce ourselves as citizens, as participants, as people with the right to write our own narratives... They are the places where we are born, grow up, are educated, work, marry, pray, play, get old, and in time, die. They are home. Very different than nation-states, which are abstractions. We pay taxes, we vote occasionally, we watch the men and women we choose rule rule more or less without us. Not so in those homes known as our towns and cities where we live” (2013).

Returning to the “resource model” developed by Brady et. al., communities are fundamentally important to citizens’ abilities to develop civic skills and navigate democratic institutions. It is in their interactions with family, peers, neighbours, co-workers, in churches and community groups that citizens develop these skills which are a crucial aspect of their ability to participate.

With an understanding of the theoretical background of this project, which aimed to illustrate the structural inequality of our democratic institutions and how participatory democracy can address that inequality at the local level, the project moves into the methods portion. This section explains the research process, how I approached the project, and gives context to the participants and the City of Brantford as a case study.

Work placement/reflexivity

An important piece of how this major research project took shape was the my own experience

in municipal governments and their efforts to get citizens engaged in what they were doing. This began after I graduated from Laurier Brantford's Journalism program in 2010.

With my first reporting job in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, one of my tasks was writing about the local municipal government. Though having briefly encountered the most local level of government during my education, I grappled with the seemingly antagonistic relationship between citizens and the municipal institution. It seemed, during my time there, that reporting was to be centred around conflict. As a reporter, the task was to find where citizens were unhappy with their services or where council was in conflict. The aim was to point out disagreements without positing potential solutions.

My next job as a reporter in the small northern Alberta town of Athabasca offered more insight into that tenuous relationship between local government and the people which it serves. Again, the job was to pick out the conflict, write about what's wrong, and pit municipality against municipality within the stories. While I had good intentions about informing the world, it was a struggle to report on the complexity of the municipalities' work. It seemed they were one step ahead of the story, armed with more time and more resources to control the message.

That feeling was reconfirmed when I became Communications Coordinator with one of the local municipalities. From that post, I saw what goes on behind closed doors, and that the local media could not, given their resources, cover it all. I saw council as an unrepresentative cross-section of the population, with retirees and business people dominating in terms of council seats. In one instance, after sending out a public survey to assess citizens' interest in a municipal waste pickup program, one citizen responded that no, they weren't interested in the program, but it didn't matter what they said because the government would go ahead and do it anyway.

It is that mistrust that led me to inquire further into the thesis that local governments are rolling along with policies and programs unaware of citizens' needs and wants. It was hard not to think that

things could be done better, that there was something wrong with the popular notion that governments are to be worked against, and not with. It was hard not to think about how council seats privilege those with social and economic power; that those with the time, money and connections are better able to run an election campaign and attain that power, and how people in marginalized positions were effectively left out of the conversations happening within council chambers and municipal offices.

Hoping to address some of my concerns through systematic study, I returned to Ontario to enrol in Laurier's Social Justice and Community Engagement program. The basic assumption driving the my project is that if there is any level of government that's going to foster a new age of democracy, it will be municipalities. I pondered how the governments closest to the citizenry, in their backyards, in their homes, in their everyday lives, could make the world a better place. It seemed that while higher level of governments were largely failing to address the big challenges, like climate change, an increasingly multicultural and diverse society, and the growing impact of corporate decisions on local communities, municipalities had an opportunity to take up important causes for the people. It seemed to me that while local governments had not caused the challenges they were facing, they were ready and willing to find solutions that ensured the health and wellbeing of their citizens.

This can be seen in the efforts of some American municipalities to provide their citizens with high speed internet, effectively bypassing the well-funded monopoly of national-level internet service providers unwilling to provide citizens with such services (Cosco, 2014). A city in Maine took a stand against the oil industry by banning the loading of oil products along its waterfront, a small victory against the broader environmental concerns surrounding Canada's oil sands industry (Sherwood, 2014). In the small community of Brooks, Alberta, it was the municipal government who spearheaded the relief effort after nearly 2,200 workers, who came from all over the world, were laid off after an e.coli outbreak at the XL Foods Plant (Pye-Matheson, 2013). While not necessarily driven by citizen participation, these examples suggested to me that municipalities can address large-scale problems with

local solutions.

To round out the my experiences coming into this MRP, I completed a semester of work in two departments at the City of Brantford, which gave me an on-the-ground perspective of some of the engagement that is done by the city. That experience included work on the city's marketing strategy for the upcoming municipal election, an effort to "get out the vote". As this is the first time the city has offered an online voting option, the city has also taken a particular eye towards engaging portions of the population normally disengaged from formal political processes, especially young people (Paddon, 2014).

I also also spent time with staff members from the City's Social Services Department involved with the Neighbourhood Hub initiative. This placement included interviews with community leaders and citizens involved with the Neighbourhood Hub initiative. The Hub, approved by City Council in late 2013 (Rodrigues, 2013), aims to address the detrimental impacts of poverty felt by people in the Eagle Place and East Ward neighbourhoods. The Hub coordinators, operating out of two schools in the areas, function as facilitators of this process, bringing citizens together with local leaders and service providers to understand and build upon the strengths of the community and address potential deficiencies, such as inadequate access to services (Lafreniere, 2013, p.13-14). This experience shed light on the myriad of ways the city interacts with its citizens, as well as the range of staff member attitudes towards the potential for citizens to participate more effectively within that system.

My previous experience as a journalist and municipal official have crucially informed the questions and approach in this MRP. The next section explains why the City of Brantford offers a good case study of citizen participation

Snapshot of Brantford as an institution

The City of Brantford still operates much the same way as was originally legislated by the British Crown. Every four years citizens of Brantford elect two representatives from one of five wards,

as well as a mayor who's elected at large. Operating with a committee structure, councillors make recommendations through their positions on number of committees of the whole and standing committees, with the final decisions coming to city council. Most of the city's powers stem directly from the Ontario Municipal Act, which sets out the perimeter's of responsibility of municipal governments throughout the province. The city administers these powers through five departments: the Chief Administrative Office, Community Services, Corporate Services, Public Health, Safety & Social Services, and Engineering & Operational Services. Decisions within the framework of the Municipal Act are made through votes of council, and informed by strategic planning documents, needs of the community, recommendations by staff and advisory boards/committees, as well as best practices of other municipalities. In 2014, the city operates with over 1,200 full-time employees (City of Brantford, Administration & Structure).

There are a number of ongoing efforts within the municipality that make Brantford a particularly good case to explore the dynamics between representation and broader citizen participation.

First, the city boasts 24 different committees and advisory boards on which citizens can take part. These sites of participation range from provincially mandated, in the case of, for example, the Heritage Committee, Police Services Board and Committee of Adjustment, to other non-mandatory efforts like the Multi-Use Trail and Bikeway Advisory Committee. The boards have the power to "to govern, manage or operate" their respective areas, while advisory committees are intended to "provide advice to council" (Municipal World, 26.5).

These boards and committees were pointed to numerous times by the research participants, highlighting their perceived importance in terms of participation in the local context. Even more importantly, the City recently established a task force to review how these boards and committees function, what problems they face and how they may be improved to better serve the community (City

of Brantford, Board Advisory Committee Review Task Force).

The task force released a survey to all advisory boards and committees, which helped to identify a number of ongoing issues, including having a clear mandate and goals to work towards, what they need in terms of council support, as well as how to make new members more “involved and productive” (Task Force to Review Boards and Advisory Committees Agenda, 2013). Basically, this ongoing task force aims to improve a key point of citizen participation and power for the municipality, and it makes for a rich example of the discourse around participation and its intended goals.

The city also produced a Community Involvement Framework in 2012. This framework acts as a guiding document for all efforts to engage Brantford’s citizens. It outlines the guiding principles of involvement, the foundational importance of citizen involvement in terms of representative democracy, how different options for involvement fall into a continuum, as well as a step-by-step guide which all staff members are to take when engaging the community (MyBrantford, 2013). In this research project, the framework acts as both a foundational document which describes the perspective the institution takes on citizen involvement, as well as a concrete item for councillors to reflect upon in the interviews.

The framework states that “participation in the municipal government process helps Council understand the needs and priorities of the community, so they can make decisions with the community perspective in mind”. Moreover, the document makes the case that effective participation makes for “decisions that are often more reflective of the community concerns and values” (MyBrantford, 2013).

