

The Form and Function of  
Local Government  
Community Engagement  
Initiatives -  
Swedish Case Studies



Peter Demediuk

Doctor of Business Administration

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# **The Form and Function of Local Government Community Engagement Initiatives – Swedish Case Studies**

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## Abstract

The aim of local governments to increase community engagement is an emergent global phenomenon. Ideally, community engagement initiatives connect the community with their government so that citizens can have a say in the things that really matter to them. Mounting internal or external pressure for more citizen participation moves the focus from ‘local government’ to ‘local governance’, and presents professional practice with the challenge of determining the ends for participation, and responding with the appropriate means – given the local economic, social, political and technological context.

The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive analysis of community engagement initiatives by local governments in order to inform professional practice in a growing but under-researched area of activity. The research aims to conceptualise and articulate factors and characteristics that constitute the ‘form’ (means) and ‘function’ (ends) of individual community engagement initiatives; identify the shape of these attributes in practice; and provide a management model to fuel debate and inform the planning, implementation and evaluation of community engagement initiatives.

The investigation was conducted using case studies of community engagement initiatives in six organisational sites in Sweden as examples of an international phenomenon. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with senior public officials.

The research findings provide a descriptive analysis of each engagement initiative. The study found that in their quest to connect with the community, each local government had settled on experimentation and organic development rather than acquiring or appropriating more fully-formed principles and practices from elsewhere. Each engagement initiative studied provided a unique ‘opportunity space’ for citizen participation as each employed different means and emphasised a particular mix of ends. These ends were to do with getting good ideas, strengthening and connecting the community, and building a more responsive and sustainable government. The study and resultant *F-quad* model suggest that the ‘big picture’ orientating questions need to be articulated, answered, balanced and communicated before rushing into the realms of an initiative’s detail and action. A key issue highlighted across the cases is the need for the ends and means of a particular engagement initiative to fit with the political and managerial frameworks and organisational culture.

## Declaration

I, Peter Demediuk, declare that the DBA thesis entitled *The Form and Function of Local Government Community Engagement Initiatives – Swedish Case Studies* is no more than 65,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

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I acknowledge the incentive provided by my mother Taisa's Ph.D. and her multiple publications in Nature and other great journals - and the continual questions by friends and family around *how is it going?*, and more often, *when are you going to make an end of it?*

And last but not least, I wish to acknowledge Therese, Tom, Lucy and Sophie's encouragement and forbearance on what has been a long, protracted and bumpy - yet satisfying - journey.

## Publications

The following is a list of publications that have arisen from the research undertaken as part of this Professional Doctorate Thesis. These publications have in turn formed a significant basis for the development of the literature review, framework development and case study chapters.

1. Demediuk, P. 2010. And What Do You Want for the Future? *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*. V.10. N.1. pp 537-548.
2. Demediuk, P. 2010. Waking Up the Sleeping Town. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*. (forthcoming).
3. Demediuk, P. 2010. A Subject to Get You Off the Couch. *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*. V.10. N.1. pp 397-407.
4. Demediuk, P. 2010. Not Just an Innocent Flock of Sheep. *The International Journal of Learning*. V.17. N.3. pp 51-65.
5. Demediuk, P. 2010. Participatory budgeting in local government: when good intentions collide with organizational culture and systems. Eds: S. Lee and J. Tjakraatmadja. Proceedings of Pan Pacific Conference XXV11, Bali, Indonesia. May.
6. Demediuk, P. 2009. Recipes for community engagement in Swedish local government. *Global Business and Economics Anthology*. V. II. December. pp. 226-237.
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10. Demediuk, P. 2008. The Costs and Benefits of Community Engagement by Local Government. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*. V. 2, I. 5. pp. 157-163.
11. Demediuk, P. 2008. Rational decision making and satisficing in modern local government. Ed: M. Jalbert. Proceedings of IBFR Global Conference on Business and Finance, San Jose, Costa Rica. May.
12. Demediuk, P. 2008. The Nature and Impact of Community Engagement: Comments on the Literature. Eds: S. Lee & G. Selva. Proceedings of Pan-Pacific Business Conference, San Jose, Costa Rica. June.

## Glossary of terms

Accountability (U4 2009)	answering to a higher authority for one's actions
Agenda setting (Shafritz, Russel & Borick 2009)	ideas and issues percolate through channels to become considered for policy and action
Autopoietic systems (Luhmann 2005).	organisations live off lessons from past decisions
Community engagement (Bayside Council 2009)	the ideal and practice of citizen participation where governments connect with people in the development and implementation of policies and programs
Community (or local) governance (Epstein et al. 2005; Stoker 2004)	arrangements for public decision making that embody an authentic role for citizens.
Deliberation and deliberative democracy (Lukensmeyer & Torres 2006)	participation that goes beyond information exchange and facilitates active citizen involvement in discourse, finding shared priorities, learning, and decision making
Decision making (Simon 1977) <i>note: <b>hyphenated</b> when used in conjunction with other terms i.e. decision-making processes</i>	finding occasions, finding alternatives, making choices and evaluating what happens
E-government (and e-voting and e-engagement) (Macintosh 2007)	technologies that provide opportunities for two-way interaction between the institution and the public
Evaluation (Shafritz, Russel & Borick 2009)	any systematic assessment of activities and effects
Governance (2005 p. 16)	the arrangements that determine decisions and action
Instrumental argument	reasoned to achieve an end or to pursue one's desires
Invited space (Cornwall & Coelho 2006)	(see opportunity space)
Isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983).	a tendency towards homogeneity in organisations
Kommun	a Swedish local government or municipality
Normative argument	one based on normativity, or right and wrong, which can change depending on values, culture, rules etc.
Opportunity space (Raco & Henderson 2005) or invited space	structures & processes for citizens and public officials to work cooperatively and constructively on issues
Participative budgeting	citizens participate in resource allocation decision making
Program (Shafritz, Russel & Borick 2009)	all activities designed to realize a policy such as services, infrastructure projects etc
Public interest / public good (U4 2009)	a universal label for access, equity & performance
Public official (U4 2009)	politicians and civil servants
Public policy (Shafritz, Russel & Borick 2009)	where governments decide about what to do or not to do in response to an issue.
Radslag	engagement that centres on a referendum

## List of acronyms

DBA	degree of Doctor of Business Administration
IAP (and IAP2 – <i>the 2 as in IAPP</i> )	the International Association for Public Participation which is a non-government body that promotes debate, develops networks, and informs practice in community engagement
IC	intellectual capital consists of the resources available to an organisation beyond financial and physical capital
NPM	the New Public Management is a generic term for reforms to the structures and processes of government which stress a rationality of economic efficiency
ODPM	the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is a UK agency that has a strong interest in the functioning of local government and the concept of local governance
OECD	the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an international organisation helping governments tackle the economic, social and governance challenges of a globalised economy
OPE	the Office of Public Engagement has been formed by President Obama’s administration in the US to highlight and champion community engagement
SALAR	the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions is the peak body representing and developing local governments in Sweden

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Community engagement has a history stretching back to the ancient Athenian ‘direct democracy’ in which citizens participated in government decision making. Imagine a more recent scenario where a U.K. Prime Minister declares that citizens should be engaged on all issues, and inhabitants are constantly bombarded with a stream of questions about a myriad of matters - such as the colour of post-boxes. The citizenry soon tires of the endless referendum questions and the pressure of having to make decisions. So in order to get these demands out of their daily routines, the public happily assign all decision making and power to the Prime Minister - inadvertently and effectively creating a dictatorship. So goes the final act in Peter Cook’s 1970 British 1970 cult satire *The Rise and Rise of Michael Rimmer*. Forty years on, the film’s satire strikes a contemporary chord as pressure and activity mounts for more citizen participation in government decision-making processes.

The purpose of this study is to explore the form and function of community engagement initiatives by local governments in order to inform professional practice in the newly invigorated movement to embed citizen participation in local governing.

Initially in this chapter, the background to the research will be presented and a justification for the study made. Then attention will be focused on the nature of the research problem, the methodology chosen and the organisation of the thesis.

### 1.2 Background to the research

The ideal and practice of community engagement is about governments undertaking initiatives to connect with their citizens so that the community can have a say in the things that really matter to it (Bayside Council 2009; Department of Communities and Local Government 2006). From the recent evocation by U.S. President Obama (2009) about the importance of community engagement in the world’s largest democracy, to the bold participatory budgeting projects by relatively small and impoverished municipalities (Hall 2005), there is a global trend of governments becoming interested and active in better connecting with their citizens. It is widely contended that a modern democratic society will only reach its potential when such community engagement is applied to combine the knowledge and strengths of citizens, political representatives and civil servants (Box 1998; Fung 2006; Thomas 1995; Wang 2001; Yang

2005). The quest for improved economic, social or political ends through citizen participation is especially relevant to local governments, since that is the level of public administration closest to the community (Bingham, Nabachi & O'Leary 2005). Participatory initiatives by municipalities moves the focus from 'local government' to 'local governance' (Pratchett 1999) which is the "... the process of engaging social and political actors in the governing of their community" (O'Toole 2003, p. 3).

### **1.3 Justification for the research**

Many decisions that were once made out of sight of the public are now subject to the involvement of individual citizens or groups through community engagement initiatives as public officials (politicians and civil servants) and their institutions react to expectations that they should operate in ways that allow increased citizen participation in decision-making processes. These expectations can be of their own making (Langlet 2009) or derive from central government policy or legislation (Solli, Demediuk & Sims 2005).

Yet public officials typically are not instructed about, and do not know, exactly how and when the participation should happen, only that it should be done without sacrificing efficiency or effectiveness (Thomas 1995). The progress of research into community engagement by governments has been "modest", and there is a gap in the knowledge about the nature and effect of citizen participation in practice (Wang & Wart 2007, p. 266). And advancement in professional practice is compromised by insufficient testing of the basic assumption that as a result of citizen participation, governance can be more effective and democratic (Irvin & Stansbury 2004). So a closer study of community engagement practice is required to inform future policy and action.

Studies by Wang (2001) and Yang & Callahan (2005) are important milestones in research on the form and function of engagement initiatives undertaken by local governments. However these studies capture managerial perceptions at an aggregative municipality-level view that does not interrogate the relative ends and means of particular engagement initiatives. Further research is required to bring the level of abstraction down to the form and function of individual engagement initiatives in different municipalities – and so add to the detail uncovered in prior research and contribute to the development of models to inform professional practice.

The thesis for a professional doctorate should make “... an original contribution to practice and/or extending knowledge within the profession” (VU 2010, p. 1). By exploring community engagement initiatives in local governments, this study is positioned to make a contribution to the need for research to advance from a preconception of what community participation should look like, to a “... searching examination of the actual forms and contributions of participation” (Fung 2006, p. 74). The findings of this thesis provide an opportunity for local governments and other agencies to facilitate changes in objectives, structures and processes necessary to operate citizen participation in a way that meets the local needs and context.

Through a descriptive analysis of ends and means of community engagement initiatives in practice, the research contributes to:

- the debate about responsibility, authority, effective decision-making processes in modern civil society and the direction of public sector reforms
- informing politicians and civil servants in local governments about factors in the planning, implementation or evaluation of community engagement initiatives
- the knowledge local governments have, to make choices, to develop, organically evolve or acquire structures and processes to meet their context and needs
- the development by higher levels of government of policy or legislation that concerns citizen participation in municipal decision-making processes
- the understanding by citizens, groups, businesses, non-profits and other stakeholders of ends and means in engagement activities by their governments
- the development of more sophisticated yet grounded models of community engagement to inform professional practice and each stakeholder group
- the construction of typologies for an emergent phenomenon.

## 1.4 Research aims

This is a study about a global phenomenon using Swedish cases. The study aims to explore the emergent topic of community engagement initiatives in local government in order to increase the body of knowledge about the form of participatory activities (the means) and the function that they play (the ends), and so inform professional practice. In order to achieve this aim, three broad research questions were developed for exploration:

**RQ1** In what ways can notions of ‘form’ and ‘function’ be conceptualised and articulated in order to inform debate, research and practice in community engagement?

**Response:** the construction of a research framework from the literature in Chapter 3.

**RQ2** What is the form and function of particular community engagement initiatives in practice, and how do these activities inform and transform local government and local governance?

**Response:** a descriptive analysis of case studies in Chapters 5 to 8 (and Appendices 5 to 7); and a discussion of the implications for practice in Chapter 9.

**RQ3** What is an appropriate model for guiding practice in the management of community engagement initiatives by local governments?

**Response:** the development of a model and a discussion of the implications for practice in Chapter 9.

The following steps and processes were undertaken in order to address these questions:

- a literature review was undertaken to identify and define key terms, concepts, issues and factors to do with the ideal of community engagement and citizen participation in local government decision processes
- a research framework was developed to articulate and connect key ideas in the literature about the means and ends of citizen participation, and to provide a structure for interrogating the elements which make up the form and function of community engagement initiatives
- interviews were then carried out to identify and describe the perceptions of senior public officials about the form and function of an emblematic community engagement initiative for their municipality
- the literature was compared to the practices and themes that were identified in each case study

- the results of the research were then applied to highlight key issues and learnings for professional practice and to construct a generic model to inform professional practice.

## 1.5 Methodology

Given the recent expansion of interest and action by local governments in citizen participation, and the relative underdevelopment of this research area, an exploratory study has been used to investigate the form and function of community engagement initiatives. A case study approach was selected since it can elicit richness and depth in detail and context that provides the reader with meaning and facilitates understanding (Patton 2001). The research was conducted using case studies of engagement initiatives in six organisational sites in Sweden.

Sweden has been the country choice for investigating the global phenomenon of community engagement for a number of reasons that align with Yin's (1993) criteria of feasibility, access and topicality of case:

- the propensity for public management reforms to take hold in Swedish local governments (see for example Olson et al 1998, Siverbo 2003);
- increasing interest and action in citizen participation at individual Swedish local governments and by the peak body SALAR (see for example Torsby 2008, Langlet 2009); and
- practicalities in terms of the researcher having been based for prolonged periods of time there and having good access to public officials along with informational and infrastructure resources

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with senior public officials and analysed using interview notes, recordings and transcripts. In recognition of the importance of retaining sufficient detail and context in individual case studies to thoroughly inform professional practice and further research, and in consideration of the limitation in the size of a DBA thesis, three of the six cases are reported in full in separate chapters and another chapter offers a condensed presentation of the findings related to the additional three cases.

## **1.6 Thesis structure**

The thesis is structured as follows:

### **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

The overview of the study describes the background, aims, questions, methodology and structure.

### **Chapter 2 – Community engagement: form, function and context**

The study is situated through a review of the significant literature on the form, function and context of community engagement.

### **Chapter 3 – Framework development**

The research framework is developed from the literature to identify, articulate and connect key elements in the ends and means of community engagement initiatives.

### **Chapter 4 - Methodology**

Contains the description of the ideals, practices, procedures and rules for the inquiry.

### **Chapters 5 to 7 – Case studies**

Offers a detailed descriptive analysis of three community engagement initiative case studies and an overlay of each on the research framework.

### **Chapter 8 – Case studies**

Provides a condensed presentation of the findings from three community engagement initiative case studies.

### **Chapter 9 – Implications for practice**

Results across cases studies in Chapters 5 to 8 are explored and drawn together to present an emergent model for managing community engagement in local governments and other agencies.

### **References**

List of references

### **Appendices 1 to 3**

Detailed descriptive analysis of the three condensed case studies contained in Chapter 8.

## Chapter 2

### Community engagement – form, function and context

#### 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has described the scope of this research and broadly addressed the body of literature that situates this study. This chapter provides a review of the literature in order to understand key aspects of the form, function and context of community engagement. Firstly, the community engagement phenomenon and the way it fits with democratic ideals will be described. Secondly, contemporary forces for community engagement shall be examined, along with its functions and challenges. Thirdly, ways of conceptualising the levels of citizen participation, and mechanisms for community engagement, will be investigated. Fourthly, community engagement at the local government level shall be highlighted, along with the roles of citizens and elements of good practice. Finally, knowledge gaps and prior research will be examined.

#### 2.2 Community engagement

Community engagement initiatives are programs, projects or activities that are undertaken by governments with the specific purpose of working with people “ ... to address issues affecting their well-being” (DSE 2005c, p. 10). These initiatives allow citizens and communities to participate in government processes and enable people to have a say in issues that matter to them (Department of Communities and Local Government 2006; State Government of Victoria 2005). The fundamental idea behind community engagement is to increase public involvement in decisions that affect the community (King, Feltey & Susal 1998; State Government of Victoria 2005, p. 19) and therefore allow “ ... citizens and government to participate mutually in the formulation of policy and the provision of government services ...” (Cavaye 2000 quoted in DSE 2005b, p.13). Or as Twyford et al (2006, p. 111) put it, the “ ... pointy end of engagement is the decision”.

In this research, ‘community engagement’ is the term adopted for the ideal and practice of local government connecting with “ ... citizens in the development and implementation of policies, programs and services” (Bayside Council 2009, p. 2). As a phenomenon that is about developing and sustaining working relationships between local government and the community, community engagement can be seen as a coin with two sides. On one side of the coin are ‘community engagement initiatives’ – what is done by governments in order to engage with people. The other side of the coin is ‘citizen participation’ – what happens in regard to the

involvement of the public in government decision making processes. It could be useful to consider 'community engagement initiatives' as something like a noun, and 'citizen participation' as something like a verb. Community engagement is taken to be about the processes of connecting people with decision making that are driven or sanctioned by the government (Twyford et al. 2006) - and is a subset of 'civic engagement' which includes other participatory processes such as voting, volunteering, and 'blogging' about one's political perspectives.

