

WHOSE PLAN?

Considering an Integrated Partnership for Developing Integrated Plans for a Sustainable Future

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The professional planners feel because of their expertise it's their plan (TOD, FAR, EIS, TDL); elected officials believe with their authority, it's their plan (adoption, appropriations, oversight); and the public knows, in a democracy, it's their plan (we elect and pay them all to do the right thing for us). But, in some places in a few moments in time with mutual trust, respect and commitment the plans are shared as "Our plans." While "Our Plans" continue decade after decade to win the awards of all sorts, why do they continue to be the innovative exception to public planning practice and not the planning norm?

Here is a matrix that I cooked-up with my class on participatory planning to attempt to help clarify the questions of who's doing what AND why some effective participation methods and practitioners have not been more widely embraced by the U.S. (urban, regional, land use, transportation) planning profession(s). What it all comes down to is that there are very few truly participatory planning models, methods or practitioners, which is perpetuated by the general lack of their inclusion in the core planning curricula nation-wide.

There are a few US practitioners and applications but the most mature source for examples is in the international community development world that goes under the Participatory Action Research (PAR) banner that harkens back to the early Peace Corps/community action days. There's lots of good web sites, blogs and literature under this banner. More sources in UK, Australia and Canada than the US. The Field Museum (Chicago) with Alaka Walli has produced a terrific community guide to PAR for local applications – I hope they can make it commercially available to us.

Planning practice is generally calcified in an antiquated data research methodology (with the label of "The Rational Planning Model"). Newer planning, organizing, action methods in wide practice are seldom taught in planning schools. For instance you can find few examples of strategic planning than participation being taught in planning schools. (See "Taking Charge: How Communities are Planning Their Future" I coauthored 20 years ago with my associate Mary Means) The emergence of Strategic Planning we identified in the field then, and have only grown now to be the preferred participatory planning methodology. And strategic planning has certainly become a mainstay in field from business management to health care but not an academically embraced urban planning method.

We do continue to see contorted efforts to affix a participation activity onto the old Rational Planning Model in its protracted time frame, obscure research methods and ultimately, its core belief in a pseudo-scientific method that believes that only the data counts and that public preferences, opinions, values

and creative insights are only corrupters of the “data.” It’s a tribal culture most alive in the transportation world and other engineer-driven domains, but not absent from land use planning enclaves, too.

There are way too few collaborative planners bringing the full tool chest of facilitation and participation skills along with a mature planning model they can apply in a collaborative manner with an openness to process outcomes. There are even fewer elected officials who are comfortable with the process defining outcomes. Here is how this integrated partnership for participatory planning for a sustainable future might look:



Excuse the not too sly insertion of some personal values about the purpose of planning today and sustainability – which is one of the reason I view my self as a fallen facilitator – there are come comes I want to champion.

In this “interactive, participatory” model, I am a firm believer that a normal planning team needs at least two lead practitioners who take the roles of 1. Facilitator and 2. Knowledge source. The same person cannot/should not attempt to take these roles simultaneously – I get a lot of pushback on this one from some of my planning colleagues. A rare few of them are excellent facilitators/listeners who most often bring spot-on planning proposals into the public forum. These are the exceptions and even they may get in trouble should they represent an unpopular planning proposal from their agency and also facilitate input to seek alternative solutions or no action at all, for instance.

Conversely, other “process” colleagues hold that they needn’t and possibly shouldn’t have any planning knowledge to maintain their neutrality to serve the participants. While I have seen excellent group facilitation come from “new” process facilitators in the planning arena, those that continue with a planning practice only get smarter and more effective as they come to learn the planning game. I do find facilitators who are smart in support of the participants to be much more effective than those that “dumb-down” in this role.

Now, an accomplished planner/facilitator can serve either function – planner or facilitator – just not at the same time and the same place on the same project. I refer to the old medical standard for a doctor to not operate on family and the

lawyer who represents him or her self in court has a fool for a client....