The Neighbourhood Hub initiative is also an important participatory effort. In an attempt to address high levels of poverty, and the subsequent detrimental impacts on health and wellbeing, the hub initiative takes an asset-based community development approach that builds upon the strengths of the communities and encourage citizens to help support their neighbours. The hubs, based in the Eagle Place and East Ward neighbourhoods, aim to bring service providers to a central location, in this case

local schools, to improve access for citizens and foster a greater sense of community. They are also relevant sites of participation for this project, as they are rooted in the idea of bringing in citizens from the relatively ‘disadvantaged’ neighbourhoods to connect, identify and address the needs of their fellow neighbours (Lafreniere, 2013, p.37)

The City of Brantford also boasts a number of Neighbourhood Associations, which again, were pointed to by a number of participants as examples of local participation. Most recently, DNA, the Downtown Neighbourhood Association took root in an effort to give residents a concerted voice in an area that had only had representation from the business community (Ball, 2014). Citizens in Eagle Place, a neighbourhood in the southwest corner of the city, created their own neighbourhood association in an effort to combat vandalism and crime, taking a particular eye at engaging youth in activities like art and sport (Marion, 2009).

The city has a hand in starting these groups up as well, offering seed money to promote the growth of the associations and get them started effectively. Currently, their website boasts 22 functioning neighbourhood associations across the city, which host volunteers that, among other things, put on neighbourhood events and maintain recreational facilities such as ice rinks (City of Brantford, Neighbourhood Associations).

In promoting the concept of such associations, the City’s website states that “a Neighbourhood Association is the most effective tool for creating power, inventing solutions and providing care” and that they provide “the power to decide how we could do what needs to be done” (City of Brantford, Neighbourhood Associations). Both of these claims are particularly interesting in terms of this research project, as it seeks out potential venues where the city could bring power to citizens within the framework of the current representative system.

The addition of online voting rounds out the “why” of studying Brantford. Many other

municipalities have introduced an online voting option for their citizens, and as the first foray into e-voting, the City framed it as a way to increase voter turnout while targeting youth, a demographic of the population known for their non-participation (Paddon, 2014).

Methods

Participants and the recruitment process

Participants for this research project were drawn from the eleven members of the City of Brantford's legislative body of Council. The research process was founded upon the anonymity of the participants. The importance placed on anonymity was designed to give councillors a chance to discuss what they feel was important and not worry about being "on the record" where their responses could be publicized and reflect poorly upon them. To maintain connections between their responses, each councillor was given a number. Throughout the results and analysis section they are identified as Councillor 1, Councillor 2, etc.

Of the ten members of council and one mayor, two are female, falling short of what the United Nations calls an "important benchmark" of 30 percent of female representatives (UN Women, 2014). Most are in their 40s or older, and none are visible minorities. Many own/run their own business, while a number of others are retired, with at least two coming from the education sector (City of Brantford, Members of Council).

Using the provided phone numbers of councillors from the City website I called all ten councillors and Mayor as the first point of contact. Those who answered were given a brief summary of the project and what they would be asked to do, then asked if they would like to participate (Appendix A). Those who showed interest in participating in the project were sent a follow-up email which included a longer explanation of the project and the required consent statement that they were to sign at the beginning of the interview process (Appendix B). Those who agreed to participate in the research process were asked to provide a number of times and locations for which to conduct the interviews.

Interview process

The interviews were conducted from June 3 to 20, taking place in a private room on the Laurier Brantford campus or at the councillor's office at City Hall. The interview times ranged from 35 to 65 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded on an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder WS-500M.

The research employed a semi-structured interview process to get an understanding of the participants' "situated or contextual accounts and experiences" (Mason, 2002, p.65). Using a long-form interview with open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect on their own experiences, giving them the chance to demonstrate the importance they placed upon each. The open-ended question also gives me insight into what the participants thought of first, or not at all. While the interviews followed the same basic question structure, at some specific points the participants were asked to expand upon something that was said. In some cases, I asked the participants to "explain" or "talk a little more about that." In other cases, I asked for justification, the "why" behind their viewpoint or experience. In a few cases, I pointed to some of his own experiences with the municipality to anchor the question, an effort to give an example of how participation may be lacking in some instances for which the participants could reflect upon.

Generally speaking, the interviews were designed to get participants thinking and talking about the successes and challenges of getting citizens to participate in the City's municipal government, their role in fostering that participation, as well as how things could or should be changed to address the participatory shortcomings of the current system.

The interview questions can be broken down into four categories.

The first category of questions asked councillors to describe participation and its role in the City of Brantford's governance. The first question stems directly from the Community Involvement Framework, which posits participation as a "key to democratic legitimacy." It was simply "what about participation improves democracy?" Similarly participants were asked "what participation looks like"

and “a time where they felt democracy was in action”. These questions aimed to establish a baseline of how councillors think about participation and democratic activity by citizens.

The second set of questions focussed on the practicality of participation. Here I asked councillors what’s working, what are the barriers, and what could the city, as an institution, do to improve opportunities for citizens to participate. These questions were designed to get the councillors to reflect upon what they think is the ‘best’ way to currently get citizens to participate, as well as discuss what barriers (personal or institutional) citizens may face in terms of participation. They aim to understand the attribution of ‘responsibility’ in terms of participation. Is it the citizen or the institution’s responsibility to ‘make’ participation work? The final question asks what the city could practically do to address those barriers.

The third category of questions sought to reveal the ‘participatory vision’ of the councillors. The first question asked, “if you could imagine a more participatory democracy, what would it look like?” In a sense, this gets away from the practical or pragmatic approach of the second line of questioning, asking participants to use their imagination to think about a ‘perfect’ participatory system. The second question within this set asked “how or where do you think citizens could take control of decision-making?” This was an effort to elicit responses about what municipal processes or powers could be returned to the citizens. In both questions, the ‘imaginary’ process was emphasized by asking the participants to discard current legislative or monetary boundaries of the current system.

The final set of questions asked the councillors to reflect upon their own position within the participatory system. The first asked how they facilitate participation, which gets to the root of how the councillors perceive their role in promoting participation of citizens within the representative system. The second question in this set asks more bluntly, “why do we need representatives?” This, ideally, helps to identify how the councillors think about citizens and the capacity to construct a more democratic system. It also aims to have councillors reflect upon what makes them different from the

everyday citizen, which also helps to paint a picture of how they see the citizen. Both are important elements of understanding how councillors think about citizens and, in turn, how that might influence their understanding of participatory efforts.

Transcribing and post-interview process

After the interviews were complete I transcribed each using a digital word processing program. The transcription process was completed between June 6 and June 28. Some portions of the interviews were left out due to a risk of identifying the participants or inapplicability to the project's subject matter. These portions amounted to a very small proportion of the interview, and were indicated as being omitted for ethical reasons with a square bracket within the transcriptions. The transcriptions were also anonymized, with each councillor participant given a number.

The transcriptions were then emailed to the participants, who were asked if they would "like to change, remove, or add comments to any of the questions within the transcript." Participants were given until July 10 to submit such additional information or modifications of their primary answers. They were also given the opportunity to receive the final major research project.

Ensuring an accurate representation of participants' views and experiences was of paramount importance to this research. In this case, validity was achieved through iterative research steps, which would involve sharing ongoing research findings and interpretations with the participants of the study to ensure their attitudes and understandings are conveyed in a truthful manner, as well as giving them the ability to expand or clarify on their responses (Mason, 2002, p.252).

The next step was identifying themes within the transcribed interviews. These themes, broadly categorized by their corresponding set of questions, were further broken down by similarities and differences between councillors as well as what was *not* said. Effectively, this process aimed to paint a picture of what was common in their understandings of citizen participation and power, where their opinions diverged significantly, and what important elements, if any, were notably absent from their

understandings of the subject matter. These findings will be expanded upon in the results section.

Section One: Participation, what is it good for?

The first question asked councillors how participation adds to democratic legitimacy, a term taken directly from the City's Community Involvement Framework. The question was designed to get councillors to reflect on the democratic function of participation. The second question, "what does participation look like?" took a similar approach, asking councillors to think about how citizen participation works in the municipal context. The third question within this section asked councillors about a "time where they felt democracy in action."

All three questions lead to some interesting insight into how they position participation within the broader governance of the city. Some responses from other questions that fit well into these themes are included in this section. Three themes were apparent within this theme. The first had councillors positioning participation as a way to enhance council's decision-making, acting as a way to bring diversity of knowledge and unique insight from citizens. The second theme explores the frame of citizen participation as a resource¹ to be utilized by the City, getting citizens to do work traditionally accomplished by city workers. The final theme explores the concept of participation as an educational process by which citizens learn about the city as an institution, as well as a process of empowerment within the community.

The most frequent theme that arose from the interviews was the idea of participation as an information source for council. Citizen participation effectively adds to their ability to make better decisions.

"It certainly makes for, from our point-of-view, better decision-making," Councillor 4 stated.

¹ The theme of "citizens as resources" is distinct from the "resource model" introduced by Brady et al. in the literature review. The "resource model" showed how civic skills (the ability to navigate complex institutions) are correlated to socio-economic status, meaning marginalized individuals are less able to participate within the institution. The theme of "citizens as resources" emerged through the research participant's responses focusing on how citizens can do "work" for the municipality through their participation.