The choice of the term 'community engagement' for this study reflects relatively common usage by governments, practitioners and academics (see for example Carson & Hart 2005; DSE 2005b; Twyford et al. 2006). But there is a plethora of terms used in the academic and practitioner literature to describe activities designed to connect people with government processes – see and this can confuse debate and understandings (Department of Justice Canada 2001). Alternative terms include: community engagement activities (DSE 2005b, 2005c; Reddel & Woolcock 2004); community involvement activities (Florin & Wandersman 1990; Yahn 2005); citizen engagement efforts (Reddel & Woolcock 2004); citizen involvement efforts (Yang & Callahan 2007); citizen participation efforts (Langton 1978; Yang 2005); public participation processes (King, Feltey & Susal 1998; Wang 2001); public engagement initiatives (Rowe & Frewer 2005); direct participation activities (Roberts 2004, p. 320); community consultation (Audit Commission 2003a); and participatory governance activities (O'Leary, Gerard & Bingham 2006, p. 7). The diversity of terms can be illustrated in President Obama's (2009, p. 1) memo on transparency in which he supports the concept of community engagement, but through the use of the terms "public participation" and "public engagement" without any definition or distinction.

In this study, 'community engagement initiatives' and 'citizen participation' will be used in place of other terminologies except when quoting directly from the literature, or where it is clear that the authors meant something rather different from the description of community engagement in the previous paragraph.

Community engagement can occur via numerous mechanisms and involve different levels of citizen participation (DETR 1998; IAP2 2004). Citizen participation, "the 'p' word" (Mohan 2007, p. 779), is widely portrayed in the practitioner and academic literature as a reinvention of government that brings potential benefits to people and the democratic institutions such as learning and informing, societal and institutional strengthening, and better policy and implementation (Box 1998; Cornwall & Coelho 2006; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; Roberts 2004;

Thomas 1995). The literature on the form and function of community engagement is examined in detail later in this chapter, but what is clear is a rise in rhetoric and action around reinventing government through citizen participation.

The idea and practice of community engagement is spreading and greater public participation in government processes and decision making is becoming a dominant international theme (Carnes et al. 1996; Department of Justice Canada 2001), and a “... standard feature of many democratic systems nationally and internationally” (Department of Communities 2003, p. 220). The ideal of citizen participation has appeared “... across a spectrum of institutions, from radical NGOs (non-government organisations) to local government bodies to the World Bank” (Cornwall 2008b, p. 269).

The growing international movement for community engagement is exemplified by the rhetoric and action of governments in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America. In Australia, former Prime Minister Rudd has called for a “... commitment to ensure close consultation with the Australian people on the things that concern them, whether they are national or local matters” - and has instituted initiatives such as ‘community cabinet meetings’ (ALP 2008, p. 1). In Canada the government has deemed that a more robust consultative relationship with the community is “singularly important” to the effectiveness of the public sector (Department of Justice Canada 2001, p. 7). More recently, President Obama of the USA has symbolically set up an Office of Public Engagement and declared on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2009 that, “Our commitment to openness means more than simply informing the American people about how decisions are made. It means recognizing that government does not have all the answers, and that public officials need to draw on what citizens know” (OPE 2009, p. 1). And in a UK White Paper (Communities and Local Government 2008, p. ii), former Prime Minister Gordon Brown has argued for “... giving local communities the power to drive real improvements in everything from the way their neighbourhoods are policed to the way that community assets are used”. That White Paper (p. 63) champions the ideal of community engagement through thoughts attributed to a Chinese Taoist philosopher Lau Tzu (600-531 BC):

Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them.

Start with what they know.

Build with what they have.

But with the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say

“We have done this ourselves”.

In addition to these messages from governments that citizen participation is a necessity in a contemporary democracy and the responsibility and duty of public sector agencies, corresponding calls for more community engagement have come from institutions and think-tanks in a host of countries such as Sweden (Demokratiutredningen 2000), the USA (America Speaks 2004), UK (Cornwall 2008a) and international bodies (OECD 2001a, 2005 ; World Bank 1996). Participation by citizens in government processes has also been valorised in the academic literature from many fields of study including political science (see for example Dahl 2000; Held 2006; Pateman 1970), history (see for example Ginsborg 2008a) and public administration (see for example Roberts 2004; Wang 2001; Yang & Callahan 2007).

There are opportunities for citizen participation in government decision-making via inputs into policy development or implementation in many domains (Cooper, Bryer & Meek 2006, p. 85; Roberts 2004). These include: public sector budgeting and performance measurement (Ebdon & Franklin 2006; Herzberg 2006); environmental issues (Bryner 2001; Carnes et al. 1996; Herzberg 2006; Irvin & Stansbury 2004); economic summits (Walters, Aydelotte & Miller 2000); local government policy development and implementation decisions (Callahan 2005; Cuthill & Fien 2005; McAteer & Orr 2006; Wang 2001; Wang & Wart 2007); strategic planning (Hellström 1997); fire prevention and response (DSE 2005b); ‘joined-up’ interests (Kathi & Cooper 2005); poverty and development (Eguren 2008; Tandon 2008), and special purpose committees (Heikkila & Isett 2007).

In opening up the once closed-off governmental decision-making processes, citizen participation “ ... involves shared responsibilities for decision making in establishing policies and allocating resources” (Gaventa 2004, p. 17), and this creation of new participation spaces for the community in government decision making and the work of government (including the co-production and co-management of services) recognises the agency of citizens as “ ... the ‘owners’, and to some extent the ‘makers and shapers’, rather than simply ‘users and choosers’ of services” (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001, p. 34).

Despite the contemporary rise in the profile and practice of community engagement that has been noted here, the idea of citizen participation in decision making has a history inexorably tied to democracy itself (Held 2006). The term "democracy" derives from the Greek words for "people" (demos) and "authority" (*kratia*)’ (Sudulich 2003), and is a concept of “rule by the people” (Held 2006, p. 1). Democracy remains neither a simple nor a constant notion as relationships between people and government people evolve (Shafritz, Russel & Borick 2009). History shows that as political equality for people changes over time, so does the nature and

effect of their participation in government decision making (Held 2006; Roberts 2004; Sudulich 2003). Nylen (2003) asserts that democracy can be deepened with active citizen participation and indicates that participatory democracy can be complementary to, rather than necessarily replace, representative democracy. The forces that can fuel a shift from the more conventional representative-end of the democracy continuum, to a position that incorporates more citizen participation, are discussed in the following section.

### **2.3 Contemporary forces for community engagement**

There are substantial shifts in the social, economic and political environment - and traditional government structures and processes have failed to perform adequately in this new context (see for example Department of Communities 2005a; Docherty, Goodland & Paddison 2001; OECD 2001a; Richardson 1999; Sandel 2009). The public are also continually becoming more educated, aware of issues, and critical of institutions and the status quo – and hence are more knowledgeable and demanding (see for example Berman 1997; Cooper 2005, p. 535; Department of Justice Canada 2001, p. 11). In addition, there are failures in other ways of gaining community ‘voice’ (America Speaks 2004; Power Inquiry 2006), a decline in peoples’ propensity to vote in elections (MORI 2005; OECD 2001a), and a perceived disconnection between government and the governed (Department of Communities 2005a). In addition, the argument that citizen participation can be leveraged “... not only to achieve efficiency but to realize a community vision chosen and enacted by its residents” (Box 1998, p. 35) presents a strong enticement for governments to instigate community engagement initiatives – especially amongst a new breed of public official (Sandel 2009).

Management ideas seem to ‘travel’ quickly, even in the public sector, and can be assimilated or translated into different forms as they ‘arrive’ and evolve in new contexts (Czarniawska 1996; Olson, O., Guthrie, J. & Humphrey, C. 1998; Solli & Demediuk 2008; Solli, Demediuk & Sims 2005). There are strong normative messages that signal the ‘necessity’ for the ideal of community engagement to travel to government organisations and their public officials (see for example Department of Communities 2005a; Department of Communities and Local Government 2006; Power Inquiry 2006). Institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Powell & DiMaggio 1991; Scott 2001) considers how ‘institutions’ - for example rules or routines - emerge as guidelines for social behaviour, and turns attention to questions of whether changes are adopted as a ‘necessity’ for the sake of legitimacy or uncertainty reduction rather than for performance-related reasons of a rational-actor model. Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 340) theorise that organisations are driven to take up routines and action that match rational concepts in work and society, and “Organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects, independent of the immediate efficacy of the

acquired practices and procedures". So forces that appear to be about better performance may only be a part of a more complex tableau. The concept of institutional 'isomorphism' suggests that organisations tend towards homogeneity by adopting or evolving towards similar structures or processes over time as a result of either mimetic pressures (for example, a desire to reduce uncertainty encourages imitation of peers who are deemed to be successful), or normative pressures (for example, adopting ways of doing that are seen as apt and legitimate in a professional sense) (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Or there may be dictates from higher levels of government for engagement (see for example Boviard & Halachmi 2000; Coaffee & Johnston 2005; Solli, Demediuk & Sims 2005). The information technology revolution can also facilitate the involvement of citizens in the decision making of governments (Macintosh 2007; Streib & Willoughby 1995). The United Nations 'Brisbane Declaration' ICEC (2005), formed by practitioners, notes four core principles as the criteria for good practice in community engagement: integrity, inclusion, deliberation, and influence.

Different public sector reform movements are forces for community engagement as each brings contrasting imperatives and opportunities for citizen participation in the governance of society. 'Governance' is a broader notion than 'government', and involves interaction between government institutions, actors within them, and civil society (British-Council 2002). Governance is about "the formal and informal arrangements that determine how public decisions are made and how public actions are carried out" (OECD 2005 p. 16). Montin and Granberg (2007, p. 5) distinguish between the concepts of government and governance by noting that as a municipality increases its networks and interaction with local external stakeholders, this results in "local government with local governance". This 'local governance' (Pratchett 1999) - or the alternative label of 'community governance' (Epstein et al. 2005) that is adopted in this research - refers to "... the process of engaging social and political actors in the governing of their community" (O'Toole 2003, p. 3). Three distinctive conceptual paradigms for governance are: traditional forms of public management; NPM (New Public Management) approaches; and new community-centred forms of governance (Stoker 2004) – and these modes and their key attributes are indicated in Figure 2-1. As Miller and Rose (2008) note, in the art of governing there is 'rationality' but not 'a rationality' – as there are many forms of reason and or styles of thinking that can be adopted. In moving from left to right on the continuum in Figure 2-1, the ideal of 'acting rationally' does not change - but the source of rationality shifts to forms of governance that utilise "... active participation by citizens in local democracy and decision making ... " (OPDM 2005a, p. 1).

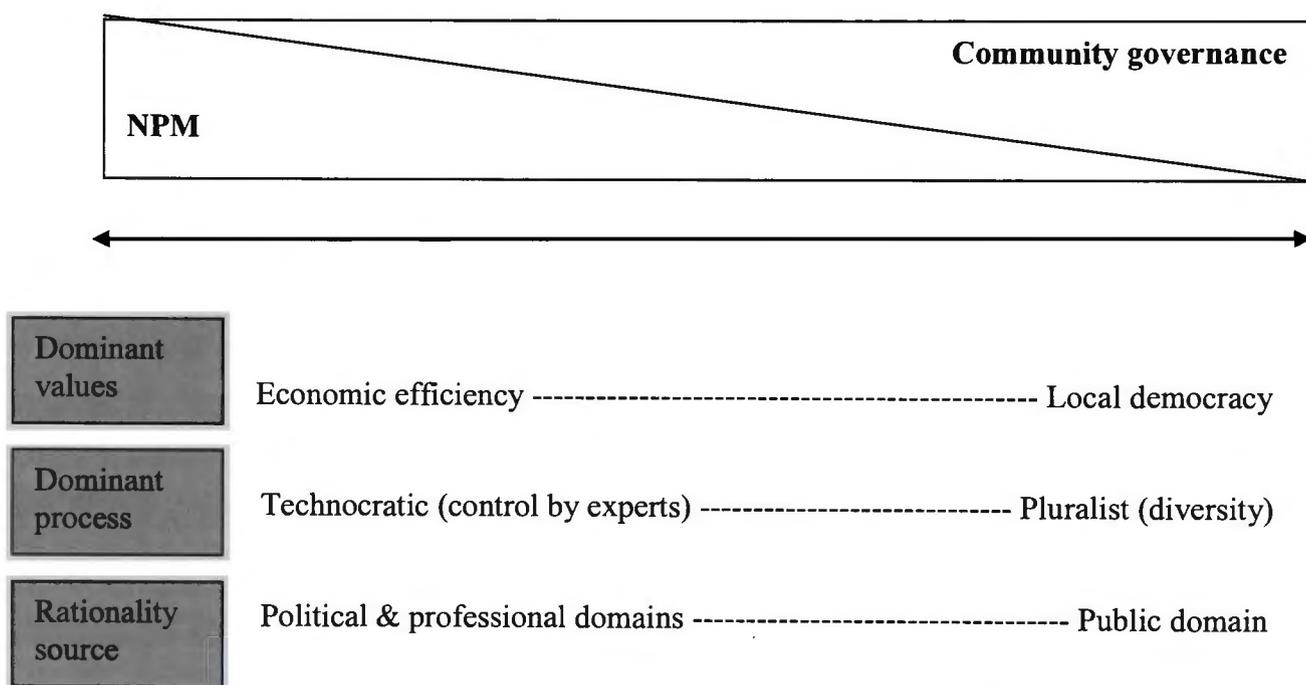
**Figure 2-1 Eras of local governing: a continuum for policy and administration reform**

Continuum of paradigms/source	Traditional public > management	NPM	> Community governance
Key objectives the governance system (Kelly 2002)	Managing inputs, delivering services in a welfare state context	Managing inputs & outputs in a way that ensures economic efficiency & responsiveness to consumers	Greater effectiveness in tackling problems that the public cares about and greater local democracy
Dominant ideologies (Denhardt 2000)	Professionalism and party partisanship	Managerialism and consumerism	Managerialism and localism
Source of public interest (Aulich 1999b)	Defined by politicians/experts.	Aggregation of individual preferences demonstrated by customer choice.	Individual & public preferences resulting from complex process of officials & community interaction.
Public servants respond to (Denhardt 2000)	Clients & constituents	Customers	Citizens
Goal of managers (Kelly 2002)	Follow political direction	Meet agreed performance targets.	Meet citizen/user preferences & renew trust through quality services.
Role of government (Denhardt 2000)	Steering and rowing	Steering, and unleashing market forces	Serving by brokering and negotiating community interests
Performance objective (Kelly 2002)	Managing inputs.	Managing inputs and outputs.	Multiple objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• service outputs &amp; outcomes</li> <li>• satisfaction, trust &amp; legitimacy.</li> </ul>
Rationality (Considine 2006)	Laws & rules	Management plans & competition	Relationships, co-production & co-operation brokered
Performance information implied by objectives (Stoker 2004)	Resource usage budgets	Resource usage budgets Output indicators	Performance measurement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resource usage budgets</li> <li>• output indicators</li> <li>• outcome information about services, trust, legitimacy etc.</li> </ul>
Achieving objectives - preferred service deliverer (Kelly 2002)	Hierarchical administration of programs through existing professional departments	Private sector or tightly defined arm's-length government or non-profit agency contracts and incentive structures.	Menu of alternatives (e.g. public sector agencies, private companies and community groups as well), selected pragmatically with an increasing role for user choice
Organisational structure (Denhardt 2000)	Bureaucratic organisation with top-down authority	Public sector organisations are decentralised	Collaborative structures with internal and external participants
Management discretion (Denhardt 2000)	Allowed little discretion.	Wide latitude in meeting goals	Constrained and accountable discretion
Dominant model of accountability (Stoker 2004)	Upwards through administrative and service departments to politicians, councils and parliaments.	Upwards through performance contracts and outwards to customers via outcomes & market mechanisms.	Multiple: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• citizens as users &amp; overseers of government</li> <li>• taxpayers as funders.</li> </ul>
Role for public participation Kelly (2002)	Limited to voting in elections and pressure on elected representatives.	Limited – apart from use of customer satisfaction surveys.	Crucial – multifaceted (the community as customers, citizens, and key stakeholders).
Management motivation (1 (Denhardt 2000)	Pay, benefits and security	Entrepreneurial spirit and desire for smaller government	Serve the public and contribute to society
Public service ethos (Kelly 2002)	Public sector has monopoly on service ethos and all bodies have it.	Sceptical of public sector ethos (leads to inefficiency and empire building) – favours customer service.	No one sector has a monopoly on ethos and no one ethos always appropriate – but the ethos is a community resource and needs to be carefully managed.
Relationship with 'higher' tiers of government (Stoker 2004)	Partnership with other agencies involved with service delivery	Upwards through performance contracts and meeting key performance indicators	A complex mix of flexible relations negotiated with national and regional governments