On another favorite front, when there is this planning/participation team symbiosis, another capacity that still generates a lot of skepticism from the participatory professional tribal group is the use for state-of-the-art communication tools and technology and that true participation can only come from face-to-face interaction. Here is where Carolyn Lukensmeyer and I agree with very few other process professionals who are either comfortable with the idea or skilled in its application, especially to use the technology to enhance interactivity and the technology to support planning explorations interactively (GIS). The recent emergence of Interactive GIS is breaking down some of these barriers but the GIS skills still tends to exclude many of the participatory OD professionals from the game – and the tools themselves I regard as still in a Bata-test condition – which is another whole course topic not covered here (see PlaceMatters web site).

The following matrix emerged from a class session with Dick and Emily Axelrod on large group process. What I am attempting to illustrate here is - to paraphrase Dewey – that there is a “Variety of Participation Experiences.” Many relate to the public land use planning process, some do not but few come from within the “Planning Tribe” itself and most of those are treated as accessory attachments to the business as usual planning process and not transformational for that process into an integrated participatory planning approach.

One point I’ll raise and a point I want to make here is that there are VERY few firms that are credentialed planning firms with both a belief in and skills to conduct what I am defining as participatory planning and not participating as just an add-on. In most firms, especially if the client doesn’t want participation, the practice is OK with that to retreat to the back room or do some kind of arms-length survey. The firms belonging in last (True Collaborative Planning) column can claim producing the plans from the process that is their core practice. Simply put, they don’t get hired when there is an aversion to a participatory approach.

My point is not a reflection on the skills of the very capable number of OD and other participation specialists but my concern is with how closely the planning profession has set the boundaries of who is or isn’t allowed in the planning club.

A brief description of the matrix categories from left to right:

- **ADR** – Alternative Dispute Resolution – A quasi-legal activity mostly used as an alternative to civil court suits. Methods for resolution of “environmental” public disputes have been pioneered by Larry Suskin, Larry Barcow, Susan Carpenter and others. ADR is supported as a state and/or university service in some places but not normally used as in planning practice unless court action is in the works and there is a recognized institution to mediate the process.

- **Legal** – State and federal public law have set minimum requirements under “Freedom of Information,” “Open Meetings,” and “Public Hearings” that a public planning process and its formal adoption (especially when public funds are involved) are required to do. Research such as that by Kettering Foundation (see the Harwood Group’s research) over the last 20 years have demonstrated that these activities, when the sole conduit for public participation are inadequate and often counterproductive.
- **Show/Tell/Listen** – Wanting to do better than the minimum legal requirements, public agencies practice a number of “public information,” “public relations” and “survey” activities with names such as “Press Conferences.” “Open House,” “Listening Sessions,” “Scientific Survey Sample” where information is presented, comments may be recorded but interaction to affect the plan or outcomes is usually nonexistent.
- **Dialogue** – An important civic and community process (championed by Daniel Yankelovich) that fosters understanding, trust and healing but virtually unrecognized in planning literature due to its open-ended process unbounded by either time or topic. If planners could or would truly to plan ahead they could anticipate an important issue facing the community and sponsor a Dialogue Process a year or two from beginning a (participatory) planning process. An example of this foresight was that of Shirley Solomon in Puget Sound in facilitating a Dialogue between a county and local tribes to foster the climate of collaboration unrelated to a specific action or plan. Joanna Macy as an environmental psychologist brings much to this area, too.
- **Change** – This is the category for activities and interventions by “Organizational Development” experts, “Change Agents,” “Futurists” and others that bring new skills into the process but are often sponsored by independent civic organizations or firewall from plan making much less decision-making. Many vision activities are expertly conducted by this group, but most often the keepers of the planning process are resistant to integrate these activities into these planning/decision/making processes. Many of the leading edge public engagement methods have been introduced by these practitioners. I would say that in many instances, the leading edge of business with this group of experts have been the most effective laboratory for democracy (team management) rather than either government or even the nonprofit sectors. Peter Senge, Peter Block, Marvin Weisbord, the Alexrods, Cathy Dannemiller and Harrison Owen come to mind.
- **Participation** – This is the category of good intentions. Regular interactive meetings are scheduled, professional facilitators are engaged, open invitations are sent and interactive exchange can occur. However, the backroom analytical methods of the professional staff continue to create the plans and recommendations that are brought into the public forum for comment, usually without much substantive response.