They continued on with an example of how citizen participation functions in terms of informing the city's efforts on a new housing project.

“Staff gets a lot of feedback because generally you cannot, unless you actually know the neighbourhood and know the people, the quality of the information isn't as good. And you notice it from the start of a project until after you've had public input and dialogue to what happens in the end... So the information is better, it's much more reliable and closer to the ground where the people are going to have to live with the decision.”

From this perspective, participation of citizens adds a type of knowledge which can not be achieved by staff or council. The theme of ‘citizen perspective’ came up a number of times. In one example, Councillor 1 discussed the work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, again positioning different citizen ‘perspectives’ as a way to add to council's knowledge. “They're out there, in their wheelchairs everyday, looking at or coming across barriers for themselves.”

That councillor also reflected on the idea of a ‘diversity’ of opinions to inform council decision, stating, “You're still looking at more people providing different opinions on an ongoing basis as opposed to just that one day they vote.”

The idea of participation as a supplement to council's efforts was common. Councillor 5 positioned participation as a way to affirm the direction of council, stating that it “assures that we're not making a mistake or that we're going in the right direction.” The same councillor continued in that vein, with particular attention to the planning and development process. “They identify what some of the issues are, because by the time you get to the formal session, it's hard to make changes. So the staff can pick up on concerns early, they can get the developer to look at them, and try to accommodate them, that sort of thing.”

Councillor 3 pointed out that the ‘informal participation’ of citizens may lead council to reversing decisions. “We've had a number of times here maybe when something like a 10 to 1 vote at

committee of the whole and it passes, then we receive comment from the public and recognize that the council really was not on the same page as the residents.” In this case, citizen participation acted as a ‘check’ on council decisions.

That councillor made a clear distinction between ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ participation, again touching on the theme of participation as a supplement to council’s knowledge. The informal participation comes in the form of citizens reacting to decisions. “Of course there's informal participation, and councillors receive that everyday from members of the public. Congratulations for this, shame on you for that, here's a better view of things.” The formal process, the councillor said, “typically involves establishing a meeting process and really then just letting everybody have their say” which “help[s] to guide the course of the municipality.”

The second theme that arose from this series of questions illuminates the idea of citizen participation as a resource for the city to use. While the first theme touches on the idea of information as a resource, some of the councillors made it more explicit. Councillor 2 touched on both themes in responding to the question “what about participation improves democracy?”

“Members of council or elected officials will have their own mindset as to what is and what is not, what works and what does not work. And if they've been doing it long enough, they tend to lose sight of what the key issues are,” they stated, adding that participation helps council “stay grounded.” Again, the idea that citizen participation adds a unique perspective to a potentially out-of-touch council becomes apparent. In the same answer the councillor said that citizens “have resources that as an individual, an elected official will never have... so it's important to recognize that they too have skills, they too have assets, they too have abilities to get things done, where we may fall short.”

While not stated explicitly as a resource, Councillor 1 pointed out the work of citizens in leading initiatives as democracy in action. “It's that individual taking the time, taking the initiative, number one to call [me], and then taking the time to go out and petition their neighbours and then

giving it to me, we give it to staff, they do the report, it comes to council, it gets approved.” Again, participation is framed as a citizen doing ‘work’ to accomplish their goals, with council only there to approve the final product.

The theme of citizen participation as a resource appeared much more explicitly in Councillor 3's response to the question of how participation improves democracy. The councillor discussed the ongoing efforts to reform the city's committee/advisory boards to be more effective. “We're really trying to find out how we can involve people in municipal governance, not necessarily democracy, but in municipal governance to help frame a better city, that requires less in terms of hired resources and more in terms of volunteer resources.” This response effectively frames participation as a way for the city to save money.

The same councillor, in a response to a question further along in the interview, gave a few examples of volunteer committee members doing “work that you'd ordinarily expect to see a City employee do.” They pointed to members of the Multi-Use Trail and Bikeway Advisory Committee putting on public events, such as trail rides, and Heritage Committee members doing public outreach and speaking engagements.

In a similar response, and outside of the first set of questions, Councillor 6 pointed to the necessity of volunteers to possess “skills” outside of their willingness to participate on committees. “If you have people that are really gung-ho, really enthusiastic about doing something for the community, but don't have the skills or the background to help things along. You can't just have an opinion... It's great to have enthusiastic people, but they've got to have the rights skills. Need the right people in the right seats, with the right skills to get to that destination.”

Councillor 2 responded to that idea of framing volunteers as a resource to be utilized, pointing to the potential backlash from the people doing the volunteering. In speaking from the citizen's perspective, they said it would be “insulting” to be treated as simply a resource, driving the point home

with, “you want to piss me off, treat a volunteer as a tool for saving money.” This response came from another set of questions, but fits well as a contradiction to the theme of participation as a resource.

Councillor 1 rounds out the first category of questions, bringing up a concept unique in the responses about how participation improves democracy. This councillor touched on the educational potential for citizen participation. “It's also good to have the community engaged because, like anything, as you are growing up, that's how you learn, by participating and taking ownership.... They learn, number one, about the processes and what happens at City Hall and the different types of things, say a resolution has to go through.” In this case, participation benefits citizens by teaching them how things work.

But it goes deeper, as the councillor continued with an example of citizens creating a petition, “That's democracy working... giving them the opportunity, empowering them with the petition. And then as they go along and they get the momentum. That feel-good is there because you're doing something, you're being proactive for your community, your immediate community, which is where you live.” For this councillor, participation can be both a process whereby citizens learn how City Hall works, as well as one that contributes to their personal fulfillment.

Analysis

Within the first theme where councillors focus on citizens as information sources to inform decision-making emerges the apparent recognition of knowledge that cannot be attained through government processes. The key observation councillors made around this theme is that sufficient knowledge cannot be attained through government processes. Pointing out how citizens bring their lived experience to inform council's decision-making process is an important aspect of fostering a more participatory institution. The emphasis on citizens' privileged knowledge hints towards the necessity of bringing citizens into the governing process to ensure their experiences are recognized and acted upon. In advocating for such improvements, the councillors assume that citizen participation is part of getting

the right information to ensure that council makes a sound decision; one that reflects the needs of the people impacted by it. As Councillor 2 indicated, this would help the city recognize issues in development, for example, before they are too far along in the process to make changes.

Critically however, the frame of citizens as information sources is weak in terms of building citizen power. While there is an advantage in citizens sharing their experiences, there is no assurance that their feedback will be acted upon. It can also be tied into the theme of citizen participation as resources, effectively positioning citizens and their knowledge as a way to manage controversy during the decision-making process.

Second, viewing participation as a resource reflects and reinforces the encroachment of market-based principles within municipal governance. With councillors framing someone's skills or abilities as a precursor to their potential to participate in the governance of the municipality, the potential for participatory inequality continues. Returning to the model outlined by Brady et al. in the literature review, citizens from higher socio-economic statuses have more chances at developing the skills that are required to participate. While leaving out those not-privileged to such experiences, it also contributes to a negative feedback cycle, whereby those without the civic skills required to join a committee are not given the opportunity to develop those skills, therefore limiting their potential to participate in the future. In essence, seeing citizens as resources may potentially close the door to what Councillor 1 pointed out as the educational and transformative potential for participation.

Overall, the councillors' perceptions of what participation looks like and how it enhances democracy focused more on citizens as resources, as opposed to a more robust model of participation as democratic transformation. Councillors also failed to recognize the unequal distribution of power embedded within the existing system, as well as the inherent inequality of who is more or less able to benefit from the methods of participation envisioned. The following section of results and analysis helps flesh out a deeper understanding of what the councillors perceive as barriers to participation as

well as their practical approaches to addressing those barriers.

Section two: The practical reality to participation

The second set of questions hones in on the practicality of participation, asking councillors what's working, what are the barriers, and what could the city, as an institution, do to improve opportunities for citizens to participate. These questions were designed so the councillors could reflect upon what they think is the best way to currently get citizens to participate, as well as discuss what barriers (personal or institutional) citizens may face in terms of participation. In other words, is it the citizen or the institution's responsibility to make participation work? Once again, the final question asks what the city could practically do to address those barriers.

Throughout the interviews the councillors identified and expanded upon numerous successes and barriers to participation particular to the City's governance. This section explores the practical side of their responses, looking at their real world experiences of what is and isn't working when it comes to citizen participation.

One of the most common responses to this section of questions centred around the role of traditional and social media.