Developed from literature as referenced

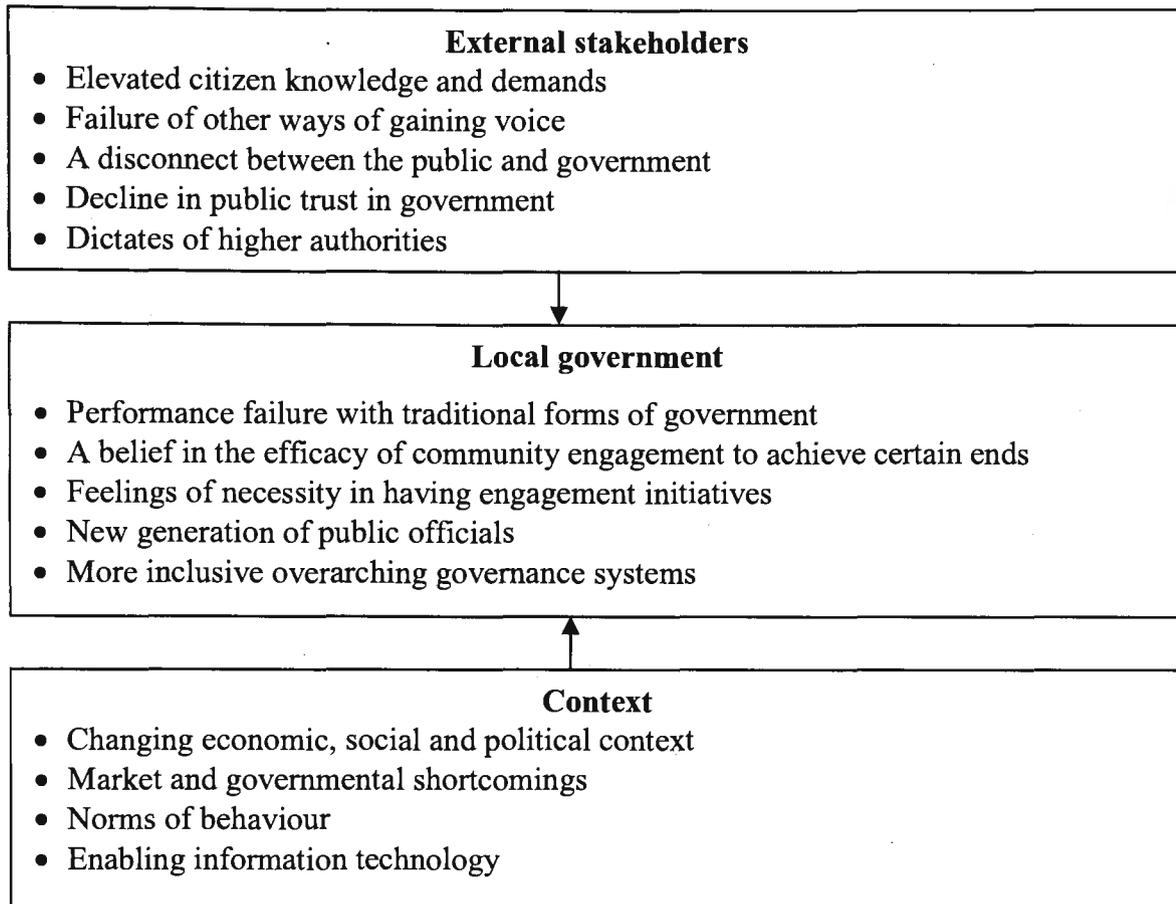
Box (1998, p. 35) observes that governments must look to both efficiency matters and to community needs and priorities in their governing - and so can operate at different positions between different theoretical poles as they balance their emphasis over time. The balancing of attributes of NPM and community governance reforms along different points on the governing continuum is illustrated in Figure 2-2. As the mode of governing moves from NPM to one based more on community governance: local democracy values will tend to become more prominent relative to efficiency concerns; dominant processes will shift towards pluralistic rather than technocratic devices; and a rationality that increasingly sources from the public domain will shift the emphasis away from political and professional perspectives. The diagonal line in the figure suggests that except for the two extremes, local governments are likely to have a mix of NPM and community governance operating at any point along the continuum.

**Figure 2-2 Attributes of local governing**



Developed after Aulich's (1999a, p. 20) mix-processes-values model with Considine's (2006) sources of rationality and Hendriks and Tops' (2000) domains.

**Figure 2-3 Summary of the *forces* for community engagement**



Developed from the literature reviewed in section 2.3

## 2.4 Functions of community engagement

Rhetoric about the ‘promise’ of community engagement from academic, professional and societal actors is in itself a strong force in the movement for increasing citizen participation in government processes and decision making. This promise can be variously described as constituting the benefits, arguments for, purposes, rationales, advantages, impacts or functions of community engagement. The latter term ‘functions’ is adopted in this study as a general heading for the promise attributed to community initiatives. This study is about the form and function of community engagement, and here the word ‘function’ is not about how the engagement works in a structural or process sense - those aspects are covered under the heading ‘form’. Rather, *function* interrogates what happens because of the citizen participation.

A wide range of argument is offered by the political science, public administration, and practitioner literature in support of greater participation by citizens in the work of government and governing. Cornwall and Coelho (2006, p. 4) believe that the strands of normative and instrumental arguments for community engagement combine in the belief that “ ... better

decisions, better citizens and better government” flow from more citizen participation in government processes and decision making in the work of governments. The strands of argument about the functions of community engagement are briefly explored in this section.

There is an argument that citizen participation ought to be a central value in democratic governance because the very concept of democracy is built on equality and rule by the people (see for example Dahl 2000; Held 2006; Sisk 2001). So community engagement can function to secure a right - and be a way of honouring democratic ideals.

Community engagement can also serve functions to do with strengthening cohesion and capacity in the community. By participating in decision-making processes, citizens gain a new consciousness and attain new skills and knowledge to expand and refine their capabilities - and so increase their preparedness and ability to engage in future initiatives (Boroondara 2005; Box 1998; Hemingway 1999; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; King & Stivers 1998; Pateman 1970; Roberts 2004; Schugurensky 2003; Walters, Aydelotte & Miller 2000; White 1996). Improved capabilities and motivation for inhabitants can add value to future processes and decision making because the public is in a position to provide more robust information exchange, analyse and debate, and see issues from a more holistic community-wide perspective (Box 1998; Thomas 1995). So through participatory experiences citizens can develop their human capital (Cuthill & Fien 2005), and as White (1996) argues, these capabilities provide some of the means for determining and attaining future ends.

Functions to do with improving the sustainability of government can accrue from community engagement initiatives that allow for additional information inputs from the public and the development of external relationships with public officials – which alter the way politicians and managers think and act, thereby increasing the scope of change (Bayside Council 2009; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; Kathi & Cooper 2005; Stoker 2004). These insights and capabilities can allow politicians and managers to perform in a way that is more grounded in reality and better reflects community preferences or incorporates innovative ways of seeing and doing things (see for example Boroondara 2005; DETR 1998; OECD 2001a, 2001c, 2005 ; Power Inquiry 2006).

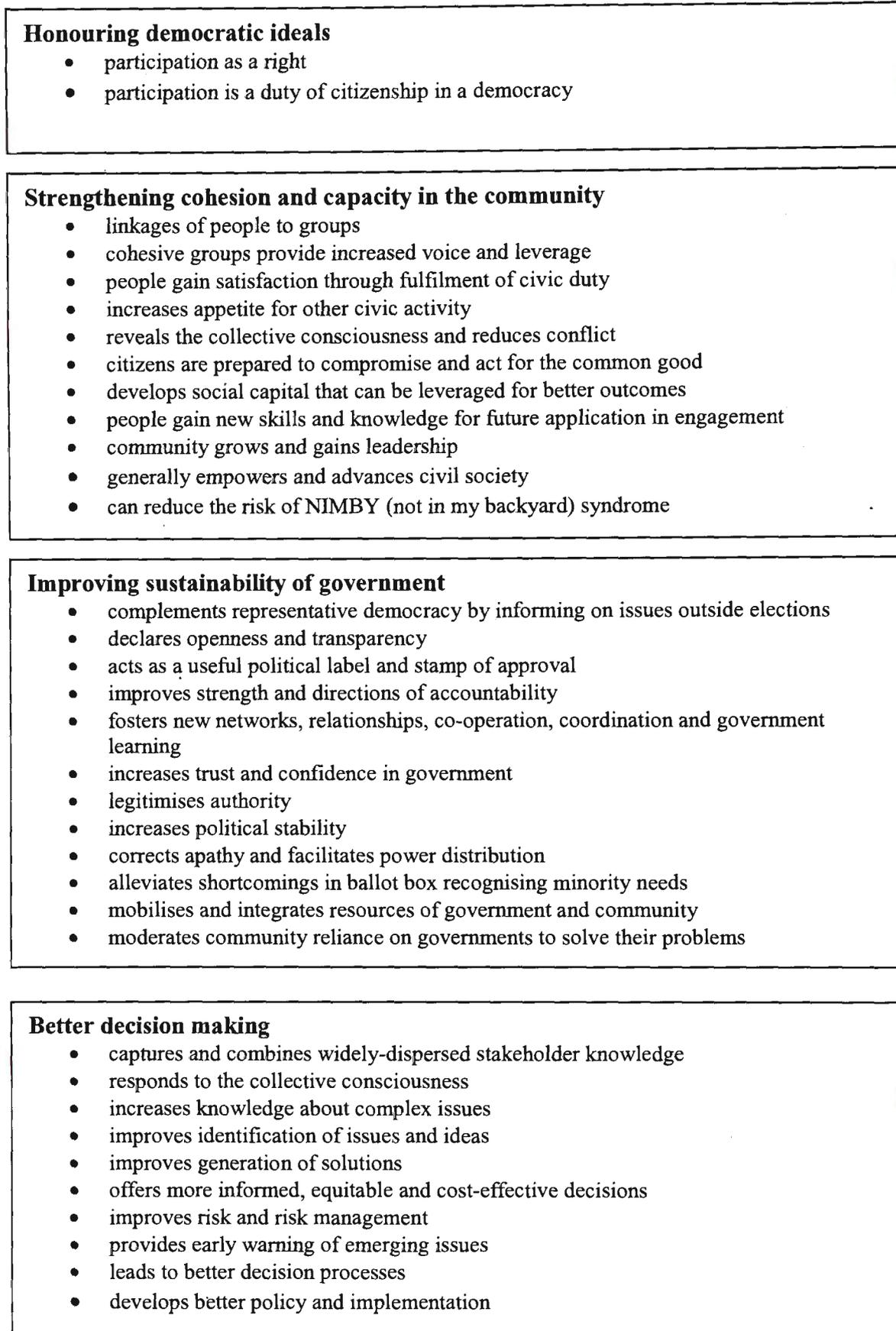
US President Obama (2009, p. 1) argues that citizen participation provides transparency that in turn “ ... promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing”. Citizen participation connects the community with the work of government and can increase the interest of people in governance – and therefore encourage and

sustain the involvement of people in the debates and voting that underpins the validity of democratic systems (Gastil 2000; Thomas 1995). Nylén (2003) asserts that citizen participation does not replace representative democracy, but works as a complementary corrective to re-engage the public in the work of government. So citizen participation can get citizens to “buy into” and “help deliver” policies and services (Callahan 2005, p. 912). Citizens can gain new perspectives that can help reduce an unrealistic or unhealthy reliance on governments to solve the bulk of social and economic problems (Diers 2004). Since community engagement initiatives assist in detecting and responding to issues that are important to the community, waste can be reduced and the financial viability of governments improved through the targeting of what really matters (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005). All in all, a better reflection of community wants and needs in what governments do, improves the sustainability of the institution (White 1996).

Bachrach (1967, p.3 cited in Renn and Webler 1995, p.21), argues that “The ability of democracy to function is measured by the soundness of the decision reached in light of the needs of the community and the scope of the public participation in reaching them”. So community engagement can provide functions that assist with better decisions on policy and action by shifting the reliance on public officials and combining the strengths of citizens, representatives and practitioners to come up with socially constructed solutions to complex problems (Bayside Council 2009; Box 1998; Roberts 2004). Combining the strengths of stakeholders is necessary since society has to solve increasingly complex problems - there are limits to the concentration of knowledge in individual actors (Klijn & Koppenjan 2000) and insights are distributed amongst stakeholders (Alford 2001). As US President Obama (2009, p. 1) argues, “... engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions”.

The functions of community engagement can be summarised and grouped into four main themes (Demediuk & Burgess 2010) - as represented in Figure 2-4: honouring democratic ideals; strengthening the cohesion and capacity in the community; improving sustainability of government; and better decision making. Like many lists, Figure 2-4 oversimplifies things. As the right-hand connecting lines seek to indicate, the four themes are not mutually exclusive because many functions discussed under one particular heading (democracy, community, government and decision making) could as easily be placed under another.

**Figure 2-4 Summary of the *functions* of community engagement**



Developed from the literature reviewed in section 2.4 and Demediuk & Burgess (2010)

The taxonomy in Figure 2-4 will serve as a reference point for investigating the functions of the community engagement initiatives that make up the case studies in this research, and provide a marker for considerations of how transformational that citizen participation might be.

Notions about the functional promise of community engagement need to be balanced by recognition of the challenges faced - be these in the form of costs, disadvantages, constraints or inhibitors. In summary, many of the challenges centre around the institution and its public officials in terms of: traditional practices, attitudes and roles; complexity and cost of new systems; risks of failure; competencies; uncovering and balancing local needs against wider ones; being inundated with uninformed, irrational or unrealistic inputs or demands; capture of agendas and power by a particular clique; and interference from outside stakeholders like political parties. The story of challenges from the community perspective is largely one of motivation, competencies, and direct and opportunity costs. There are challenges to do with democracy and political parties since participation can cause conflict and it is hard to overturn embedded representative ways of doing things (Irvin & Stansbury 2004; Roberts 2004).

How the functions of citizen participation apply in practice depends on the levels of participation sought by the community engagement initiative and the context in which these activities are introduced. Each of the varying levels of participation has their own validity depending on what is sought to be achieved and in what context (Department of Emergency Services 2001; DSE 2005c). A way of conceptualising these levels is discussed next.

## **2.5 Levels of participation**

Community engagement initiatives can be seen in terms of how decision making power is either shared or kept close by governments to protect certain interests (Hansard Society 2006). Arnstein's (1969, p. 217) classic 'ladder of participation' uses the term 'power' to scale the level of participation, and that taxonomy for levels of participation is compared to alternative models in Table 2-1. Of these models, the IAP2 (2004) public participation spectrum appears particularly robust, descriptive and prominent – and is adopted in this research to operationalise the description of the levels of participation which occur when governments engage with their communities. This framework is chosen for five essential reasons. Firstly, the spectrum excludes manipulative and disingenuous practice (which are outside the definition of community engagement adopted in this thesis) whilst providing a broad, robust and well-defined taxonomy for levels of genuine participation. Secondly, the model allows for the possibility that an appropriate level of participation is one that best matches the objectives of the exercise given the context and resources available

**Table 2-1 A comparison: models of public participation levels**

Arnstein	IAP2 (2004)	Robinson, 2002 #370}	Goss via Coleman et al (2001)	Pimbert and Pretty(1997)#	Hobsons Bay (2005)	OECD (2001a)	Dept of Emergency Services (2001)
manipulation		influence		manipulative participation			
therapy		<i>influence</i>		<i>manipulative participation</i>			
informing	inform	Inform	giving information	passive participation	informing	information	information sharing
consultation	consult	Consult	consultation/ listening	participation in information-giving	seeking information	consultation	response seeking
placation	involve	involve	exploring/innovating/visioning	participation by consultation	involving	active participation	community input into planning
partnership	collaborate	Partner	judging/deciding together	interactive participation	partnerships	<i>active participation</i>	<i>co-operative decision making and planning</i>
delegated power	empower	empower	delegating/supporting/decision making	<i>interactive participation</i>	<i>partnerships</i>	<i>active participation</i>	<i>co-operative decision making and planning</i>
citizen control				self-mobilisation			

Note: where a model has elements that cover more than one of Arnstein's eight steps, the aspect is shown in italics

Developed from the literature as referenced.

(see for example Hobsons Bay 2005; IAP2 2004; OECD 2001a; Planning NSW 2003). Thirdly, the spectrum is constructed from a stance of community engagement activities that are sanctioned by the government institution, which is important in this research as it focuses on engagement initiatives undertaken by governments. Fourthly, the model canvasses and makes explicit an important range of processes including: uncovering problems; constructing alternative solutions; and making a choice. Finally, the IAP2 spectrum has gained a profile in the academic and practitioner debate (see for example Symonds 2005; Twyford et al. 2006), and it informs or reflects institutional models and practice in countries as diverse as Australia (see for example Department of Environment and Conservation 2006; DSE 2005a; DSE 2005c; Planning NSW 2003), the United Kingdom (Cleveland Fire Brigade 2009; Yate Town Council 2009), USA (Seattle Public Schools 2008) and Sweden (Huddinge Kommun 2007).

The IAP2 model (2004) Figure 2-5 has five key points highlighted along a spectrum of participation which is a continuum that ranges from lower to higher levels of public impact. *Inform* is the flow of balanced and objective information from government to community with a commitment to keep the public informed. *Inform* can be taken to be a higher level than Arnstein's 'manipulation' or 'therapy', since deception or obfuscation is not the objective. *Consult* occurs when the institution solicits, and promises to listen to, information from the public and commits to providing feedback on how it influenced decision making. *Consult* equates to Arnstein's 'consultation'. *Involve* happens where the institution is working closely with citizens to obtain information that can influence action, and comes with a commitment providing feedback on how that information influenced decision making. *Involve* is roughly analogous to Arnstein's 'placation', though with slightly more emphasis on being able to 'ensure' that information will be reflected in decision alternatives. *Collaborate* occurs where the institution and public become partners in developing alternative and preferred solutions to problems, with a commitment to incorporate those views to a maximum extent. *Collaborate* is analogous to Arnstein's 'partnership'. *Empower* happens where the institution places the final decision-making power in public hands with a commitment to follow what is decided upon. *Empower* is analogous to Arnstein's 'delegated power'.