- **Advocacy** – Since Paul Davidoff, Saul Alinsky and the civil rights movement advocacy has been a recognized civil channel. Sometimes degenerating into NIMBY, and sometime creating great results (i.e. Dudley Street), advocacy is something done to the public agency or in spite of it but usually not with it. (This category could arguably be slide to the left on this scale a notch or two.) I would pose that this category has its place in the civic forum but only with the failing of established institutions and agencies to support a participatory collaboration. To clarify, advocacy organizations are important civic resources but entering into an advocacy strategy either in the strategic confrontation style of Saul Alinsky or an alternate parallel advocacy approach of Paul Davidoff are both throwbacks to systemic failings and also costly today in these times of limited resources.
- **True Collaborative Planning** - This too rarely practiced approach is a true partnership between the public, the professional staff expertise and official leadership that has been long labeled by Bill Potapchuck and others as Collaborative Problem Solving and more recently by David Cooperrider as Appreciative Inquiry and Jody Kretzman and John McKnight as Assets Based Planning. Here these “planning” and public participation are fully integrated, and an interactive partnership developed with mutual cross-sector trust, creative and professional guidance, leadership support and commitment to implement and sustained, inclusive, representational engaged participation throughout the planning process from the beginning. For the skeptics their most frequently heard criticisms have consistently and effectively overcome by accomplished professional participation practitioners that include: 1. Getting hard to reach groups to participate, 2. Getting a large enough representational critical mass to engage, 3. To sustain and maintain engagement over the life of long-term projects (multi-year) and 4. Public understanding of “complex” planning.

Thoughts/comments about these thoughts and the graphic below?

Matrix of Planning & Participation Universe

ADR	Legal	Show/Tell/Listen	Dialogue	Change	Participation	Advocacy	True Collaborative Planning
Function: Conflict & Dispute Resolution Technique: Alternative Dispute Resolution Certification Skill: Mediator	Function: Open Meetings. FOIA. Public Hearing Technique: Legally bounded. Skill: Official presiding	Function: Give information. Collect information. Technique: Public relations Open House. Presentation, Survey Skill: Professional, Survey Research	Function: Creates interactive exchange between parties. Technique: Dialogue Skill: Dialogue Facilitator	Function: Charged to implement usually new program, activity, organization.. Technique: Range of change, visioning and strategic methods. Skill: OD Professional	Function: Seeks input into plans Technique: Range of Public Participation methods from NGT to Charrette Skill: Facilitator	Function: Grassroots, issue-based input Technique: Range of advocacy form confrontation, lobbying, negotiations to interactive Skill: Issue advocacy skills	Function: True creative, collaboration between officials, public & professionals Technique: Democratic values, Planning & Facilitation Skill: All of the afore mentioned & PAR*
Limits : Situational. Specific Willing parties. Legally bounded (norm) Expert: Suskin	Limits : Meets legal requirements. Necessary. Not creditable as participation Expert: Harwood Group research	Limits : Can inform Plan and Public. Usually not perceived as participation Expert: DOT participation guides	Limits : Improves understanding, & relationships. Not necessarily link to action. Expert: Yankelovitch	Limits : Implements specific objective usually interactively Expert: AmericaSpeaks	Limits : Improves plans when input is applied to staff professional plans. Expert: IAP2. Doyal, Straus	Limits : Positional. Examples: • Civil Rights, Environmental • Transit, • Smart Growth Expert: Sierra Club (example)	Limits : Many political & professional paradigms and public suspicions are barriers Expert: Hester *Participatory Action Research model

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(NOTE: This is a follow-up to an email I sent in December with the syllabus from a course I have been teaching in participatory planning practice. I would be glad to resend it to anyone who did not get that email. RT)