Councillor 7 painted a particularly grim picture of the state of local media in Brantford, stating: "We don't have TV station like CHCH. We have Rogers... controlled out of Cambridge/Kitchener-Waterloo. We have very little influence and the number of hours we have for television here are limited and it's not really good... The [Brantford] Expositor... has very little local content other than the immediate two or three pages, but no local editorial... and the AM station is not even allowed to say Brantford... newspapers are struggling to stay alive... reporters are struggling to keep their jobs and that's what they're caring about. So our ability to communicate through the media is almost non-existent."

The councillor continued, tying in the idea that there may be citizens out there "who might be

willing to [volunteer], but don't know how to. And we don't have the mechanisms in place to properly do that.”

However, Councillor 7's views were not shared by all their colleagues. Councillor 3 seemed happy with the city's promotive efforts, saying that information is “readily disseminated by media,” continuing, “I think we do a pretty good job here in terms of dissemination of information about what the City council does here. It's all televised... So we get that kind of public interaction and [citizens] inform themselves based on what they see and watch on the TV.”

Councillor 5 had an interesting take, arguing that it seemed higher levels of participation in voting in the higher levels of government might be due to media coverage, saying, “I think that there's a lot of coverage of what Prime Minister does, what happens in parliament, and maybe not as much coverage of Queen's Park and locally.”

That same councillor pointed to a multimedia approach to ensuring citizens show up at City events. They said, “I'm really big on using online stuff like Facebook and Twitter, getting people to retweet... We had successful ward meetings because we promoted them,” going on to explain how that success came also from compiling emails lists, posting posters at local stores and getting citizens to “retweet” and share social media posts. “You can't just put an ad in the paper and say, okay we've let everybody know. It doesn't work... the way marketing really works is that you need to come at people from several angles.”

Councillor 4 discussed electronic media as an “answer” to “increasing the participation and making it more immediate,” stating that “I can sit at council now which I never used to be able to do, and we can be discussing something, and I can get an email from someone saying, hey what about this, or that, which never used to happen... And the fact that most members of council have Twitter or email, people can get to us and they're aware of that, is huge from a participation point of view.”

The same councillor said that electronic and social media are valuable in their ability to “get a

message out in a hurry and... connect with younger people.” But they weren’t totally sold on social media, saying that “it drives me crazy” and the “lack of responsibility is the part that's most disturbing.”

Councillor 7 turned a similarly skeptical eye on social media. “You have to try to do real time stuff, so it's forcing us to look at social media, but it's effective to a point,” they said, segueing into a story about “dealing with trolls” and how constant bombardment from citizens online can “affect your psyche.” The councillor continued with the difficulty in dealing with such unconstructive criticism, saying, “Don't engage, you can't win. You're always going to look defensive, and it's a problem.” Success-wise, the councillor pointed to a more “personal” approach to social media, whereby they share photos and videos of events that they attend. “People follow me, to see what I do in a day... It's a very personal thing, but people like to be engaged in it.”

In that regard, Councillor 6 added, “Twitter, I've never used it, but feedback you get from others is that you get feedback from anybody and everybody, and they don't identify themselves, don't know if they're friend or foe, whether they're being serious or whether they're just joking.”

Councillor 3 rounds out this theme, with a poignant metaphor about the use of social media. “A lot of the councillors, me included, have Facebook and Twitter accounts and we try to be moderately active. But it's like fishing, you can throw as many hooks in the water as you want, but if the fish aren't biting, nothing's coming into the boat.”

Tagging onto the discussion of electronic and social media, another theme which arose as a response to e-issues, was the concept of more direct methods of communication. In response to the rise of social media, Councillor 6 said, “the older generation likes to pick up the phone and talk to people face to face as opposed to Twitter or Facebook... I always like to look people in the eye. If you want honest feedback, that's the way to do it. ” Similarly, that councillor said, “With emails, any electronic, you don't know what the facial expression or body language is like. I think it's always best to go see

someone face to face, if that's possible," which hints at a broader critique of social/electronic media.

Councillor 2 took a more in-depth approach on how to go about facilitating positive interaction of citizens when they discussed their work in creating dialogue in groups.

"You want to engage people? You want volunteers to be involved and you want to have good dialogue? Create a circle. Even if it's a semi circle... people across the room can now engage with one another as well, and that kind of works very well."

That councillor pointed to a dynamic of non-listening, where hearing was "just an auditory response." They expanded on this idea, saying that there's a "perception... probably a very truthful perception, that when you sit down in a room with politicians and bureaucrats, and you express your ideas, they're not acted on." Again, that 'non-listening' contributes to feelings of "unappreciation", which the councillor summed up with, "you didn't respond to meet their need or their idea... it's a sure fire way to make them feel like shit."

Councillor 2's idea of unappreciation can be tied into their broader discourse of "respect" for citizens who participate. They said that volunteers who come together on committees and task forces are often victim to "the almighty brush off," of which "politicians... are well noted for." Pointing to an example of a citizen committee dedicated to reexamining the City's ward boundaries, the councillor said that the hiring of an independent consultant to "review their work" was perceived as Council "[dumping] all over them." This, the councillor said, contributes to a broad example of the causes of non-participation, "when people see that, there's reluctance for anybody to volunteer."

To address that problem, Councillor 2 said to "respect the information and the efforts that they absolutely make" and to find a way to give criticism "without the negative hoopla... [because] I can't imagine anybody else who wants to put themselves out as a volunteer to be hammered."

The third theme which emerged from this set of questions focuses on the role of City staff in terms of fostering participation. In this case, they were viewed as a barrier to be overcome to address

non-participation.

Tying into the theme of respect for citizens, Councillor 5 pointed out the process where citizens get “shuffled off to another department” when they contact City Hall with problems. That councillor pointed to an ongoing effort to reform the City’s call answering system whereby “the staff are trained to answer almost all the questions.... You give the answers to the person when they call.” Councillor 5 said that the changes “would help with participation because people would have less of a negative attitude towards their municipal government.”

Councillor 3 pointed to the dynamics between citizens members of committees and boards, who are sometimes, “diametrically opposed to a municipal department.” This opposition, they explained, involves committee members taking opposite views of seniors managers, “which requires a lot of conflict resolution.” While this councillor brought up citizen volunteers in opposition with public servants, Councillor 2 pointed to what seemed to be a bigger problem for participation

The councillor pointed to a number of examples where citizens had taken over maintenance responsibilities on portions of public land. One individual, who had taken care of a slice of land, was unable to assume that responsibility for a short period of time. “He needs the city to help cut the grass on an interim basis. And the City crapped all over him,” he explained, “Here's a guy that's volunteering... and you want to pull it away from him. And it was a fight, it was an absolutely fight, to the point where, forget it, we'll go out as councillors and cut the lawn if we have to.” That, the councillor explained, created “tension” between council and staff.

Councillor 2 said these were examples where “volunteers come out and the city pulls back and says nah, they really shouldn't be doing that, and there's resistance... Could be front line staff worried about losing their jobs, or [diminishing] their capacity and role in the community, and their employment.” So, he explained further along, citizens who are willing to participate may face, “parochial behaviours, technical behaviours, that close doors to this kind of stuff.”

The concept of technical behaviours provides a logical transition into the final theme that arose from this category of questions. Two councillors named bureaucratic language as a barrier to citizen participation. Councillor 5 stated, “Very often the people that work in City Hall in the various departments, they speak a different language. Planners speak planese, financial people speak financial language, and engineers speak a different language.”

Councillor 5 agreed, pointing to the potential backlash when bureaucrats and councillors speak ‘above’ their audience. “There are people that want to come out and volunteer because they're hardworking with their hands and they're lucky if they have a grade 8 or grade 9 education,” they explained. “It makes sense to come down to a level that makes them feel comfortable.”

That councillor also pointed to the style and content of public presentations, arguing it's more effective to simplify slideshows with key words and engage citizens by asking for questions throughout. “[Presentations] were so technical that anybody that wanted to ask a question would be scared to death to ask a question.” The councillor concluded that staff should “soften the technical jargon” and “give [citizens] an ability and confidence to ask the questions.”

Analysis

It seemed significant that only one councillor pointed to the potential for electronic media to speed up how citizens get their information to councillor. Most of the other councillors presented social media, and media in general, as a way to “promote”, “market,” or “get the message out,” which fit them well within the “commercial model of social media” which Loader and Mercea pointed out (2011, p.761). Similarly, while Councillor 4's comments on citizens emailing during meetings is a significant insight into making citizen participation more immediate within the current system, the addition of immediate communication via electronic media is still limited in terms of citizen power, as councillors maintain the power to choose which emails, texts, or tweets to inform their decisions. Moreover, these

one-off communications may foster what Howard called “thin citizenship,” a process where citizens can “respond quickly to political urges and need not spend significant amounts of time contemplating political matters” (Howard, 2005, p.185).