The IAP2 participatory scale ends at *empower* because this is the strongest form of engagement that the institution can rationally plan for and offer - since governments in western democracies must legally retain ultimate responsibility for decisions made under their mandate (Department of Communities 2005a; Department of Communities and Local Government 2006; OECD 2001a).

**Figure 2-5 IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum: levels of participation & rationale**

→ increasing level of public impact →				
<b>INFORM</b>	<b>CONSULT</b>	<b>INVOLVE</b>	<b>COLLABORATE</b>	<b>EMPOWER</b>
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Objective</b>
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public and private concerns are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
<b>Promise to the public</b>	<b>Promise to the public</b>	<b>Promise to the public</b>	<b>Promise to the public</b>	<b>Promise to the public</b>
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide

Sourced from (IAP2 2004)

Creighton emphasises that the boundaries between the IAP2 categories are not black and white, and so the continuum can be portrayed (Figure 2-6) as a set of intersecting circles (Creighton 2005, p. 9) where a particular level of participation could be reasonably argued to occupy more than one 'camp'.

**Figure 2-6 Intersecting boundaries of participation categories**



Sourced from (Creighton 2005, p. 9)

The IAP2 (2004) spectrum aligns different levels of participation to different objectives – and mirrors the idea that position along the *inform-to-empower* continuum ought to depend on what functions a government wants from the engagement exercise (Box 1998; Thomas 1995) and internal and external circumstances and context faced by an organisation (Donaldson 2001). Therefore notion that there is no one best way for an organisation to do things is reflected in the IAP2 model (IAP2 2004), as there is no one optimum position along the *inform-to-empower* continuum.

In order to achieve the level of public participation that is desirable for a particular context, contingencies and set of objectives, governments have to choose appropriate engagement mechanisms to support the participatory activities (Department of Communities 2005a; Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003, 2005; Ebdon & Franklin 2006; IAP2 2004; Robinson 2002; Thomas 1995) - and these are discussed in the following section.

## **2.6 Mechanisms for enabling participation**

This section examines the ways that governments can operationalise community engagement initiatives in order to enable the desired level of participation to occur. These ways of engaging are variously termed ‘mechanisms’ (Ebdon & Franklin 2006; Roberts 2004; Rowe & Frewer 2005), ‘approaches’ (America Speaks 2004), ‘processes’ (Robinson 2002), ‘instruments’ (Rowe & Frewer 2005), ‘techniques’ (IAP2 2004), ‘tools’ (OECD 2001a) and ‘methods’ (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003). This research follows Roberts (2004), Ebdon and Franklin (2006)

and Rowe and Frewer (2005) in adopting ‘mechanisms’ as the generic label for the vast array of practice.

It is not an objective of this research to exhaustively list, define and analyse the purposes, costs and benefits of huge myriad of alternative mechanisms. That has been done comprehensively elsewhere in research papers and practitioner reports to do with engagement mechanisms in general (see for example Abelson et al. 2001 Yahn, 2005; Carson & Gelber 2001; Curtain 2003; Department of Communities 2005b; Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003, 2005; Planning NSW 2003), e-engagement mechanisms (see for example Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003), technologically-driven large scale initiatives (see for example America Speaks 2004), or emerging techniques such as citizens’ juries (Carson 2006; James & Blamey 1999). Rather, the objectives for this literature review are to identify mechanisms which are commonly highlighted in the literature (which then can be compared to mechanisms detected in the case studies), and to examine how these mechanisms may be matched to particular levels of public participation.

IAP2 (2004) suggests mechanisms that suit each involvement level in its public participation spectrum that ranges from *inform* to *empower*. A number of government entities have also developed taxonomies of engagement mechanisms that match particular levels of participation (see for example Department of Environment and Conservation 2006; Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003; DSE 2005b; Maribyrnong City Council 2000; OECD 2001a; Planning NSW 2003). Figure 2-7 is constructed in order to synthesise the mechanisms listed in the IAP2 framework with taxonomies suggested by six government entities (which are listed in the ‘key’ to that figure). In Figure 2-7, suggested mechanisms are clustered under each participatory level into groupings according to whether they are primarily event, document, or electronic-based. In addition, each mechanism is cross-referenced to the literature by using a letter as a key. Multiple references for many of the mechanisms indicates a significant degree of agreement and overlap in the literature about which engagement mechanisms are suited to particular points along the participation spectrum.

**Figure 2-7 Mechanisms to enable levels of participation**

→ increasing level of public impact →				
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Objective	Objective	Objective	Objective	Objective
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public & private concerns are consistently understood & considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives & identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Mechanisms	Mechanisms	Mechanisms	Mechanisms	Mechanisms
<p><b>Events:</b>                      Information meetings N P M D O                      Open houses I                      Exhibitions &amp; site displays M O                      Educational campaigns &amp; presentations N D                      Personal telephone contacts M                      Information repositories W</p> <p><b>Documents:</b>                      Public notices P W                      Written correspondence P M O W                      Fact sheets, handbooks, pamphlets &amp; discussion papers I M D W                      Media stories N M D O W                      Advertising O</p> <p><b>Electronic:</b>                      Websites N I P O W</p>	<p><b>Events:</b>                      Community consultative (information and feedback) sessions N P M D W                      Exhibitions N M                      Facilitation P                      Focus groups N I P M O                      Invited meetings M D                      Public meetings I M                      Conferences &amp; seminars O                      Hotline M                      Public hearing P W                      Citizens' panel P                      Precinct meetings N                      Parliamentary committees W</p> <p><b>Documents:</b>                      Media campaign for submissions M                      Public comment &amp; suggestion boxes I M                      Questionnaires &amp; surveys N I P M O W</p> <p><b>Electronic:</b>                      Websites M O P W                      Sharing internal databases &amp; information management software O</p>	<p><b>Events:</b>                      Workshops N I M W                      Deliberate polling I                      Facilitation P                      Planning focus groups P W                      Community forums &amp; public hearings N M D O W                      Advisory committees &amp; citizen panels P O W                      Technical and review sessions D                      Site tours and meetings M D                      Non-binding referenda O                      Open hours sessions O                      Consensus conferences O                      Online discussion groups W                      Interactive e-conferences W</p>	<p><b>Events:</b>                      Citizen advisory committees N I P D W                      Consensus conferences I O W                      Charette P M W                      Facilitation P                      Policy round table P W                      Regional forum P                      Search conference P                      Planning &amp; user forums N W                      Joint projects N D                      Participatory decision making I                      Workshops D                      Study groups W</p>	<p><b>Events:</b>                      Management advisory committees &amp; commissions of inquiry N M W                      Referenda &amp; ballots I N R W                      Citizens juries I P M D O W                      Citizens' panels W                      Visioning &amp; search conferences P O W                      Joint venture M D O                      Delegated decisions I D                      Tripartite commissions O</p>

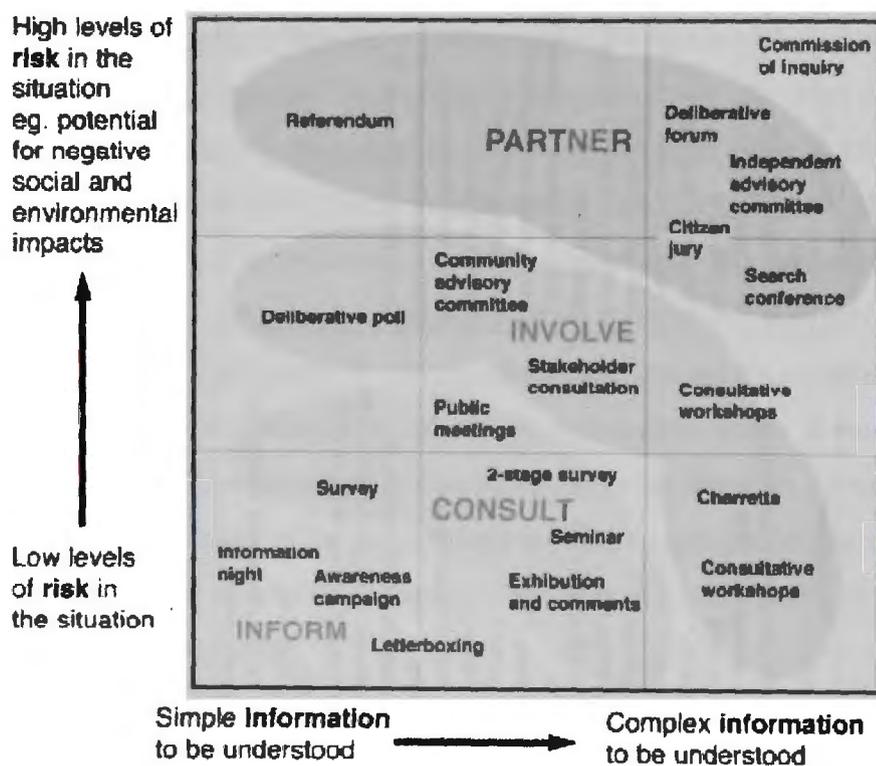
Developed from (IAP2 2004) with inclusions of mechanisms from sources in the key below:

**Key**  
 D (DSE 2005a)    I (IAP2 2004)    M (Maribyrnong City Council 2000)    N (Department of Environment and Conservation 2006)  
 O (OECD 2001a)    P (Planning NSW 2003)    W (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003)

The list in Figure 2-7 provides a useful compendium for an initial matching of mechanisms with IAP2's participatory levels of informing, consulting, involving collaborating and empowering but does not provide guidance on factors that could guide choices between the alternative mechanisms listed for each participatory level. (2002, p. 4) offers a guide to selecting between alternative engagement mechanisms by suggesting that the choice is dependant on a mix of two factors: situational risk in decision making and the complexity of information required for sound decision making.

The levels of participation in Robinson's public participation matrix framework (Figure 2-8) differ slightly from the IAP2 spectrum (Figure 2-5), as the *collaborate* and *empower* levels in the latter are amalgamated into a 'partner' category in the former. Robinson (2002, p. 4) argues that the levels of participation are contingent on risk and complexity, and as either of these factors (taken alone) increase, higher levels of influence are appropriate. But Robinson's framework also asserts that the mix of risk and complexity levels would affect not only the participation level, but also the choice of mechanisms within that level.

**Figure 2-8 Public participation matrix**



Sourced from (Robinson 2002, p. 4)

Walters et al (2000) propose an alternative framework (Table 2-2) for choosing appropriate engagement mechanisms. The framework considers particular purposes of the community engagement and the nature of the issue at hand as key factors in making the choice of mechanism.

**Table 2-2 Purpose-issue matrix for determining enabling mechanisms**

Purpose of the community engagement	Nature of the issues & enabling mechanisms		
	Well-structured	Moderately-structured	Ill-structured
1. Discovery		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest group forums</li> <li>• Web-based forums</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task forces &amp; commissions</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Neighbourhood meetings</li> <li>• Web-based</li> </ul>
2. Education		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town &amp; area meetings</li> <li>• Educational forums</li> <li>• News media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town &amp; area meetings</li> <li>• Educational public forums</li> <li>• News media</li> </ul>
3. Measurement		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> </ul>
4. Persuasion		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persuasive large &amp; small group public forums, meetings</li> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Advocacy media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persuasive large &amp; small group public forums, meetings</li> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Advocacy media</li> </ul>
5. Legitimation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elections</li> <li>• Referendums</li> <li>• Formal hearings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elections</li> <li>• Referendums</li> <li>• Formal hearings</li> <li>• Media strategy</li> <li>• Task force</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elections</li> <li>• Referendums</li> <li>• Formal hearings</li> <li>• Media strategy</li> <li>• Task force</li> </ul>

Adapted from (Walters, Aydelotte & Miller 2000, p. 356)

Engagement can transcend an information-exchange agenda and allow for significant deliberation by citizens on an issue – and the characteristics of deliberative information processing models compared to traditional debate and dialogue models are presented in Table 2-3.

**Table 2-3 Characteristics of debate, dialogue and deliberation**

<b>Debate</b>	<b>Dialogue</b>	<b>Deliberation</b>
Speaker focus Compete Argue Individual ideas Promote opinion Seek majority Persuade Dig in Tight structure Express Usually fast Clarifies Win/lose Experts deliver information Ad-hoc information Any representation	Speaker-listener focus Exchange Discuss Identify ideas Build relationships Understand Seek understanding Reach across Loose structure Listen Usually slow Clarifies No decision Experts deliver information Ad-hoc information Any representation	Participant focus Weigh Choose Identify & prioritise shared ideas Make choices Seek overlap Seek common ground Framed to make choices Flexible structure Learn Usually slow Clarifies Common ground Experts respond to questions Detailed & balanced information Balanced representation
<hr/> <i>Most useful when a position or course of action is being advocated and winning is the goal</i>	<hr/> <i>Most useful when people want to talk together about something without desiring any particular outcome from the conversation</i>	<hr/> <i>Most useful when a decision or criteria for a decision, about the best way(s) to approach an issue or problem is needed</i>

Adapted from (Lukensmeyer & Torres 2006, p. 10) and (Hodge, Bone & Crockett 2005, p. 3)

Carson (2005, p. 2) provides a broad list of factors to consider before applying deliberative mechanisms (refer Table 2-4), and these include the complexity and sensitivity of issues, the need for diverse inputs and creative solutions, and internal support and commitment.

**Table 2-4 Points to consider in deciding whether to apply a deliberative design:**

<b>When to use deliberative mechanisms?</b>	<b>When not to use deliberative mechanisms?</b>
Complex issue requiring broad debate	Experts could solve the problem
Highly sensitive requiring broad debate	No decision is pending
Need creative, acceptable and options	Pressure to include stakeholders with an agenda
Enthusiastic staff support	Little staff support
Organisers prepared to act on recommendations	Organisers not prepared to act on recommendations
Need to know the range of public opinions	Public wishes can be obtained by traditional methods like surveys
Need to avoid the usual players	Lack of facilitation competencies or resources
Diverse opinions required	Diversity in opinions is not important

Adapted from (Carson 2005)

## **2.7 Community engagement at the local government level**

Community engagement practice is especially relevant, suited, important and prevalent at the local government level (see for example Callahan 2005; Department of Communities and Local Government 2006; DETR 1998; Ruiz, Dragojević & Dietachmair 2007; Wang 2001). Local government is a natural locus for community engagement because it is closest to the people in a geographical and operational sense, and because policy and action relates to issues of local concern and directly impacts on citizens' immediate living environments (Department of Communities and Local Government 2006; Heikkila & Isett 2007; Mineur 2007; Phillips 1996; Wang & Wart 2007). Opportunities for activating citizen participation in decision-making processes are enhanced in the local government arena compared to other levels of government because "Locally responsible public administrations and political decision-makers work closer to their citizens, are often better able to reach their citizens, and are more accessible for them" (Ruiz, Dragojević & Dietachmair 2007, p. 5). Local government is therefore a good setting in which to address the disconnection between community and government through community engagement (Department of Communities and Local Government 2006; DOI 2000a, 2000b; Moreland City Council 2002; Power Inquiry 2006; Stoker 2004).

The next section examines the roles for citizens where the public is put 'back into public services'.

## **2.8 Roles of the public in local community governance**

Each engagement opportunity bestows particular roles for the public across a spectrum of 'users and choosers' to 'makers and shapers' (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001). The further the role moves towards 'makers and shakers', the more apt appears the observation that citizenship can be about "governing and being governed" (Perczynski 1999, p. 5).

In local community governance, managers are front-line operators who can beneficially collaborate with citizens in deliberations about the nature and implementation of government. This new reality of putting the public back into public services can produce a multiplicity of single or simultaneous roles for citizens and the work of public officials (Castelnovo & Simonetta 2007; King & Stivers 1998). Roberts (2004, p. 328) sees seven potential roles for citizens and for administrators (shown in brackets) as:

- 'subject' in an authority system (surrogate for ruler)
- 'voter' in a representative system (legislation implementer)
- 'client' in an administrative state (expert, professional)

- ‘customers’ of government services (broker, contract monitor)
- ‘advocate’ about community conditions or services in a pluralist system (referee, adjudicator)
- ‘co-producer’ or ‘volunteer’ in a civil society (liaison, co-producer)
- ‘co-learner’ or co-finder of issues and solutions in the social learning system (co-learner, trustee, steward, facilitator).

Epstein et al (2005) and Marshall et al (2004) describe other variations of the roles for citizens as:

- ‘advocate Stakeholders’ who are concerned or advocate about community conditions, new proposals or existing services or are catalysts for action
- ‘collaborators’ who forge compromise or consensus; or identify and leverage community assets, or work collectively (see ‘co-producer’/’volunteer’ in Roberts’ (2004) list above)
- ‘framers’ of neighbourhood agendas, issues, community visions or solutions
- ‘evaluators’ of public services
- residents who are simply disengaged from participation in public issues.

Box (1998) emphasises a role where citizens operate less like ‘watchdogs’ or as ‘free riders’, and are active and constructive and often sought-out and referred to by their elected representatives for new ideas.

Luhmann (2005, p. 103) describes organisations as “ ... *autopoietic* systems that reproduce decisions through a self-produced network of decisions” and notes that the added complexity or uncertainty that comes from involving external actors in organisational decision making is not intrinsically a negative thing, since it can open up different ways of thinking and provide new pathways for organisations. Organisations tend to live off lessons from past decisions, even long after the precise nature of those decisions are forgotten, and this can be comforting as it absorbs uncertainty, but it also creates some sort of closed world with limited horizons where one learns mostly by outcomes of one’s own decisions (Luhmann 2005). Applying Luhmann’s descriptions to the notion of community engagement, the expanded roles for citizens (such as advocates, framers of issues, collaborators or co-producers) may import some uncertainty, some fresh ways of looking at means and ends, that allows organisational decision-making processes to focus on problems more closely and in different ways – and to use uncertainty in a productive and transformational way that provides a new beginning to the organisation and its services.

## 2.9 Knowledge gaps and prior research

The literature reviewed in this chapter has established that increased citizen participation can potentially lead to better decisions, better government, and better communities - and honour democratic ideals. However there is a gap in our knowledge of what happens in practice, and so far “theoretical and empirical progress has been modest” in interrogating the form and function of community engagement initiatives (Wang & Wart 2007, p. 266). So Irvin and Stansbury (2004, p. 55) call for a critical examination of engagement initiatives to test “... the underlying assumption that if citizens become actively involved as participants in their democracy, the governance that emerges from this process will be more democratic and more effective”.

Citizen participation in government decision-making processes is commonly reported from a standpoint that assumes or emphasises positive impacts, and the question commonly addressed is how to participate - rather than whether to do it at all (Irvin & Stansbury 2004). The positive standpoint that pervades the literature is symptomatic of what Fung (2006, p. 67) sees as a “... naïve and untempered enthusiasm for public participation”. Overly enthusiastic assertions about the contribution of community engagement may address normative goals for participatory activities but fail to take an instrumental perspective that examines the costs and benefits of these initiatives (Moynihan 2003); not be supported by robust evidence (Burton et al. 2004); or fail to properly consider problematic factors (Irvin & Stansbury 2004). So more sober analysis of citizen participation is required (see for example Carnes et al. 1996; Fung 2006; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; Moynihan 2003) along with a deeper attention “... on the intrinsic merits of the principle itself” (Burton 2003, p. 8).

Studies of engagement practice have often focused on the application of participatory mechanisms rather than: the centrality of attitudes or actions of public managers (Moynihan 2003). Or else they focus on issues of participation quality and the effectiveness of participatory process in achieving outcomes (Department of Justice Canada 2001) and there is a need for increased guidance “... on how to design participatory processes to be appropriate to particular management concerns” (Bayley & French 2007, p. 3). In particular there has been “... little assessment of the extent to which participation and consultation exercises actually influences decision making” (OPDM 2005b, p. 12), and the interaction between participatory activities and government decision processes is poorly understood (Audit Commission 2003b; Department of Justice Canada 2001).

Cornwall and Coelho (2006, p. 5) note a tendency in the engagement literature “... to merge descriptive and prescriptive elements without clearly defining the boundaries between empirical reference and normative political discourse”, and this confounds our understanding of what works and where, and leaves a larger deficit in our knowledge of the nature and functions of community engagement practice than may have been imagined.

Hence there is an imperative for more research that advances from preconceptions of what community engagement should look like to a “... *searching examination of the actual forms and contributions of participation*” (emphasis added) (Fung 2006, p. 74). There needs to be an interrogation of how participatory activities “... inform new policy and procedures” and facilitate learning and adaptation amongst all stakeholders (Roberts 2004, p. 342), and this can lead to the development of micro-level theories or models that can guide practice (Roberts 2004; Rowe & Frewer 2005).

Yang (2005, p. 192) observes that local government research has tended to focus on “... the citizens’ perspective” and proceeds to point out that there has been a lack of studies which have systematically investigated the phenomena “... from the government’s perspective”. A recent doctoral thesis by Butler (2008) is an example of an exploration that takes a community orientation, and invites another dimension of research taken from an institutional perspective.

Prior research into community engagement at the municipal level has investigated the phenomena from a number of angles, and a sample is presented in Table 2-5. For example, exploration has focused on: a certain function of participation (Blake et al. 2008; Brackertz & Meredyth 2008); a particular mechanism and the context for participation (Carson 2006); citizen perspectives (Glaser, Yeager & Parker 2006); national trends (Stevenson 2002); reactions of internal stakeholders (Symonds 2005); and causes and antidotes of disengagement (Power Inquiry 2006). All of these and other research efforts have added to our knowledge - and also evidenced the need for more information on what works, and when, in community engagement.

The list in Table 2-5 highlights that many prior studies on community engagement use a lens set at a country or agency level. Other studies target a particular engagement mechanism or certain stakeholder groups. This thesis ‘steps back’ from more narrowly-focused or targeted approaches, and explores a number of cases of citizen participation in a rather holistic way - by examining the form and function of engagement initiatives encountered at local governments. So, as explained in the research methodology (refer Chapter 4), the point of departure for this

study will be ‘the’ engagement initiative identified at each local government in the sample, and this will lead to consideration of its form and function – and not the other way around, where an aspect of form, function, mechanisms, or something else, drives a study.

**Table 2-5 A sample of research into community engagement by local government**

<b>Authorship</b>	<b>A key orientation</b>
(Barrett, J & Scott 2008)	New Zealand: Impact of community competence in the “language of accounting” and remedies
(Blake et al. 2008)	UK: How governance structures enable engagement by disadvantaged groups
(Brackertz & Meredyth 2008)	Australia: Social inclusion in community engagement, Representativeness, and methods for improving
(Butler 2008)	Australia: Community engagement from community perspective with focus on community strengthening
(Carley 2006)	Scotland: Integration of citizen participation in planning into, mainstream governance structures
(Carson 2006)	Italy: Applications of a particular mechanism
(Coaffee & Johnston 2005)	UK: Management models and governance and participation in the modernisation agenda
(Demediuk 2008a)	Australia: Technology application in an engagement initiative
(Edelenbos 2005)	Dutch: How internal and external stakeholders perceive their engagement roles and have ongoing commitment
(French & Folz 2004)	Who managers consult in making decisions about local services, and the extent of such influence
(Glaser, Yeager & Parker 2006)	USA: Citizens' views of the merits of different approaches to citizen engagement
(McKenzie & Pini 2006)	Australia: How a lack of community participation is legitimised and rationalised by rural local governments
(Nelson et al. 2008)	Australia: Experiences of local activists power sharing barriers
(ODPM 2005),	UK: Does meaningful citizen engagement provide better services than those delivered in other ways?
(Power Inquiry 2006)	UK: The causes of public disengagement in recent years and how this trend might be reversed
(Silverman 2006)	USA & Canada: The factors behind choices in the divergent mechanisms used to stimulate public participation.
(Stevenson 2002)	Scotland: Engagement in a particular task - community planning
(Symonds 2005)	Canada: Attitudes and intention of public officials regarding community engagement
(Taylor 2006)	UK: How citizen engagement in structures of local governance impact on wider policies structural factors that affect them
(Wang 2001)	Macro-level management perceptions of general form, function and impact of community engagement
(Yang & Callahan 2005)	Macro-level management perceptions of general form, function and progress of community engagement activities
(Zwart 2007)	Australia: Participant recruitment and utilisation

**Developed** from the literature on community engagement

So this study makes a contribution to professional practice by exploring the form and function of individual community engagement initiatives from the perspective of public officials. The

strategy for this thesis is to mirror the holistic approach taken by Wang (2001) and Yang & Callahan (2005) in examining the form and function of community engagement by local governments, but to bring the level of abstraction down to individual engagement initiatives (rather than to an aggregative municipality-level view). Through an exploration of the form and function of engagement initiatives in particular municipalities, and comparisons between them, this study can add to the detail uncovered in prior research, and contribute to the development of models to inform the planning, implementation and evaluation of the new ‘spaces’ that enable citizens to influence the work of government – which can be imagined as “participatory spaces” (2008a, pp. 30-1) or “opportunity spaces” (Raco & Henderson 2005, p. 1). A framework for examining the form and function of community engagement initiatives in these new spaces for citizen participation will be advanced in Chapter 3.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

Community engagement is about connecting people with the work of government, and engagement initiatives allow citizens to participate in government decision-making processes. The literature indicates that community engagement is becoming a dominant international theme and a standard feature of many democratic systems, and the momentum comes from a combination of forces including support from the highest levels in government; a more educated, expectant and critical citizenry; and a changing economic, technical and social context. Borrowing Cornwall and Gaventa’s (2001, p. 34) terminology, the creation of new ‘participation spaces’ for the community in government decision making recognises the value in citizens contributing as ‘makers and shapers’ (rather than simply as ‘users and choosers’) of services. These participation spaces, and the level of immersion and influence which they afford, need to be constructed to reflect: functions (ends) that align with local needs and context; and appropriate mechanisms (means) for participation.

The foregoing review indicates that in this relatively new and expanding area of practice, there are major gaps in our knowledge of the actual form and function of community engagement initiatives and an urgent need for a “searching examination” (Fung 2006, p. 74) of what works and when, in particular from a government perspective, so as to inform future practice and research. But the work of government, and devices that connect with it, must fit with the public sector management framework at play as this fashions how politicians and civil servants operate with policy and administration (Olson, Guthrie, & Humphrey, 1998; Olson, Humphrey & Guthrie 2000). So in the next chapter the discussion of community engagement is extended to an examination of the opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making processes within modern governance frameworks for local government.

## Chapter 3

### Framework development – community engagement initiatives

#### 3.1 Introduction

Research question one (refer RQ1 in section 1.4) posed the challenge of finding ways to conceptualise and articulate notions of ‘form’ (means) and ‘function’ (ends) in community engagement so as to facilitate research into practice. The purpose of this chapter is to respond to this challenge through an exploration and synthesis of the literature and the resultant development of a research framework that will guide this case-based study into the form and function of individual community engagement initiatives. The framework development is an important prelude to the fieldwork, for as Rowe and Frewer (2005) note, in the under-researched area of citizen participation it is especially important to consider key concepts and relationships before research commences. The development of the research framework is based on literature reviewed in the previous chapter and new literature examined in this chapter.

In particular, the framework is required to assist in the interrogation of arguments identified in the literature, which combine in the belief that community engagement can offer four groups of functions (refer Figure 2-4 of Chapter 2):

- enhancing decision making
- improving sustainability of government
- strengthening the cohesion and capacity in the community
- honouring democratic ideals.

The scope of this study concentrates on the first three functions as instrumental arguments for community engagement: better decision making, better government, and better citizens. Factors or characteristics that can be used to articulate each of these three groups of functions will be explored and these aspects built into a research framework that captures some of the nature and interconnection of good decision making, good government and good community. The fourth group of functions, honouring democratic ideals, has a strong political science orientation - and for the purposes of this study is maintained in a simple form as being to do with perceptions of citizen participation as a right or a duty. Detailed study of the nexus between democratic ideals and community is thus left to expert political science research on democratic norms.

The chapter will initially explore ways to conceptualise and articulate notions of good decision making, good government and good community. Then a research model will be developed that incorporates these three notions and the interconnections between them.

### **3.2 Exploring decision making**

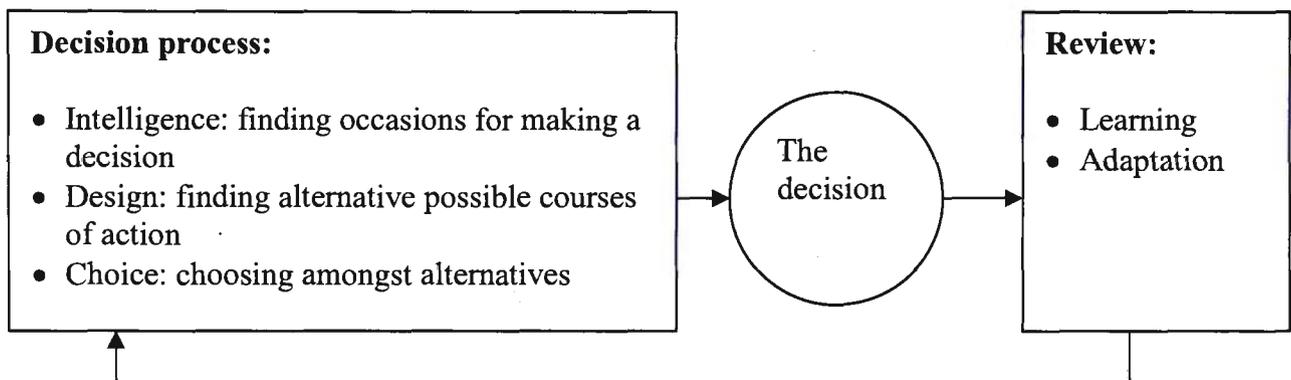
A decision is a selection between alternative choices and decision making is how “... an organisation differentiates itself, and by doing so, recognises what it is doing. No more, but no less” (Luhmann 2005, p. 83). A decision may reflect a number of things, including an intention to do something, an intention not to do something, or an opinion. In public administration the decision is especially important since the “... decision is not only a process but also, above all, a product of organisation” (Luhmann 2005, p. 100). So decision making is a phenomenon that lets us view what governments do (Gianakis 2004). Articulating decision making is important since there is a need “... to attribute decisions, a need to localise the points of decision in the network of communications” (Luhmann 2005, p. 84). Therefore decisions, especially in the local government sector, are artefacts that a responsible organisation should be seen to be producing in a coherent and referential fashion (Brunsson & Jonsson 1981).

Decisions might be seen as a commitment towards a course of action, but experience has shown that decisions are almost always never carried out as intended since in the real world actors are constantly having to juggle means and ends (see for example Jonsson 1996, 2007). So the act of ‘doing’ may decouple from the act of ‘deciding’, and decisions are not necessarily followed by expected action, and indeed, action can predate the decision that is finally articulated by individuals or institutions as the justification for what was done.

Whilst not discounting the utility of the many alternative models of decision making - for a revealing analysis see March (1988) - this research focuses on the dimensions surrounding the 1978 Nobel-prize winning work of Herbert Simon since its ideal of rational decision making accords with modern public sector management theory and practice (refer discussion around Figure 2-1 and Figure 2-2). The main dimensions of decision making highlighted by Simon are illustrated in Figure 3-1. The first dimension is the three phase decision process of intelligence (finding occasions for making a decision), design (finding alternative possible courses of action) and choice (choosing amongst alternatives). The second dimension is to do with review and consequent learning and adaptation. Decision making is about “finding occasions for making a decision, finding possible courses of action, choosing amongst choices of action”; and “... evaluating past choices” (Simon 1977, p. 40). The four fractions (finding occasions, finding alternatives, making choices and evaluating what happens) “... added together, account for

most of what executives do” (Simon 1977, p. 40). In his speech as Nobel Laureate Simon argues that while theories about decision making that have flowed from empirical data “ ... do not yet constitute a single coherent whole ... In one way or another, they incorporate the notions of bounded rationality: the need to search for decision alternatives, the replacement of optimization by targets and satisficing goals, and mechanisms of learning and adaptation” (Simon 1978, p. 366).

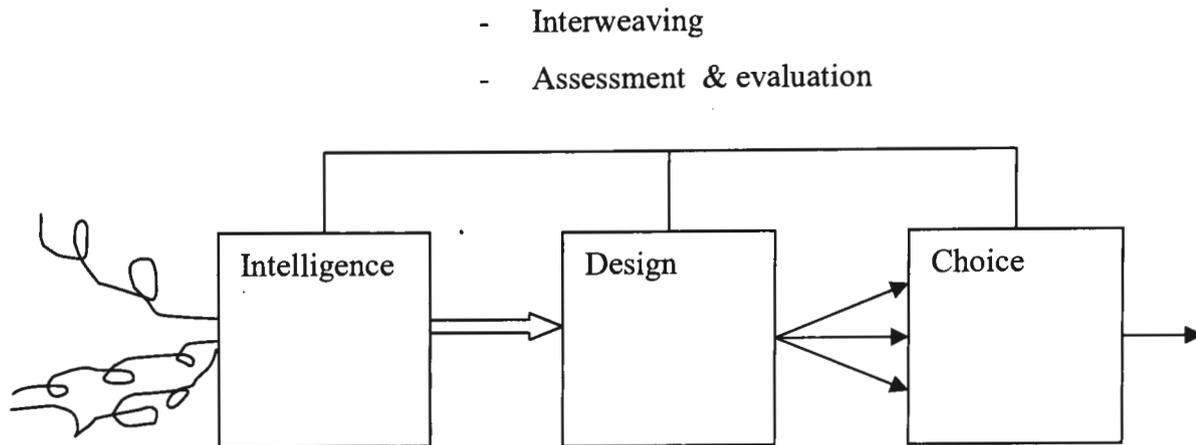
**Figure 3-1 Dimensions of decision making:**



Adapted from themes in Simon (1977)

The relationship between the three phases of the decision process (intelligence, design and choice in the left-hand side of Figure 3-1), are represented in Figure 3-2. The spirals to the left of Figure 3-2 depict the many strands of information from the internal and external organisational environment that are surveyed. The ‘intelligence’ box culminating in a single wide arrow indicates that a ‘problem’ (or occasion) for a decision is identified. The middle box and consequent multiple arrows show that the response is the design of alternative solutions. And the right-hand box finishing in a single arrow indicates a choice is made between the alternatives. Simon notes a complexity within the intelligence-design-choice sequence since “Each phase in making a particular decision is itself a complex decision making process. The design phase, for example, may call for new intelligence activities; problems at any given level generate sub-problems that, in turn, have their intelligence, design, and choice phase, and so on. They are all “ ... wheels within wheels” (Simon 1977, p. 43).