The discussions of anonymity and “troll” behaviour online seems to indicate a broader cynicism, where social media is an arena of unconstructive criticism and insults. Digital media may even foster that problem, as “the technology is designed to give prominence to selected voices, favouring the opinionated over the informed by giving the former representation through opportunities to express outrage” (Howard, 2005, p. 185). Moreover, while the availability to information online has expanded, the private action of consuming the information does not foster a recognition of “collective needs,” and requires only “thin citizenship” within governance (Howard, 2005, p.186). So, while the councillors may recognize the potential for electronic media to enhance their own decision-making, their conceptions lack in terms of fostering a better process of inclusive deliberation.

Similarly, the councillors’ responses focusing on how face-to-face interactions with citizens are “better” than electronic methods, indicated their understandings of the limitations of new technology to foster better public deliberation. Meanwhile, the preference towards face-to-face interactions again is limited by those citizens willing and able to participate in such forums.

What was missing throughout the responses about media was how to foster better deliberation of citizens online, that is, how can social/electronic media sites serve as more than a conduit to getting information to council and act as more than the realm of anonymous trolls looking to insult and demean public discourse. There is no doubt new media can contribute to a more inclusive and deliberative democratic institution, but this theme provoked more questions than answers.

The two councillors’ ideas about the tendencies towards jargon and bureaucratic language in public meetings are particularly important in creating a more participatory system. Similarly,

Councillor 5's concept of "professional languages" used in public meetings hints towards the a professionalization of the institution, which progresses towards further exclusivity and therefore limiting accessibility to the institution. That trend is the opposite of the positive feedback cycle needed to foster greater participation.

While it's easy to recognize the importance of engaging citizens on a technical level that they understand, it was surprising that language as a barrier to participation was not considered in terms of immigration. With more than ten percent of Brantford's citizens coming from outside of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013), the troubles of non-English speakers in navigating public institutions was never brought up as a problem.

The theme of municipal staff members as a potential barrier for citizen participation was another surprise. While council is responsible for setting the agenda and budget, it is up to (mostly) staff members to see initiatives through, effectively having the potential to make or break participatory initiatives. It is also useful to mention that particular city staff members and whole departments were noted for their participatory efforts..

Section 3: Visions of a participatory future

The third section examines councillors' vision of a more participatory future. It is an extension of my focus on the practical efforts of politicians to address the barriers and participatory shortcomings of the whole city. The answers to the questions: "if you could imagine a more participatory democracy, what would it look like?" and "how or where do you think citizens could take power?" led to the formulation of two broad themes within the category.

The section first consists of further discussions about improving the current committee and board structure. This theme had councillors discussing the potential for giving boards either more "autonomy" or a "sense of purpose". While not all the responses within this theme came from the "participatory vision" section of questions, the theme fits well within the councillors' conceptions and

ideas for a more participatory system. The second theme involves councillors' emphasis on improving participation by specific neighbourhoods, which focusses on the participatory approach of the Parks and Recreation department and neighbourhood associations as a way to model that participation.

Councillor 4 articulated the core of the first theme well. In the current committee structure, citizen participants "don't know" about the broader issues, including budgeting, within the limitations imposed by the municipality's finite resources. "A lot of times, when volunteers start on an advisory board they'll presume that because they have ideas and advice that that's going to become policy. And because they have a very small concept of all the information, they don't know the whole picture," Councillor 4 said. The councillor's answer to creating a better participatory system involved reforming the committee structure to be more "task-oriented for specific jobs and projects". The councillor went on to state that starting the committees off with a better idea of the budgetary constraints and what they're limited by would be a good start to a more system that's more appealing to volunteers.

Councillor 1 echoed the problems of the committee structure, "once [volunteers] are there, no one's really coming up with that sense of purpose and... some of the people that are new are looking towards staff or councillors saying "what do we do?" In envisioning a more participatory system, Councillor 1 talked about a "task force or study group" model, where there's "a beginning, and end, and a purpose. So you're there for a purpose, you work on it, you accomplish it, you move on."

In recognizing that a lack of a "sense of purpose" tends to drive participants away, Councillor 6 argued that "council needs to get its act together first... before we can think about involving the public." Getting their act together means "providing a consistent voice, consistent direction to the public in order for them to be attracted to participate as a public member." In envisioning a more participatory system, Councillor 6 took the stance that participation would be improved if "the public are not actually making the decision... but we as a council are saying here's the parameters, here's the expectations, here's the timelines, go to it."

Describing the same problem, but with a different take on a solution, Councillor 2 argued that Council and staff need to “relinquish a bit of authority.” In thinking about places in which citizens could take decision-making and agenda-setting power, Councillor 2 pointed to the Committee of Adjustment, which is a “quasi-judicial’ committee that somewhat apart from council and makes legally binding decisions. Pushing power back to citizens, the councillor argued, would involve taking similar steps with other committees, where the decisions made at the board level only come to council for ratification. In touching on a previous theme, the councillor identified that council should be confident enough in board decisions to ratify their decisions without a staff member there to “rationalize” the recommendation.

Anticipating the next theme Councillor 4 identified the Parks and Recreation Board as a particularly good example of a board that “can make a lot of decisions individually [up] to a certain amount of money.” Within the budget constraints dictated by council, it could be neighbourhoods and their associations who come together and plan how park space is used. In the Parks and Recreation example, councillors use the department as an exemplar for modelling other department's participatory approaches, focusing in on the “bottom up” and “neighbourhood driven” approach that it takes.

When asked where power could be given back to citizens, Councillor 5 identified the Parks & Recreation Department's “attitude,” where “planning for recreation and recreation programming and facilities should be from the bottom up.” As the Parks and Recreation Department is also responsible for the cultivation of neighbourhood associations, the councillor pointed to a “philosophy of neighbourhood driven policy and development” as a potential for a more participatory future. This was discussed at length by other councillors.

Speaking on the growth of neighbourhood associations over the last decade, Councillor 1 said they've been so successful because it's citizens “taking things into their own hands” and “when you take ownership, empowerment happens and [it's] a great cycle to get into.” The power of

neighbourhoods became a participatory focal point for other councillors.

Councillor 2 pointed to neighbourhood associations as a way to 'focus' the voices of many citizens. "If we all sat in a room, 94000 people and voiced our opinions and our thoughts, wow, you would just hear white noise." To address that problem of 'too many voices,' the Councillor explained a forum in which individual neighbourhood associations would come together and make decisions, appoint a representative, who would then come to a meeting of all the neighbourhood association representatives. That process helps to focus all the voices of citizens participating at the neighbourhood association level, which can then be presented to council as one, instead "of hearing 1000 voices, or 94,000 voices."

Councillor 7 referred to the potential of implementing "community action networks," through which, much like in Councillor 4's example of citizens working within council-identified constraints, wards would be given a certain amount of money each year and neighbourhood associations decide how it is spent. That councillor said, "you get participatory democracy in action in their backyards" because "there's more of an attachment to neighbourhoods." In explaining that point, the councillor identified a move to "take it back to the street level again," where neighbourhoods identify and deal with local issues while the higher level decisions are saved for council. "Instead of trying to make them come to us and tell us, this is what we want you to do... here's \$50,000 for your neighbourhood this year, figure out how you want to spend it and then let us know and the councillors will work it out with you."

The point of decentralization, that is, stretching the institution out to the neighbourhood level was also identified by Councillor 3, who, although critical of a participatory vision (given their responses on the city giving citizens enough opportunity to participate and whether spending money to increase participation is "worth it") said that it would "involve perhaps satellite offices in every ward so that people aren't having to come here to do [business]." It would also involve, "additional

employees here, to be able to deal with the two way street that that creates.” Councillor 6 shared a similar thought on reaching out to citizens, stating, “You've got to go door to door and say to people, you won't come to us, I'm coming to you.” Councillor 5, in discussing the budget open house, posited that it could work better to “go around to the five wards and... you could register to come and make a presentation. Rather than saying you've got to come to city hall, you got out to the community.”

Analysis

In envisioning a participatory future, the participants again worked from an implicit set of assumptions that views citizens as resources, this time as implementers of policy decisions. In making the change to “task-oriented” board and committee work, the councillors positioned the citizen within the broader democratic institution. While they see participation as important and a net positive for the city, participants must be guided to work within the framework that council provides. In this theme, the councillors offered a relatively limited potential for stronger forms of participation, which, as outlined in the literature review, are rooted in power. While citizens have the power to participate, this theme shows how councillors do not necessarily think they should have the power to participate in setting the agenda or making decisions. Instead, they are there to be managed by the institution. The final results sections expands more upon how the councillors presented citizens as unable to think in the big picture.

In looking to Barber, the councillors revealed their relatively “thin” democratic tendencies in how they portray citizens in participation. Instead of participating in “ongoing public talk and participation in public action” (1984, p.160), citizens are instead “subjects” meant to fulfill the needs of the institution (1984, p.152). This type of participation does not foster the necessary democratic deliberation and active citizenship within government processes that Barber calls for. Within this limited participatory position, citizens give what they are asked to provide, but no more. For Young, these participants lack a voice in decision-making, and are not given the opportunity to “express their feelings, experiences, and perspectives on social life... where others can listen”, making the process

unfit to meet the ends of democracy as a “condition of justice” (1990, p.91).

Again, the emphasis is on the management of participation, in which citizens need to be given narrow “direction” and “guidance” to participate to the fullest extent. While recognizing that outside constraints are necessary for participation, it seems to be a patronizing and paternalistic viewpoint, where citizens require the institution to tell them how to participate. It is a form of “centralized social control” (Benello & Roussopoulos, 1972, p.4), lacking in terms of building community, instead reinforcing the liberal ideal in which individuals may participate as subjects to help the the institution accomplish its goals, but not as a part of the goal-setting process.

Moreover, comments on neighbourhood level decision-making within a limited budget seemed to indicate a trust in citizens only up to a point. The suggestion is that citizens deserve some autonomy yet require the oversight of council. One councillor summed up the core aspect of this theme crisply: “some things are too important to leave to a community.”

Returning to Fung, these neighbourhood associations could be conceived of as a step towards mini-publics where citizens come together to deliberate, but, given how they were conceived of by the councillors, they would lack the institutional power to act as a balance to the representative system. These associations would fall into the “advice and consultation” point on Fung's spectrum of authority and power, but they do hold potential in fulfilling the higher levels of empowerment seen at the end of that spectrum in “co-governance” and “direct authority” (2006, p.69).

This theme also reveals an apparent lack of bold vision from the councillors. When one councillor was asked to imagine a more participatory future, they struggled to come up with an answer, instead saying that perhaps they had “too much” experience at city hall to think of an alternative. In that case, elected representatives may be seen as a potential barrier to be overcome in working towards a more participatory local government.

On the flip side, the theme of “decentralization,” reaching out to people in their homes and

returning decision-making to the neighbourhood level, has good participatory potential. While it was limited by the councillor's perspectives on citizens' ability to think about the big picture, which will be discussed in the final section of results, making democratic institutions more accessible is a good start to fostering participation. Again returning to the literature review, a move to make city hall more accessible would also make it more inclusive, as it addresses the barriers of transportation and time that citizens from disadvantaged groups may face. A seven country comparison showed the link between access to transportation and "social exclusion," which is when "people are effectively 'locked out' of the social, economic and political mainstream" (Lucas, 2014, p.7). The Canadian research found "there is little national effort to co-ordinate local transport planning or address transport-related social exclusion problems (Lucas, 2014, p.8). Fittingly, Brantford's Neighbourhood Hub initiative partly attempts to bridge this gap between social exclusion and transportation, with neighbours asked to discuss community needs and identify ways to address those needs by making services available within the neighbourhood.

Could giving neighbourhoods the ability to deliberate and make decisions on local resource allocation foster in a more participatory future? If the "community action networks" were able to "prove" their ability to make, in council's eyes, sound decisions, could that lead to the expansion of local level citizen participation to "big picture" items at the municipal, provincial, or federal level? While not a solution to the problem of participation, there is value in thinking about direct, local action as a way to promote a cycle of positive reinforcement, in which participation leads to outcomes, and those positive outcomes lead to further citizen participation.

Section 4: Selfish citizens and enlightened council

The final section integrates recurring observations made throughout participant interviews to shed light on how councillors conceive of citizens as political actors. The approach helps identify how the councillors understand citizens' capacity to help construct a participatory democratic system. The

core question driving this section asks, “Why do we need representatives?” The question asks councillors to reflect upon what makes them and their role different from the everyday citizen, and why it is essential. Responses help to paint a picture of how political elites 'see' the citizen. These questions are important elements of understanding how councillors view their role in relation to citizen and, in turn, how that might influence elites' understandings and approaches to participatory efforts.

The interview participants often pointed to citizens' inability to see the “big picture,” touching on problems of lack of education about municipal processes. The theme of selfishness was also presented as a ‘problem’ of participation. Time, or lack thereof, was another frequent theme that arose in the interviews. Within those responses, the councillors also described how they were ‘different’ from the general public, that is, what sets them apart in their ability to make sound decisions for the good of all citizens.

Councillor 3 took aim at a recent neighbourhood development meeting attended by few citizens compared to the number of development representatives, council, and staff members. “We had a meeting and nobody came out.... because nobody cared,” explained the councillor, who pointed to another example in which more citizens attended to “crap on the [developer] because he doesn't keep the building clean or the grass cut.” The councillor continued the argument that citizens are given ample opportunity to get information, but, “you can't make people interested in something they're not interested in” and “they just don't care outside their own little circle.”

In discussing the potential for participatory democracy, where all citizens are involved, Councillor 3 was skeptical, pointing out that “mob work generally is not terrific.” In that regard, council acts as “sort of the debating society that [has] been elected.”

For Councillor 3, citizens are only interested in participating when a decision is bound to affect them:

“The taxes might go up and they grouse about that, and if the snow doesn't get cleared quickly

enough they're upset with that. But other than the things that touch on them personally, the larger civic government, the democratic process, they could care less about.”

The theme of the citizen’s limited view was shared by Councillor 4, who said, “what [citizens] want to know is how much are my taxes are going up, and am I getting what I wanted.” They added that “everybody has an ox to gore,” pointing to an example in which an “arts person” would criticize the local government for spending money on sports facilities, “they want to have what they want to have.” While citizens may have the drive to accomplish something for their community, they lack the broader understanding of infrastructure and economic development that’s needed to accommodate their goals.

The council format, in Councillor 4’s view, helps to address the “complicated and time-consuming” decision making process that, if left to citizens, would devolve into “apathy” or become driven by “people who have an interest and an agenda”. As a gathering of representatives, council holds a “sense of the greater good” that meets the needs of the community.

Councillor 7 held a similar view regarding citizens’ “not caring,” stating that “the public, other than taxes and immediate issues, really don't care that much about what happens.” Another problem in a more direct form of democracy is “you’d find out how little people actually care.” Much like Councillor 4, this councillor pointed to the potential for citizens in a raw democracy to get “tied back to some form of party or alliance.” The lack of caring and interest group selfishness is also bolstered by a lack of knowledge. The suggestions is that citizens, “don't get what we do and how much we do as a municipality.”

Councillor 5 shared concerns about the potential for a participatory democracy to devolve, possibly into “dictatorship.” They argued that “people lead busy lives, and so they're not going to go to a meeting unless they feel like they've got an interest in it.” Pointing to poor attendance at a recent budget meeting, Councillor 5 said the format may be “too big,” and “there isn't the individual interest,

unless they want to come and say don't raise my taxes.”

This concept of the short on time citizen was shared by Councillor 1, who, in referring to poor meeting attendance said, “usually if it affects you then you go.” It’s easier for citizens to “get it electronically and read it at their leisure” rather than “go sit and listen” at a meeting. That councillor shared similar concerns about citizens’ ability to think outside themselves: “everybody thinks they're right... but sometimes your heart is leading and not your head to realize that rules and regulations need to be followed.” For Councillor 1, becoming an elected representative means “having that empathy, that sympathy,” and being able to make decisions for the “betterment of the entire city” instead of your own neighbourhood or ward.

Councillor 1 and 7 shared strikingly similar thoughts on generational differences. Both pointed out the “lack of time”. Councillor 1 said that the previous generation (60-80 year olds) have a “different idea” of what makes a committee work, “We're hurrying up because okay, we've got this committee, we just finished a 12 hour day of work, and our day is not done because our kids or our grandkids have to go to soccer. Whereas that generation, that wasn't part of their daily routine.”

Councillor 7 pointed to the “culture of service” that is “really uncommon now.” In those days, “you worked hard, you went to church every Sunday and you served the community in some form or another.” While citizens’ “lifestyles just changed and the models for social, or serving, didn't.”

Meanwhile Councillor 6 pointed to a broader “feeling of apathy” where “no matter what I say or do, things are not going to change.” It’s the “vocal” people who get their voices heard initially, and when a decision is made “all the people who haven't voiced their opinions, they let you know that they're unhappy with it.” The city gives them “the opportunity to voice their opinions but don't want to, for whatever reason, take advantage of that.”

Councillor 5 argued that “people have that barrier in their mind,” which is part of a broader “cultural urban myth.” Even if those citizens have never been involved, they’re “infected” by the idea

that there's "no point" to participation.