**Figure 3-2 Organisational decision making as sequential and driven by diagnosis**



**Adapted** from Boland (2004), Langley (1995) & Simon (1977)

The three stage decision process is applied to each element for decision making in the public sector management cycle. A model of these elements was developed for this study from the literature in order to provide a balanced and comprehensive list of key elements in the management cycle (refer Figure 3-3). The management cycles that have been used in the development of the taxonomy epitomise the rational decision making that has been espoused for modern public management, since they all essentially involve determining ends (objectives), and selecting means (policies or programs) to meet these ends.

Reflecting Simon’s ‘wheels within wheels’ concept, each of the eight elements -from ‘problem identification’ to ‘learning and adaptation’ – are part of decision making and will require the application of the decision process of intelligence, design, choice, and review in their own right.

**Figure 3-3 Elements of the public sector management cycle for decision making**

Element for decision making		Management process reference
1 ↓	Problem identification - issues or opportunities	(Boehm 2005; Carnes et al. 1996)
2 ↓	Determination of priorities – agenda setting	(Lukensmeyer & Torres 2006; OECD 2003; Yang & Callahan 2007)
3 ↓	Setting goals & objectives	(Boehm 2005; Halligan, Aulich & Nutley 2000; MAB/MIAC 1993; Otley 1999; Wang 2001; Yang & Callahan 2007)
4 ↓	Developing policy or programs around objectives	(Boehm 2005; Halligan, Aulich & Nutley 2000; MAB/MIAC 1993; Otley 1999; Wang 2001; Yang & Callahan 2007)
5 ↓	Implementation of policy and programs	(Carnes et al. 1996; Halligan, Aulich & Nutley 2000; Lukensmeyer & Torres 2006; MAB/MIAC 1993; OECD 2003)
6 ↓	Monitoring and evaluating outputs and outcomes of policy or programs	(Boehm 2005; Halligan, Aulich & Nutley 2000; Lukensmeyer & Torres 2006; MAB/MIAC 1993; OECD 2001a, 2003, p. 35; Wang 2001; Yang & Callahan 2007)
7 ↓	Accountability for processes & results	(Halligan, Aulich & Nutley 2000; MAB/MIAC 1993; Otley 1999)
8	Learning and adaptation from the process and results	(Halligan, Aulich & Nutley 2000; MAB/MIAC 1993; Otley 1999; Simon 1977, 1978) and implicit in the cyclical nature of most other versions of management cycles

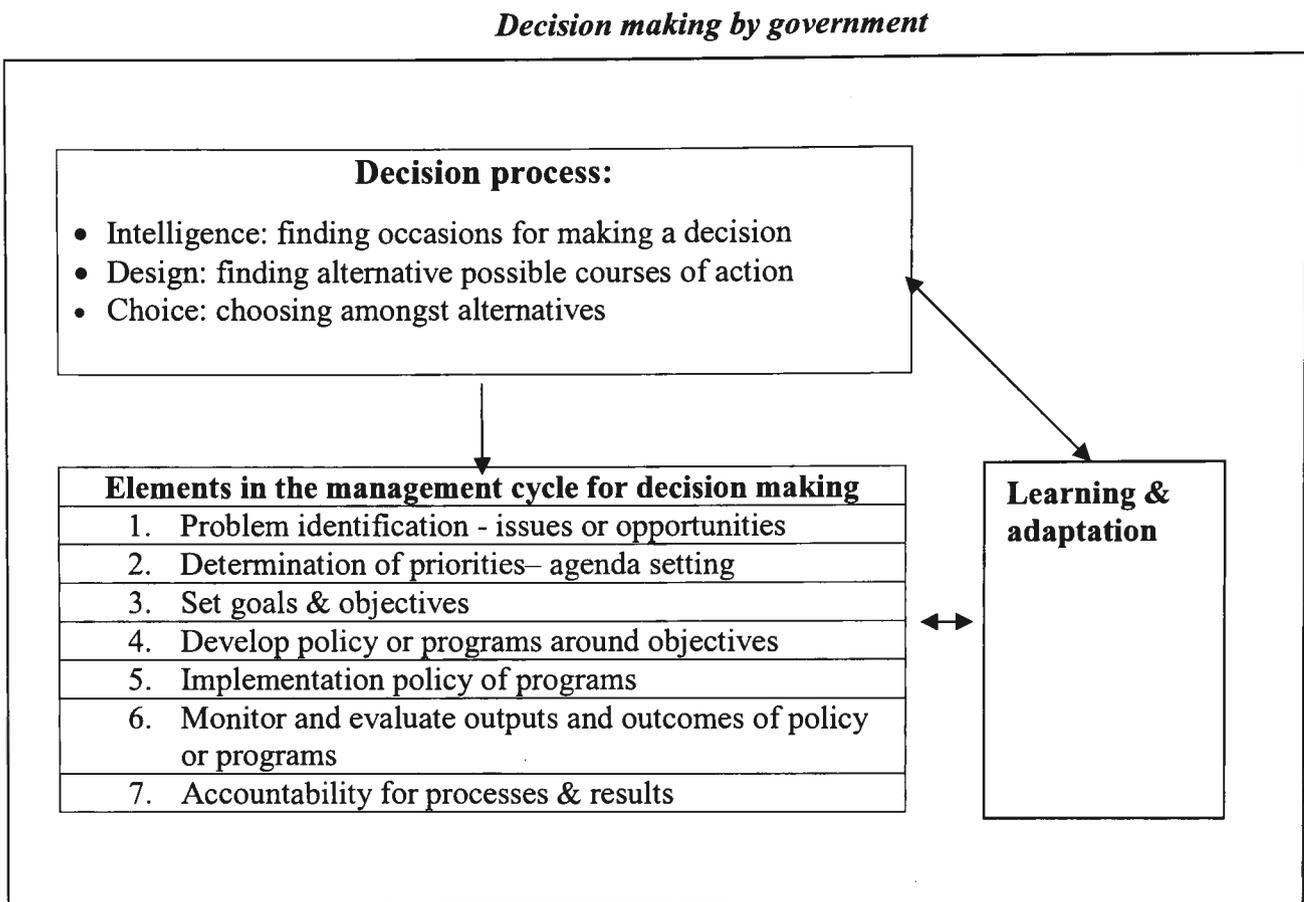
**Developed** from a synthesis of the literature on management processes and cycles as referenced

Combining the main items in Figure 3-1 and Figure 3-3 provides a conceptualisation of government decision making - an 'x-ray', taken from one of a number of possible angles of what is inside the decision-making 'black box'. This combination is displayed in Figure 3-4, and indicates that one way of examining the processes of government decision making is to consider how the four phases of decision making (intelligence; design; choice; and review/learning & adaptation), apply to the elements (the managerial processes) in the management cycle. In Figure 3-4, the eighth element in the management cycle, learning and adaptation, is shown to be linked to each of the other seven elements- while also being subject to a decision process of intelligence, design and choice. So learning can be about the decision process and the carriage of elements in the management cycle as well as providing feedback into future decision processes.

Figure 3-4 is a generic model of decision making which can be adapted for a context of citizen participation, by the inclusion of the IAP2 (2004) Public Participation Spectrum (refer Figure 2-5) as a device for exploring how citizen participation informs or transforms each element in the management cycle. The application of the IAP2 to examine the decision process of intelligence, design and choice is apt - since it interrogates the interaction of citizens with these three essential phases through the *inform-to-empower* spectrum. The spectrum interrogates the degree to which the public contributes to: flows of information (analogous to 'intelligence'); the

framing of alternatives (analogous to ‘design’); and the final choices made (analogous to ‘choice’).

**Figure 3-4 One x-ray of the decision making ‘black box’**



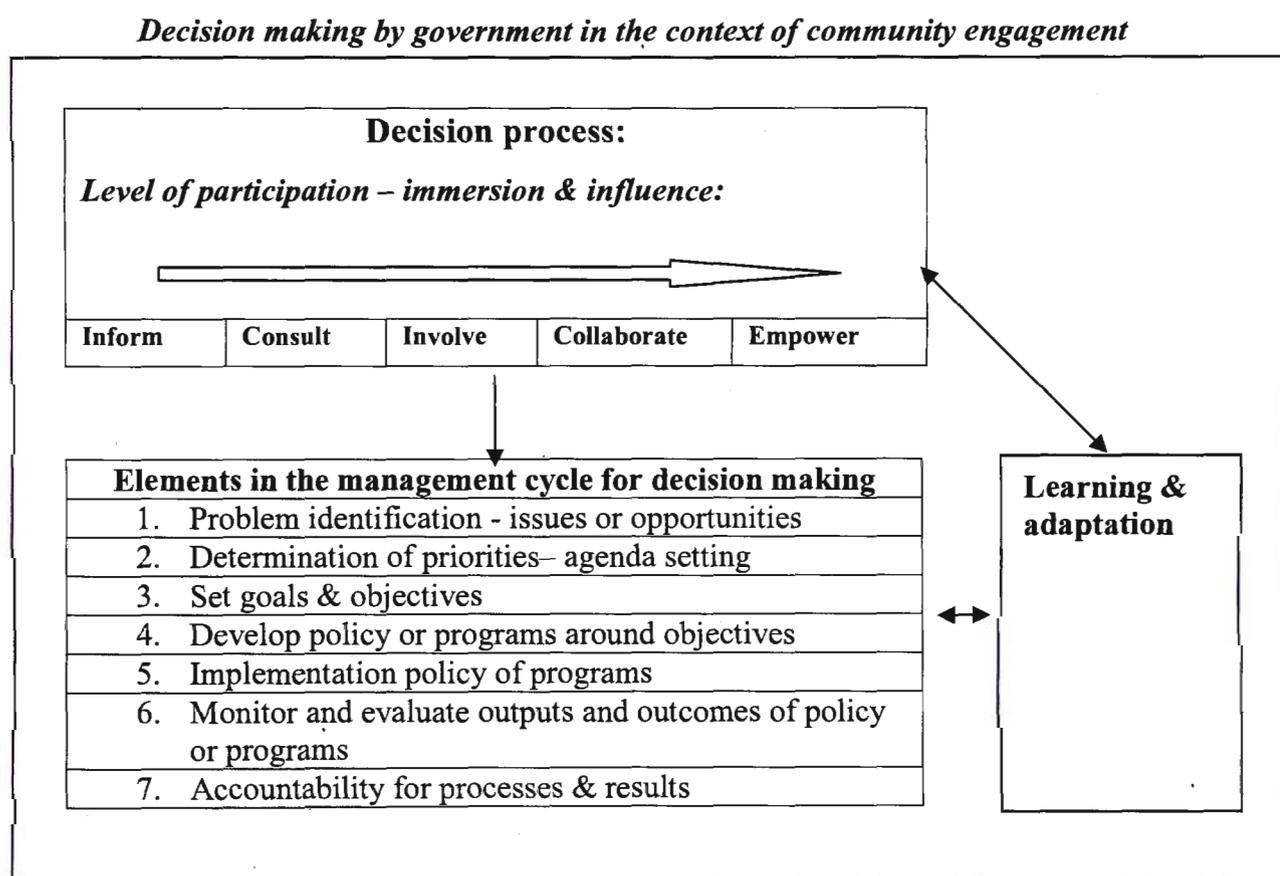
Developed from: Simon’s (1977): decision process and learning & adaptation (refer Figure 3-1); & management cycle elements (refer Figure 3-3).

By aligning the IAP2 spectrum against the elements in the management cycle to which the decision process is applied (refer Figure 3-3), a model is constructed (refer Figure 3-5) that can provide a useful description of how citizen participation informs or transforms decision making.

The development of Figure 3-5 contributes to the conceptualising, framing or operationalising of the research by suggesting a new approach that builds on the mode of investigation undertaken in the studies by Wang (2001) and Yang & Callahan (2005). In examining the question of the level of participation in each element of the management cycle, these studies use a simple likert-type scale. For example Wang (2001, p. 328) required a response to the question of whether “ ... citizens or citizen activists are involved in the following processes” and listed a particular set of elements indicative of a public management cycle. The degree of ‘involvement’ in each element was scaled as a whole, and this does not provide the differentiation that the use

of the IAP2 spectrum allows due to its in-built definitions and graduations of influence scale from *inform* to *empower*. Without such a descriptive base, different respondents in the research by Wang (2001) and Yang & Callahan (2005) may well have different benchmarks or expectations that affected their relative calibration of the ‘level’ of influence. So the application of the IAP2 *inform-to-empower* continuum suggests a more nuanced way to interrogate the level of citizen participation in decision making that can benefit the design of this study and further research.

**Figure 3-5 Public participation in government decision making**



**Developed** from: Simon’s (1977): decision process and learning & adaptation (refer Figure 3-1); management cycle elements (refer Figure 3-3); & IAP2 (IAP2 2004) participation spectrum (refer Figure 2-5).

The preceding discussion led to the development of a way to conceptualise government ‘decision making’ in a context that includes community engagement. In the next sections, the motif of ‘learning and adaptation’ (refer Figure 3-5) is explored, along with ways of conceptualising ‘better government’ and ‘better communities’.

### **3.3 Exploring 'better government' and 'better communities'**

#### **3.3.1 The motif of learning and adaptation**

Learning and adaptation is an important motif in models of the decision process (see for example Mintzberg, Raisinghani & Théorêt 1976; Simon 1978). Mintzberg notes that feedback loops and learning do not just occur after a decision is taken, but continuously during the three phases of the decision process. Learning and adaptation is also an important and recurring theme in the public management discourse, and especially in the cyclical models of public sector management which illustrate that outputs and outcomes of policy and programs are evaluated, and the learnings inform future decision making (see for example Chester City Council 2007; Halligan, Aulich & Nutley 2000; Lukensmeyer & Torres 2006; Wang 2001).

Innes and Booher (2000, p. 5) maintain that citizen participation allows “real learning and change to take place on all sides”. Community engagement is not just about influencing current government decision making (Innes & Booher 2000):

Citizen participation can help to build social, intellectual and political capital among citizens and between them and governmental and non-governmental actors. It can encourage positive sum solutions to problems instead of political compromises ... (and) ... In short, a basic purpose of citizen participation becomes learning and adaptation of the community governance and planning system (p. 31).

The former New Zealand Controller and Auditor General (Barrett, P 2002, p. 21) suggests that at the end of a management cycle, a government emerges with two important dimensions that affect future decision making: outcomes in terms of community conditions (how the community is now better or worse off as a result of the policy or program activities); and its capabilities (its “... resources or access to resources”). So an exploration of learning and adaptation should include the feedback and change that comes from reviewing processes and results, and should also consider the changes in capabilities within and outside the organisation that have come from the decision-making processes.

Taking Innes and Booher's (2000, p. 5) idea that in a community engagement context, learning and adaptation can be reflected in the building of community and institutional capabilities and capacity, the following sections will examine how these attributes can be conceptualised in a research framework.

### **3.3.2 Intellectual capital as a metaphor for better government**

In empirical research into knowledge resources at local governments, Sciulli et al (2002) illustrate that a useful way to view the capability of a local government to act and adapt is to look beyond financial and physical capital (for example money and facilities), and to examine the levels of intellectual capital. Sciulli's study exemplifies Mouritsen and Flagstad's (2004) assertion that using the construct 'intellectual capital' can help to appreciate learning and change at an organisation. And in their 'Cities of the future' study, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC 2005) argue that an examination a city's intellectual capital and factors that influence it is vital, since these resources fuel good decision making, sustainable development and a good quality of life. In this study intellectual capital is adopted as a metaphor to examine change that is indicative of 'good government' - and the incompleteness of the representation noted by Sciulli et al is acknowledged.

Intellectual capital is the 'knowledge' embedded in individuals, organisations and relationships, and it is becoming a pre-eminent resource because of its importance and uniqueness for adaptability, change and improvement (Drucker 1993; Edvinsson & Malone 1997; Stewart 1997; Sullivan 2000). Intellectual capital represents stocks of 'knowledge' in the broadest sense of the word - for example: competencies, attitudes, processes, and networks (Sullivan 2000),

There are almost as many taxonomies of intellectual capital as there are authors on the field, and these differ in complexity and labelling of elements (see Marr & Adams 2004 ). However a common theme is to structure the taxonomy to differentiate between intellectual capital embedded in the people, the organisation, and external relationships (refer Table 3-1). For the purposes of this research the terminology 'human; internal; and external capital' used by Sciulli et al (2002) to examine knowledge in local governments is adopted. Human capital represents the capabilities of people within an entity and is bound up with their abilities, attitudes and personal relationships. Human capital resides in the mind, body and actions of the individual, and is lost to the organisation when they leave. Internal capital is bound up in the entity's capabilities and is reflected in culture, processes, routines, systems, strategy, policy and innovative capacity. External capital is taken as the capability that exists through an organisation's external relationships with customers, the wider community, suppliers, network partners, and other stakeholders such as regulatory bodies (Edvinsson & Malone 1997; Sciulli et al. 2002; Stewart 1997; Sullivan 2000; Sveiby 1997). External capital enables the flow of new knowledge that in turn shapes an organisation's capabilities (Youdnt 1998). Given that such capabilities drive an organisation's action and performance (see for example Kaplan & Norton

2004; Stewart 1997; Sveiby 1997), they constitute a source of potential and one major facet of ‘good government’. So an exploration of the nexus between citizen participation in government decision making and intellectual capital is one way of interrogating the proposition that a function of community engagement is the advent of better government.