Analysis

This section expresses the sense of a declining democratic system from the point of view of the leaders of that system. The idea that citizens will only participate if decisions could possibly affect them, resonates with a central tenet of liberal democracy; namely individualization.

Barber argued against such conceptions of liberalism's "thin" democracy, with citizens "self-interested" and "greedy," participating only when that action will improve the "material conditions" in which they live. Of all the responses, none attempted to "solve" the problem of selfish citizens, an indication that it's understood as an unchangeable, possibly convenient, reality

The bleak perspective on citizens' motivations only reinforces a non-participatory system. The widespread belief that citizens only care about themselves, that is, citizens lack the ability to go beyond the self to serve the community, again reflects liberal democracy's atomization of communities, and distracts from the broader role of the institution. In many responses, the municipality was portrayed as "accessible" to all, with citizens' only deciding not to participate.

Their answers surrounding what sets councillors apart fits with the long-held assumptions going back to Plato about the unique importance and need for political elites. The governing of a city is too important to be left to the everyday citizen, who, in *The Republic* were committed to performing their function (much like their participatory performance the guidance of council's as seen in the last section). Of course in the twenty-first century, philosopher kings aren't raised and appointed, they're elected.

This has broad implications about the electoral process that flummoxed some interview participants. When asked about citizens' abilities to make the "big picture" decisions, Councillor 3's responded that "mob work in general is not terrific." However, when asked why "mob work" is appropriate for electing our representatives that councillor brought up more "problems" of

representation, specifically Rob Ford's time as mayor of Toronto. The answer alluded to a contradiction within the research, where a "mob" is good enough to elect an official to represent them, but not enlightened enough to actively participate in the ongoing governance of their community. If the participants felt the people are not able to govern themselves, how can they be trusted to "choose" the right leader? This, once again, demonstrates the participants' limited views of participatory renewal; a vision in which, participation is deemed good, successful to the extent that it supports the current system.

While not the focus of this research, two councillors addressed the election process. They argued that running for council was open to anybody who wants to run, blind to the structural inequality of the campaign process which favours individuals with economic privilege. Again, the responsibility of participation is placed firmly on the backs of citizens. Councillor 5 and 6 echoed this notion outside of the election process, arguing that non-participation came from a "feeling of apathy" or an "urban myth" that may not be based in reality.

Time, or lack thereof, was a consistent theme in the participant responses. And while it may be rooted in reality (ie. Canadians pressed by constraints by the family and work,) the lack of time was presented as though it is consistent throughout the citizenry. What was missing was the recognition of an unequal distribution of time as a resource, with councillors not recognizing that time could be a privilege correlated to socio-economic status. If time is a problem for current participants, as Councillor 1 stated, then what are the implications for someone struggling to make ends meet?

Conclusion

In reviewing the results and analysis, a picture emerges of how the City of Brantford's political leaders think about citizen participation within local government. Participation is a matter of choice, which focusses responsibility on the citizen to take advantage of the opportunities given to them. If

they do not participate, it is attributed to “apathy”, part of a broader “urban myth” or a general lack of time. When citizens *do* participate, they do so in their own self-interest, and are unable to consider reality outside of their own experiences and desires. While there was a recognition of the limits of councillors' knowledge, participation was framed as a way for citizens to communicate their experiences and knowledge to council. From that council seat, the councillors said they are uniquely positioned to “think in the big picture” and consider the needs to the whole city. To improve participation, many councillors pointed to a “management” of the citizenry, whereby council dictates the terms of participation within the advisory board and committee system, illustrating Barber's conception of liberal democracy as “zoo-keeping” (1984, p.20). This “management” of participants was also reflected in the councillor's framing of “participation as a resource,” where volunteers become “subjects” to serve the needs of the institution but not to participate in democratic deliberation. In envisioning a more participatory system, a number of councillors pointed to the level of neighbourhoods, where citizens participate in the affairs of what is closest to them (planning of parks and transportation systems, as well as neighbourhood associations, for example), while higher level decision-making is maintained by council.

This particular set of political elites primarily conceives of citizen participation, noted as both important and positive for the institution, as a supplement to their own work as a councillor. Citizens are to participate by “informing” council of their experiences, but not in fuller democratic deliberation which one councillor called the “debating society”. This “society” however, is inaccessible to many, given the social and economic inequality that predicated the unequal distribution of ability to participate within the institution. Here, Marshall's ongoing struggle for citizenship come to a halt. While civic and political rights are firmly rooted in law, the right to protect and defend these rights on an equal ground has yet to be achieved within our democratic institutions (1950, p. 30).

When the councillors conceive of participation as a supplement to the representative system, they disregard that “under these conditions citizens lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful” (Arnstein, 1969, p.12). Without the “redistribution of power,” participation becomes an “empty and frustrating process for the powerless” (Arnstein, 1969, p.1) reinforcing the ongoing deficit of democracy. Similarly, while recognizing that participation is a good thing, they seemed to lack a recognition of the inequality inherent to the participatory forms that they outlined. While advocating for citizens to take charge of their own initiatives, they did not see how many citizens may be excluded from such processes, given the unequal distribution of resources of time and skills needed to accomplish them. This effectively leaves out citizens who may be most in need of the institution which operates in their name.

Perhaps it is their time in office that has constricted their vision? As one councillor pointed out, they may have spent “too much” time in office to think of a participatory alternative. Perhaps it is power, that privileged status, that they wish to hold on to, making them unable to imagine divesting that power and privilege to the masses? The tension between participation and representation that Pitkin described becomes apparent. Representatives are sent into office and are “immersed in a distinct culture of their own, surrounded by other specialists and insulated from the ordinary realities of their constituents’ lives,” meanwhile, given their representatives ongoing work, citizens “give their own attention and energy to other matters, closer to home.” Without the experience of working within the institution, citizens “feel ignorant and incapable” and the cycle of alienation continues (2005, p.339).

And yet many of the representatives seemed to see non-participation as an individual choice, distancing themselves from the potentially proactive role of the institution to achieve the goal of inclusion and social justice. As Barber explains, “they throw referenda at the people without providing adequate information [or] full debate... and then pillory them for their lack of judgment,” likening the

focus on citizen's responsibility to a general sending troops to war without rifles then “calling them cowards when they are overrun by the enemy” (1984, p. 155). While mentioned a couple of times during the interviews, the councillors largely missed the transformative potential of a more participatory institution. That potential not only helps citizens to understand how the municipality works, it can also transform their very motivation to participate, going from “what's in it for me” to “what's in it for the community?”

A representative system does achieve the goal of efficiency. It is no stretch to argue that it is easier and more economical for citizens to quadrennially invest their power in political representatives, who are privileged with the civic skills and knowledge needed to navigate our complex democratic institutions. But should the argument for efficiency sacrifice the potential for a stronger democracy?

It is the potential for citizens to wield more power within the institutions that affect our everyday lives. The potential for that wielding of power to get results, and for those results to have citizens realize “their own capacities: for autonomous judgment, for deliberation, and for effective action,” (Pitkin, 2005, p.340) again feeding into the positive feedback loop of the school of democracy.

Should the efficiencies of the representative system disregard the structural inequality of the institution, which excludes many and favours those with social and economic power? Should the process of democratic deliberation, which has the potential for citizens to recognize their common struggles and “develop the capacities to think of our own needs in relation to the needs of others” (Young, 1992, p.92) be relegated to the realm of an elite class? Should the everyday citizen be excluded from deliberation even when it may “increase their disposition to be reasonable and to transform narrowly self-interested preferences,” (Fung & Wright, 2005, p.33) which was one of the most significant barriers to participation the councillors conceived of. Should these ignorant, selfish and passive masses never be given a chance to prove themselves in the fullest conception of

democracy, as active agents within the institutions that operate in their name?

Given the growing democratic deficit and mistrust in our political institutions, at every level, there must be an effort to strengthen our democracy; to make it more effectively speak and listen to citizens; to be a deliberative force of inclusion, community-building and mutual recognition.

That strengthening of democracy will not happen overnight. Much like when a citizen participates fully and sees their power at work, which encourages them to participate again, so too our democratic institutions must act as agents to bolster the participatory cycle. Even though this project has criticized the lack of “participatory vision” from elected representatives, they can play a potential role in this “re-peopling” of democracy. Given the complexity and scale of our institutions, elected leaders can help “overcome organizational barriers, develop sustained deliberation, build trust, and improve administrative responsiveness” (Musso et. al., 2011, p.107). Barber similarly admitted to the requirement of “transitional leadership” towards strong democracy and “greater self-government” (1984, p.238). While these particular representatives were criticized for their inability to think outside the system, that must not rule out the potential for any elected official to help usher in a direct local democracy.

As this project has argued, it is the municipal level of government, responsible for much of what citizens encounter in their everyday lives, that is best positioned to foster the re-peopling of our democratic institutions. It is easier to first foster participation when people see the effect of their efforts at the neighbourhood level. That local level empowerment gives people “face-to-face experience among their neighbours” which can make them more “effective democratic citizens,” even at the provincial or federal levels (Pitkin, 2005, p.340).

While it will not be easy, given the complexity of our institutions and the unequal distribution of power firmly rooted within them, the re-peopling of democracy is a necessary project, the next step in

the ongoing struggle that Marshall outlined. This project has positive repercussions that extend far beyond our homes, neighbourhoods and cities in which it must begin.

Prospects for further research

Interviewing citizens and municipal employees with a similar line of questions as this research project would help round out understandings of the barriers and opportunities for strengthening democracy at the local level. Do citizens share the same feelings of apathy and selfishness towards participating? How do municipal employees feel about bringing citizens into a more active role in the governance of the municipality? Exploring both of these groups' understandings of participation would give a fuller picture of the practical problems of re-peopling municipal institutions.

Similarly, an in-depth exploration of the election process as a barrier to fuller civic participation would be beneficial to democratic theorists. In the brief discussion of the “fairness” of municipal elections, two councillors said that the ability to run a campaign was attainable by all, seeming to ignore the influence of economic privilege within the institution. While campaign finances at the federal and provincial level are relatively easy to research through their respective election bodies, there is not database of nationwide municipal contributors. In Brantford, a local newspaper relayed some trends in terms of the sources of campaign finances, (Marion, 2011, “Ward candidates”) which showed which candidates were “self-financed” and which had outside funding. What it lacking is a more systematic approach to showing trends in campaign financing throughout Canada's municipalities. Are private developers and business interests similarly represented in campaign spending throughout the country? How many candidates are self-financed? It is hoped that this research would paint a more detailed picture of the interaction between private interests and municipal campaigning, and could inform further inquiry into the role of economic privilege within local democracy.

A similar approach could be taken in looking at the occupations of Canada's municipal leaders. An in-depth exploration of the work backgrounds of councillors could also illustrate trends of “who” becomes a representative. During the 2014 Ontario provincial election, CBC News used an illustration to show which occupations were most represented in political parties (CBC, 2014) In my experience, it seems local business owners and professionals often fill the seats of council, while retired educators also seem to participate more than people from other occupations.

Research into the form and function of neighbourhood associations would also be of great benefit. Given these councillors repeated emphasis on neighbourhood-level decision-making, a project which delves into how and where neighbourhood associations use power or if they fall victim to the same exclusionary tendencies of government institutions, would be of great value in understanding the role of neighbourhoods in re-peopling democracy.

All three cases for further research could add to a deeper understanding of how to take the necessary step towards more inclusive, deliberative and citizen-driven government institutions. In calling for a more participatory system, this evidence could be used to show how the system excludes those most likely to benefit from “protective rights” and how the implementation of those rights has “been profoundly affected by who has had the power to decide what issues will be placed upon the public agenda, as well as who is in a position to occupy a place of power” (Kobayashi & Ray, 2000, p.405).

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APPENDIX A

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT TELEPHONE & EMAIL SCRIPT

**A case study of City of Brantford political leaders' attitudes and understandings
of citizen power and participation**

Principal Researcher: Alex Denonville
MA student in Wilfrid Laurier Brantford's Social Justice and Community Engagement program
Email: deno0790@wlu.ca Phone: 519-995-9196

MA Advisor: Dr. James Cairns
Laurier Brantford Assistant Professor of Society, Culture, and Environment
Email: jcairns@wlu.ca Phone: 519-756-8228

TELEPHONE SCRIPT:

Good morning/afternoon/evening Councillor _____. My name is Alex Denonville and I'm currently undergoing my research project as part of my Masters program in Social Justice and Community Engagement at Laurier Brantford.

I'm doing my major research project on local political leaders' attitudes and understandings of citizen participation in governance. As an elected official, I was hoping you would offer your insight into the challenges and benefits of bringing citizens into government-decision making.

As a participant, you would be asked to sit down with me for an interview, which may last up to two hours, to talk about your experience and understanding of citizen participation in local government. The interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder.

This research project is completely voluntary, you can withdraw at any point, and all efforts will be made to maintain your anonymity. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews, and offer comments or clarifications to your original comments.

If you are interested in participating, I will email you the detailed consent letter and schedule a time and date for the interview to take place.

Do you have any questions about the project?

Thank you for your time and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further.

EMAIL SCRIPT:

Hello Councillor _____, as per our recent telephone conversation, here is my project's detailed informed consent statement which you'll be asked to sign if you choose to participate in the interview.

Once again, the interviews are completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the process at any time.

Denonville 70

If you are still interested in participating in this project, please respond with 2-3 dates and times that fit your schedule over the next two weeks. The interview will take, at most, two hours. I am open to any meeting place, as long as it's relatively quiet and private. Laurier Brantford also has facilities available to host the interviews.

If you have any more questions, feel free to contact me at this email or by cell: 519-995-9196.

Thank you,

Alex Denonville
MA Candidate, Social Justice & Community Engagement at Laurier Brantford
deno0790@wlu.ca
519-995-9196

APPENDIX B

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

A case study of City of Brantford political leaders' attitudes and understandings of citizen power and participation

Principal Researcher: Alex Denonville
MA student in Wilfrid Laurier Brantford's Social Justice and Community Engagement program
Email: deno0790@wlu.ca Phone: 519-995-9196

MA Advisor: Dr. James Cairns
Laurier Brantford Assistant Professor of Society, Culture, and Environment
Email: jcairns@wlu.ca Phone: 519-756-8228

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand how local elected leaders think about the power and position of citizens in government decision-making, that is, what are the opportunities and barriers of getting citizens to participate in governance.

Elected officials from the City of Brantford's municipal government are being asked to participate in this study, as they have knowledge and experience of the government and its working, as well as playing an important role in facilitating the citizens' role in government.

Participants will be asked to partake in a semi-structured interview with the Principal Researcher. They will be asked open-ended questions about the role of citizens in governance, barriers to and opportunities for participation, the institution's role in increasing participation, as well as their own position within the broader democratic picture.

The interviews will last no more than two hours, with participants given the opportunity to follow up with the Principal Researcher after the initial interview to offer further comment. Participants will also be given the chance to review the transcribed interviews and offer further comment or clarifications for the final project. The approximate maximum total time for participants will be four hours.

This research process presents few risks to participants. Participants may risk their status and reputation as local leaders, for example, responses that negatively frame citizens and their ability to participate may reflect poorly on the participants. Participants will also be asked to sit for an extended period during the interview process, which may impact their regular routine and schedule.

These risks will be mitigated by taking measures to ensure the anonymity of participants. Participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews to offer further comments or clarifications, as well as remove any information that may indicate their identity (if they prefer to remain anonymous). This follow up will be conducted either via email or follow-up interviews based on the participants' needs. The risks to the participants' in terms of time commitment will be mitigated by an open scheduling process, including nights and weekends.

It is hoped that this research project will help inform the broader literature of democratic theory, offering a local and personal angle to academia and statistics. Moreover, it is hoped that the research project will help the researcher better understand the potential barriers and opportunities to bringing citizens into government-decision making and agenda-setting. As elected leaders within the municipality, the participants may have an in-depth understanding how citizen participation works at the local level, and how we may go about improving that participation.

INFORMATION & CONFIDENTIALITY

To begin the research, participants will be asked to schedule an appropriate interview time and location with the Principal Researcher. The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to ensure the accuracy of the research process. Only the Principal Researcher will have access to the digital files, which will then be manually transcribed through a computer word processing program. The audio files will be uploaded to an external hard drive, and will remain for the duration of the research process. The transcriptions will also be uploaded to the external hard drive, which will be secure at the Researcher's home. All audio and transcription files will be deleted at the conclusion of the Researcher's term at Laurier Brantford (September 2014). If a participant wishes to withdraw early from the research process, the audio and ongoing transcription files will be deleted immediately.

Particular quotations may be used in the final publication of the research project, and those quotations may give an indication of the participant's identity. Participants will be given the opportunity to review their transcriptions to clarify or remove any statements they wish.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Alex Denonville, at 23 Wellington St., Brantford, ON, N3T2L5, and 519-995-9196 .

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this research project will culminate in the Researcher's Major Research Project (MRP) for the Master's program in Social Justice and Community Engagement at Wilfrid Laurier's Brantford Campus. The final MRP will be made available to the Researcher's MRP committee, which includes the Advisor and Second Reader. If interested, participants will be given the full research project.

CONSENT

I agree to the use of a digital voice recorder during this interview.

Participant's signature _____

I agree to the inclusion of quotations from the interview in the final research project.

Participant's signature _____

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____