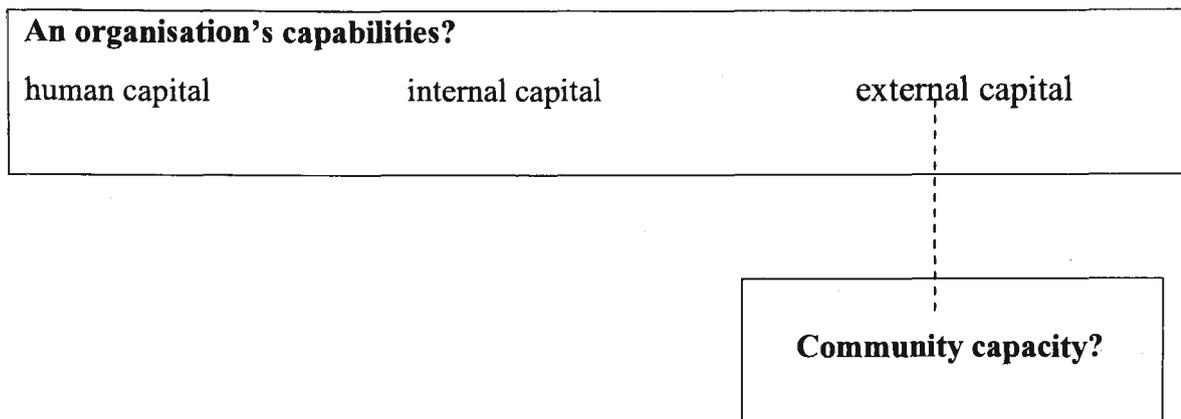
**Table 3-1 The main categories of intellectual capital and alternate ‘labels’**

	<b>IC embedded in the people</b>	<b>IC embedded in the organisation</b>	<b>IC embedded in relationships</b>
Edvinsson & Malone(1997)	human capital	organisational capital	customer capital
Stewart (1997)	human capital	structural capital	customer capital
Sveiby (1997)	employee competence	internal structure	external structure
Sciulli et al (2002)	human capital	internal capital	external capital

**Adapted** from (Edvinsson & Malone 1997; Sciulli et al. 2002; Stewart 1997; Sveiby 1997)

The promise of external capital is especially significant in a context of community engagement since the capability of local governments is shaped by the resources they can access (Barrett 2002, p. 21) and “ The absorption of relevant public knowledge can fill the capability gap in an organisation by creating new knowledge that can be transferred within the institution and be disseminated and applied” (Malusik 2002, p. 606). Given that external capital is “The knowledge embedded in the relationships established with the outside environment” (Bontis 2002, p. 629), it can be expected that the extent of this knowledge is moderated not only by the strength of an institution’s linkages with external actors, but with the capacity possessed by those actors which can be tapped. There is a strong link between intellectual capital (the organisation’s capabilities) and community capacity, since the ability of a government to plan and act is partly driven by the knowledge resources it can access from the community (Finger & Brand 1999; Innes & Booher 2000). Indeed, Price Waterhouse Coopers (2005) argue an examination of a city’s intellectual capital requires consideration of the resources available in society, since the latter is a building block of the former. This explicit connection between an organisation’s intellectual capital and resources in the community is indicated by the dotted line in Figure 3-6. The Figure suggests that using intellectual capital as a metaphor for better government moves our attention to a local government’s capabilities that are reflected in its human, internal and external capital - the latter being shaped by the nature and extent of community capacity that can be accessed through relationships. Ways of representing community capacity, for the purposes of this research, are discussed in the next section.

**Figure 3-6 Intellectual capital as a metaphor for better government**



Developed from concepts in (Innes & Booher 2000; Sciulli et al. 2002)

### **3.3.3 Community capacity – the community's knowledge resources**

Communities are valued for the knowledge and tangible and intangible resources that they can bring to bear on issues (Taylor 2007). Building community capacity allows citizens and groups to be “... better able to participate in the planning and management ...” (Cuthill & Fien 2005, p. 64) and adds to what the New Zealand Controller and Auditor General describes as the resources available to governments that can be leveraged in future decision making and action (Barrett, P 2002, p. 21). Following intellectual capital theory, apart from financial and physical capitals, a local government's resources are its intellectual capital, and the nature and extent of the external resources that it can directly access (as external capital) is governed by the community capacity which can be tapped. The capacity within the community governs the potential for community-level activities (such as self-help groups, social movements, pressure groups, social networking), and thus moderates the participation of citizens in official decision-making mechanisms (Box 1998; Finger & Brand 1999; Innes & Booher 2000; Thomas 1995; WHO 1999).

In order to examine the form and function of community engagement, there are three important reasons to consider how engagement initiatives, community capacity, and decision-making processes interact. Firstly, community capacity feeds into government decision making through engagement (Cuthill & Fien 2005) – and so community capacity is a key resource a government can tap for its decision making and action. Secondly, community capacity moderates the ability for citizens and groups and the community to have a voice in government decision making through community-level activities. Finally, community capacity evolves through citizen participation in decision making (Innes & Booher 2000), and this in turn affects the first two

points - the resources a government can access and the ability of the community to build and leverage knowledge.

Whilst community capacity and capacity building are contested terms, Cuthill and Fien (2005) argue that three essential elements of community capacity allow for effective participation of citizens in local governance and government action. These elements of community capacity are: enhanced citizen ability, community group ability and a collaborative community culture (Cuthill & Fien 2005).

Citizen ability is tied to the “... human capital ... the diverse abilities existing within the community...” (Cuthill & Fien 2005, p. 73). Smith and Herbert (1997, p. 7), quoted in Shaver and Tudball (2001) note that “personal attributes” which form part of community capacity “...might include wisdom, skills, knowledge, the ability to learn, health status, self-esteem, emotional affect, self-efficacy, social interactivity, levels of social capital, perceived social valuations of oneself...”. The greater the citizen ability, the better the prospects that people will want to participate in the work of government, and will also be able to make an effective contribution. The greater the citizen ability, the bigger the reservoir of external resources a government can tap into.

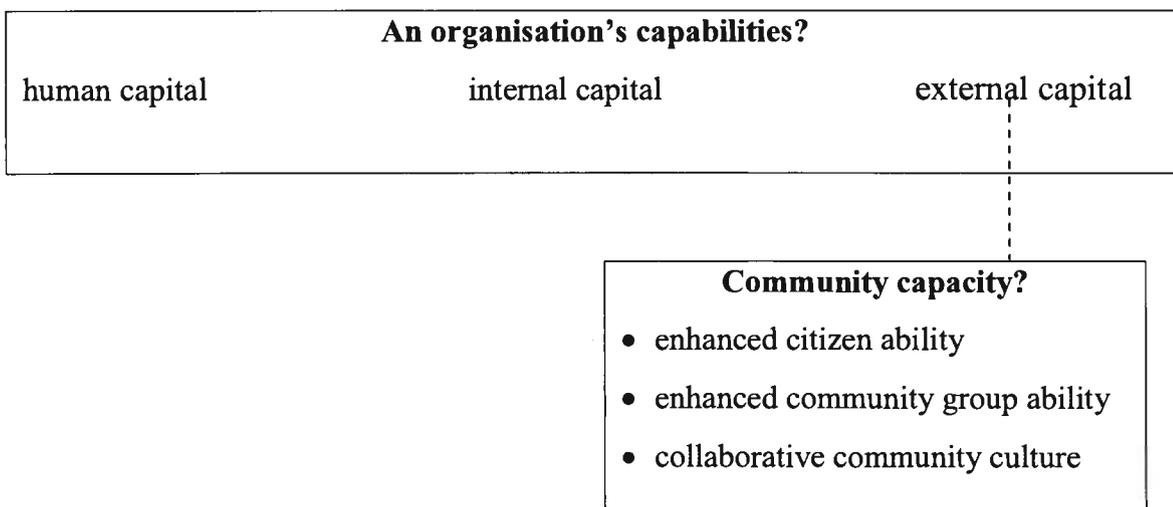
Community group ability occurs in the “... complex interaction of different people with diverse priorities and perspectives ...” in which groups are able to critically reflect, learn, plan strategically, and operate pro-actively in a concerted fashion rather than “... stumble from one crisis to the next ...” (Cuthill & Fien 2005, p. 73). With enhanced community group ability, more effective participation can occur since a more united and adaptable public approach can wield more powerful influence in local governance and government decision making.

A collaborative community culture (as opposed to a competitive culture exemplified by closed door meetings and protected information) is “... based on constructive, open dialogue, and the development of trusting and collaborative relationships ...” and requires substantial time and commitment “... both across community groups, and between community and local government” (Cuthill & Fien 2005, p. 74). Smith and Herbert (1997, p. 7), quoted in Shaver and Tudball (2001) note that “systemic attributes” which form part of community capacity relate to social roles and expectations ... and the manner in which and extent to which a society encourages and facilitates access and participation in its various institutions and community life”.

Cuthill and Fien’s (2005) taxonomy is incorporated into the research framework as it provides a clear way of exploring how engagement affects community capacity - which in turn, says something about better communities, better government and better decision making. For not only does community capacity moderate the knowledge resources that an institution can access for its own decision making, the levels of citizen ability, community group ability, and a collaborative community culture govern the contribution that a community can itself directly make to a government’s decision making (Cuthill & Fien 2005). The capabilities available to the institution through the interaction of intellectual capital and community capacity are displayed in Figure 3-7. This Figure depicts the notion that a local government’s capability can be represented by the concept of intellectual capital (which is an amalgam of human, internal and external resources) - and this capability is in turn shaped by the way external capital is bolstered by the community capacity that can be accessed by the organisation through its relationships.

Alternative models for exploring community capacity, such as those based on the intricate dimensions of social capital theory (see for example de Vaus 2001; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998) are beyond the scope of this study - but could be considered in future research.

**Figure 3-7 Elements of community capacity and connection to external capital**



**Developed** from concepts in (Cuthill & Fien 2005; Innes & Booher 2000; Sciulli et al. 2002)

Simon (1997) indicates that decision making in organisations is influenced by factors like: channels of communication; the social processes; the competencies and computational limitations of individuals; the application of authority and hierarchy; work practices; inculcation of actors with the entity’s objectives, ethos and culture; communication and information flows -

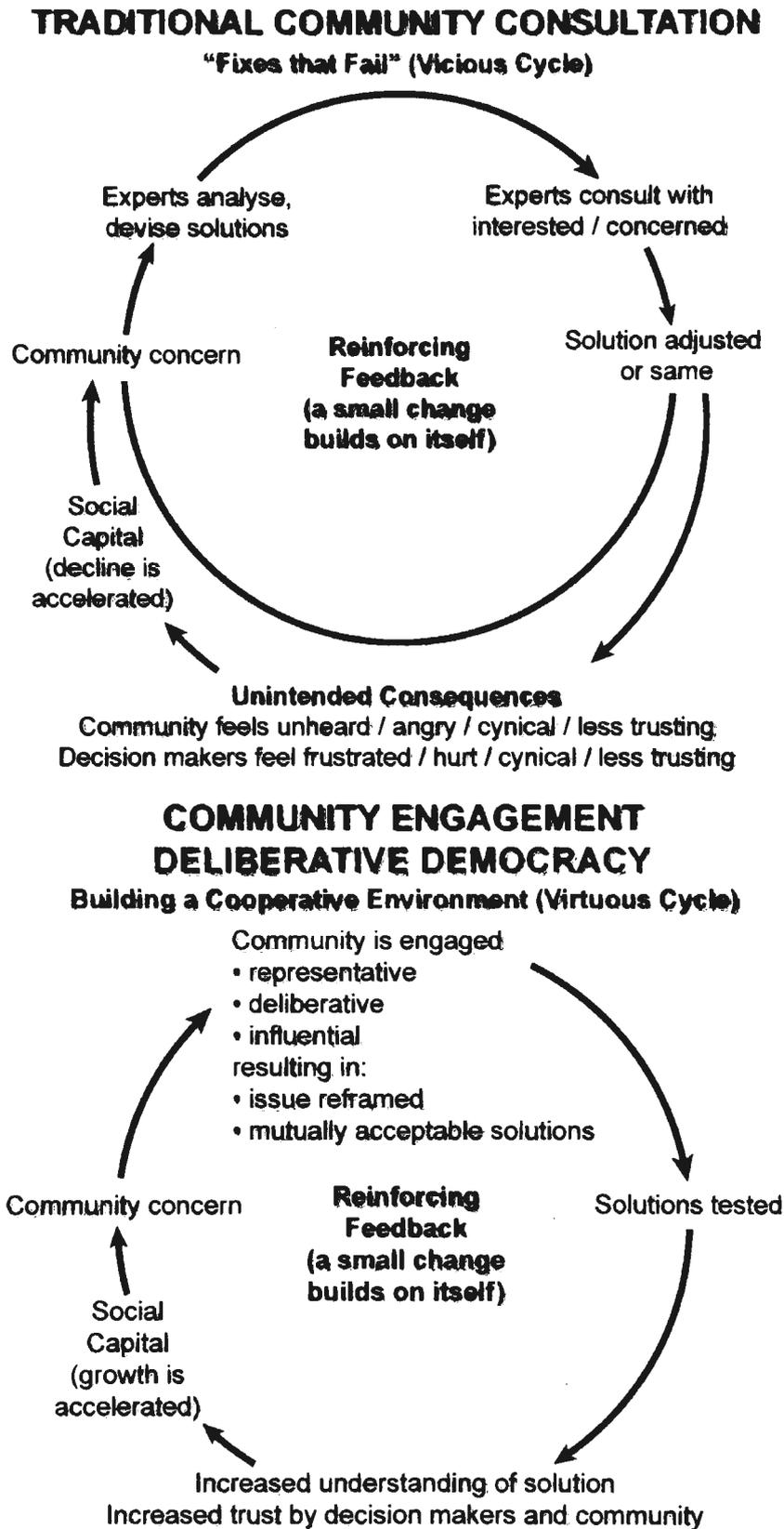
and these are the sorts of characteristics that are captured by models of intellectual capital and community capacity.

But Hartz-Karp (2004, p. 15) (refer Figure 3-8) warns that community engagement can have a negative impact on community capacity, and consequently be dysfunctional for co-operative and mutually acceptable local government decision making. In a ‘vicious cycle’ (Hartz-Karp 2004, p. 15), engagement is situated in the *inform* to *involve* span of the IAP2 (2004) spectrum - and so citizens’ concerns are ultimately given to experts to solve. The institution’s experts devise solutions, and somewhere along the way it is deemed necessary to get some citizen involvement – but this is handled in a way that people’s responses are neither collaborative nor expansive. The experts feel this community response is misinformed or captured by special interests, and the expert solution is not adjusted – or only somewhat adapted. As a result, the public is either disinterested or outraged, so trust and interest in working with the organisation wane, and this reduces the community resources that the government can tap in the future, and limits the prospects for the community to have an effective voice.

At the other end of the spectrum is ‘virtuous cycle’ (Hartz-Karp 2004, p. 15), where a stronger level of engagement exists in the *collaborate* or *empower* part of the IAP2 (2004) spectrum. This allows citizens to have a meaningful role in framing issues, constructing mutually acceptable solutions – thus displacing the dominance of experts. These new solutions are tested and become understood, so trust and capital in the community grows – therefore maintaining or expanding the ability of citizens to contribute to future decision making (Hartz-Karp 2004, p. 15).

In a virtuous cycle not only are ‘packets’ of knowledge that can inform decision making exchanged between actors in the community and entity (Gale 2008), but there can be a strengthening of cohesion and capacity in the community through the social learning

Figure 3-8 Hartz-Karp's engagement cycles



Sourced from Hartz-Karp (2004, p. 15)

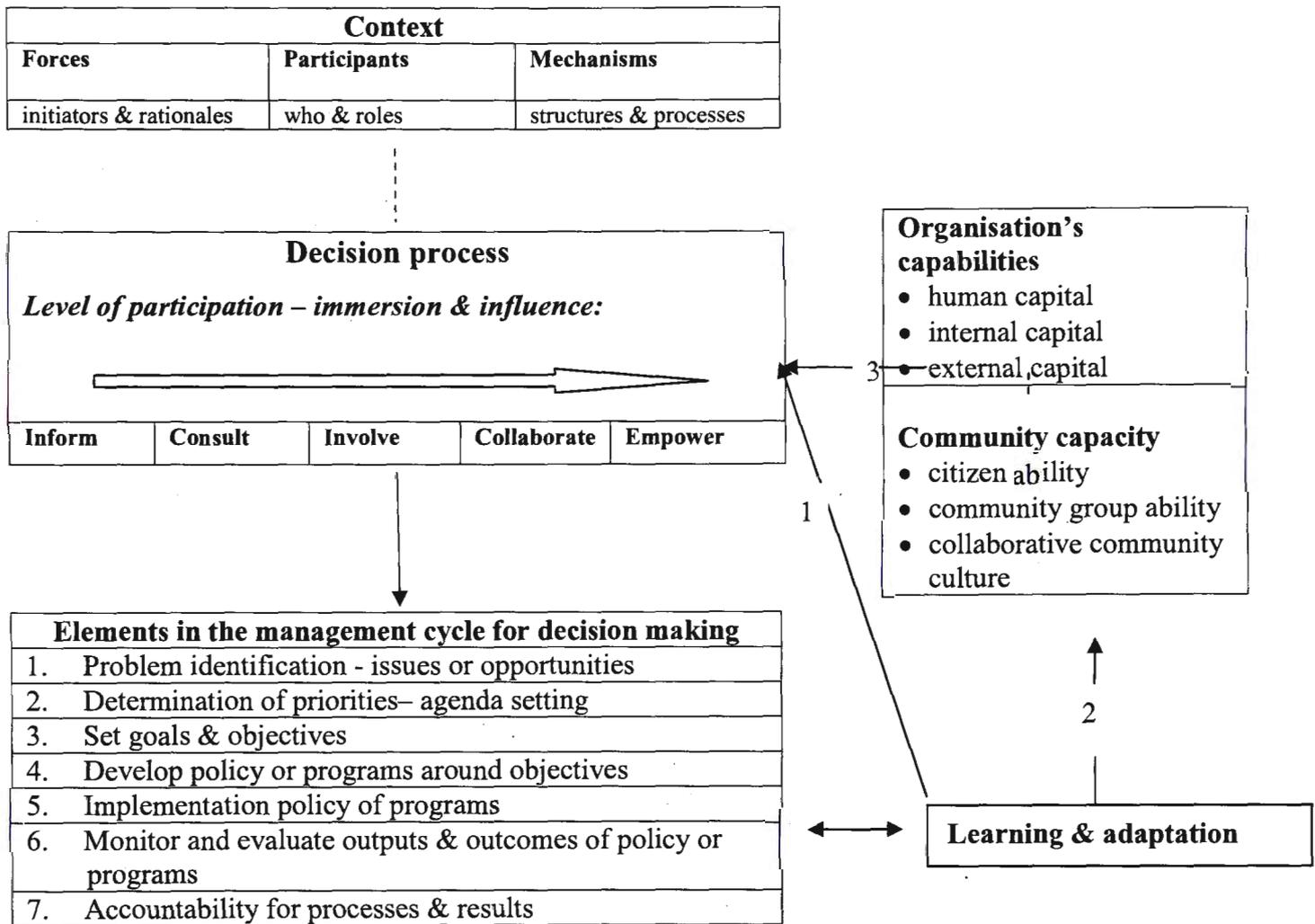
### 3.4 A research framework

Research frameworks are useful in: representing the main aspects, concepts, factors or variables; tabling prior knowledge; and clarifying and delimiting the focus of investigation (Punch 2005). Frameworks can provide a point of departure for guiding research and inform debate and practice. Research frameworks have been used in prior research to assist in the capture of key aspects citizen participation, which provide insights for models and descriptions about the form and function of community engagement (see for example Fung 2006; Wang 2001; Yang & Callahan 2007). In this study, constructing, applying and revising a research framework can contribute to the development of models which Rowe and Frewer (2005, p. 252) urge are needed to describe or predict “... how to enable effective involvement in any particular situation”.

A research framework is presented in Figure 3-9. It has been developed from the literature review and incorporates Figure 3-5 & Figure 3-7. Three important dimensions of community engagement practice observed in Chapter 2 are the forces, participants and mechanisms - and these form the first part of the research framework. Various combinations of ‘forces’ have edged governments towards community engagement, and the literature points to a wide range of potential initiators of community engagement initiatives (be they citizens, politicians, managers, institutions or legislations) with different rationales for doing so. The literature also noted that a range of ‘participants’, including citizens, managers, politicians and other stakeholders, can be involved in community engagement initiatives in varying roles that alter conventional responsibilities and relationships. Different possibilities for participants are interrogated through consideration of who is involved (including the method of selection) and what their roles are. The ‘mechanisms’ dimension explores the alternative structures and processes used to operationalise the engagement.

Figure 3-5 is then added below the ‘forces’, ‘participants’ and ‘mechanisms’ dimension of the context to form a second stage of the research framework, which interrogates the level of public participation in the ‘decision process’ that occurs for each ‘element in the management cycle’, and also considers the ‘learning and adaptation’ phase.

**Figure 3-9 Research framework for exploring the form & function of community engagement**



Developed from Figure 3-5 & Figure 3-7 & literature review in Chapter 2

Figure 3-7 provides the third stage of the research framework which explores how learning and adaptation feed directly back into future decision making and also have repercussions for an organisation's capabilities and community capacity from the engagement initiative. The arrow (#1) from 'learning and adaptation' that flows directly back to the 'decision process' symbolises the propensity noted in the literature on NPM and the public sector management cycle, for modern public management to report, analyse and interpret performance so as to inform future decision making. This same arrow (#1) also captures the 'public feedback' from the community that comes from community engagement and is fed into the decision making process – as suggested in the IAP2 public participation spectrum (refer Figure 2-5) and the literature on community governance. The second arrow (#2) from learning and adaptation connects to the organisation's capabilities and the community capacity, and interrogates important aspects of the themes of better government and better citizens that have been highlighted in Chapter 2 as

functions of community engagement. The framework indicates that learning and adaptation can lead to new organisational and community resources, and so an arrow (#3) from an 'organisation's capabilities' and 'community capacity' to 'decision process' queries the possibilities for such changes to drive and shape future participation and decision making.

The three arrows connected to 'learning and adaptation' are constructs to assist in conceptualising flows of information and interrelated consequences of learning. For instance, information that feeds into future decision making (represented by arrow #1) can change an organisation's human capital by altering personnel's' understandings or motivation (arrow #2) which in turn can affect future decision making (arrow #3). The learning from community engagement could be to do with a range of matters such as processes, physical things, competencies and attitudes. The learning from community engagement can be modest or substantial and have short run effects or longer-lasting impacts (Epstein et al.). For example where participation in the processes of decision making gives an agency a better understanding of people's agenda, and the citizens gain skills, experience and consciousness, then substantial longer-term improvement in means-ends means may be established (White 1996). Epstein et al (2005) assert that learning which is about 'restoring the course' is fine for maintenance of the status-quo and for matters of efficiency (single loop learning in the Argyris & Schön (1978) approach), but learning that is more transformational allows for changing organisational goals, capabilities and community capacity - and therefore increase the potential for new ways of thinking and acting in government decision making (double-loop learning in the Argyris & Schön approach).

The preceding discussion has identified key factors to be considered when examining the form and function of community engagement, and in particular, the question of citizen participation informing and transforming local government decision making and issues of organisational capabilities and community capacity. The research framework outlined in Figure 3-9 has been developed through a systematic selection and syntheses of the literature to produce a broad yet functional taxonomy to guide this research. The context segment of the framework interrogates the 'front-end' considerations of forces, participants, and mechanisms, the decision process segment scrutinises the level of participation in management processes and resultant learning and adaptation, and in particular, the capabilities of the institution and community capacity.

The framework responds to the imperative to examine context for public participation, the process of participation, and outcomes such as knowledge, capacity for future engagement, trust

in institutions and decision makers, policy responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness (Abelson & Gauvin 2006). Figure 3-9 provides a partial and over-simplified representation of the factors that dictate the form and function of community engagement and shape government decision making - but the research framework does outline the main factors of interest for this research in a holistic way that is not apparent in other models detected in the literature. In contrast to other research frameworks that are used to explore a government's approach to citizen participation at a macro-level (for example (Wang 2001) and (Yang & Callahan 2007)), the research framework in Figure 3-9 facilitates the examination of particular individual community engagement initiatives.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The literature has indicated gaps in the knowledge of how citizen participation informs and transforms local government decision making in practice, and interacts with notions of good government and good communities. In a response to these gaps and as a contribution to new knowledge, this study posed three research questions (refer section 1.4). This chapter has addressed the first research question (RQ1: refer section 1.4) about ways to conceptualise and articulate notions of 'form' (means) and 'function' (ends) in community engagement - so as facilitate research into practice. Thus, a research framework to orientate this study has been developed, and it adds to the existing professional and theoretical literature by providing a simplified, partial, yet holistic representation of factors and characteristics that constitute the form and function of individual community engagement initiatives. The framework enables the interrogation of the form and function of community engagement initiatives in the field (RQ2: refer section 1.4), which in turn allows for the development of a management model to guide professional practice (RQ3: refer section 1.4). Findings in relation to RQ2 and RQ3 are important since a good understanding of what happens with particular community engagement initiatives in specific contexts can inform practice in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of citizen participation activities. The next chapter discusses the methodology for answering these important research questions around the form and function of community engagement initiatives by local governments.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will build on the introduction to the methodology that is provided in Chapter 1, and provides justification for the adopted research strategy and procedures. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the overall approach to the research process ideals, practices and rules of inquiry and to justify the methodological assumptions and research designs underpinning the study.

#### **4.2 Basic beliefs for this study**

This research takes subjectivity to be a valid space in which such an investigation can take place and adopts an interpretivist approach in order to explore the needs, values, beliefs, and meanings that public officials fashion around the form and function of community engagement – one that allows for understandings through “multiple participant meanings” (Creswell 2002, p. 6) in a social world that “constitutes some form of open-ended process” (Easterby-Smith & Smircich 1980, p. 498).

An interpretivist approach acknowledges the likelihood that people will have different experiences of physical and social reality so the world is taken to be whatever individual people perceive it to be, rather than a set of facts or truths, and the assumption of common “meaning systems” in a positivist approach is rejected in favour of an interest “... in understanding the lived experience of human beings” (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000, p. 9). An interpretivist approach can provide a rich and complex picture of how people think and act in relation to phenomena in a particular context - rather than striving for precise objective measures of a situation (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000) – or as Collis and Hussey (2003, p. 53) put it, a focus “... on the meaning, rather than the measurement, of a social phenomena”.

#### **4.3 Research Method**

The case study method was chosen for this research due to its fit with an inductive stance, the complex and nascent phenomena being addressed in the research problem, the objectives of the research, and practical considerations. These factors are discussed in the following sections.

### **4.3.1 The case study approach**

The construct 'case study' has multiple meanings. Creswell (2007) sees the term in three lights: as a methodological approach including research strategies and design; as an object of study; and as a product of examination.

A qualitative case study approach seeks to describe a phenomenon (such as a program, event, incident, process or organisation) "in depth and detail, in context, and holistically" - and much can be learnt from an investigation of a few exemplars of that phenomenon (Patton 1990, p. 54).

Yin (1994, p. 23) defines the case study method as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." Case studies are "the method of choice where the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context" (Yin 1993, p. 3). Given that this particular research problem concerns the pressing issue of community engagement by local government (as evidenced in the literature review by discourse, policy, and action across modern governments), Yin's (1993; 1994) specification of a contemporary phenomenon is satisfied. An investigation of what is occurring in the reality of local government operations matches Yin's ideal of a real-life context. The complex dimensions of community engagement initiatives (such as rationales, mechanisms, stakeholders, and outcomes) along with its recent ascent to attention and a shortage of in-depth studies reflect a research object with unclear phenomenon-context boundaries.

The case study approach can attend to the exploration of new territories about dynamics and micro-processes in an organisation in a deep way and advance an understanding on issues that other research methods may overlook – therefore providing solid contributions to management theory and practice (Carmona & Ezzamel 2005). The use of case studies in this research can uncover, articulate and address factors that are pertinent to public officials and other stakeholders who deal with the complex phenomena of community engagement in their contemporary real-world situations.

Case study approaches can be described along lines that consider: the number of cases; the analytical levels sought; the units of analysis; and case selection. These four issues are discussed in the following section in relation to choices made for this study.

### **4.3.2 Number of cases examined**

Creswell (2007) provides a categorisation of the number of cases studied. In an ‘instrumental’ case study, one bounded case is selected by the researcher as a host in which to examine an issue. In a ‘collective’ case study, the issue is investigated across different cases. In an ‘intrinsic’ case study, the researcher focuses on the case as worthy of attention in its own right. This study adopts a collective case approach since it assesses multiple objects, assists model or theory development through an investigation of patterns across cases, and uses individual cases to disconfirm or support ideas and propositions (Maylor & Blackmon 2005), while allowing each case situation and experience to be presented and understood in a holistic way as “an idiosyncratic manifestation of the phenomenon of interest” yet still providing the opportunity for subsequent comparison of cases (Patton 2001, p. 450). However an acknowledged trade-off in using a collective approach is the commensurate reduction in depth and breadth of data that can be gathered in a single instrumental case study (Maylor & Blackmon 2005).

### **4.3.3 Analytical levels**

Types of case study also differ by the intended purpose of findings in analytical terms (Yin 1993). Exploratory cases are the starting point of much social research and can be used for testing the feasibility of particular procedures for research, and for observing a socially embedded phenomenon in order to derive questions, models, hypotheses or theories that provide new information and can fuel further research (Yin 1993). The insights and familiarisation concerning phenomenon that can be gained from exploratory research can generate new ideas, patterns, models or hypotheses that can be considered in research and action rather than ending in conclusive answers to problems (Collis & Hussey 2003). A descriptive case study attempts to provide a more comprehensive and complete picture of a phenomenon, and an explanatory study investigates cause and effect relationships (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000; Collis & Hussey 2003; Yin 1993).

Reflecting Cavana et al’s (2000, p. 109) view that an exploratory study is appropriate “when knowledge is scant and a deeper understanding is required”, this study fundamentally utilises exploration since it deals with a nascent area of research and interrogates the broad and complex arena of form and function of community engagement initiatives.

The positioning of this research in relation to case categorisation and purpose is depicted in Table 4-1. The focus is on exploration through a collective case study, of the nature, and the interaction between, key attributes that constitute the form and function of community

engagement initiatives. The exploration may be argued to have a depth that moves the study partially into the realms of descriptive examination since the research interrogates concepts and relationships.

Having established an exploratory purpose for the research and settling on a collective case study examination, the unit of analysis and site selection need to be determined (Yin 1993) – these are discussed in the following two sections.

**Table 4-1 Matrix of cases examined and analytical level**

<b>Purpose/ Examination</b>	<b>Exploratory</b>	<b>Descriptive</b>	<b>Explanatory</b>
Instrumental case study – investigate an issue via one case			
Collective case study – investigate an issue via multiple cases	<b>This study</b>		
Intrinsic – investigate a case for its own value			

**Adapted** from (Yin 1993, p. 5) and (Creswell 2007).

#### **4.3.4 Unit of analysis**

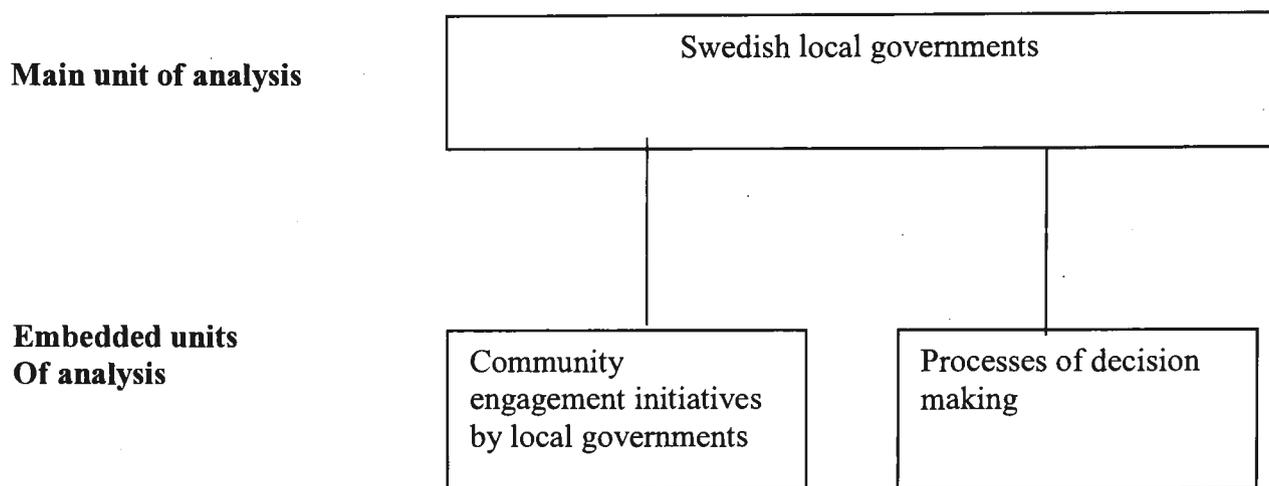
Specifying what the ‘case’ is in terms of the main unit of analysis and any embedded units of analysis is critical because that determines the direction and boundaries of the case study; the way the research is designed; and the theoretical significance of findings research - while avoiding the hazard of a researcher trying to study everything (Yin 1993, 1994).

This research adopts an embedded design in order to focus the study, allow for fuller exploration and analysis, and reduce the risk of drift. In this study, it is appropriate to have individual governments as the main unit of analysis since they are the focus of local governance reforms world-wide and provide the context in which the phenomenon under investigation (the interaction of community engagement initiatives and decision making) takes place. The literature indicates that community engagement initiatives and decision making are of two significant processes that are woven into the fabric of the institution as important instruments of modern government. The literature also reveals that the interaction of engagement initiatives and government decision making processes is relatively unknown and under-explored. So, the

phenomena whose interaction is under investigation are the embedded units of analysis within the fabric of the main unit of analysis – the local government authority. The main unit of analysis and embedded units of analysis are indicated in Figure 4-1.

Thus, this research can be seen as a collective case examination that utilises embedded units of analysis in an exploration of the form and function of community engagement initiatives.

**Figure 4-1 Units of analysis**



Developed from the discussion in section 4.3.4

#### 4.3.5 Case selection and country context for this study

It is important to explore instances of ‘invited participation’ in different countries to see what each “can teach us about what enables and disables effective citizen engagement” (Cornwall 2008a, pp. 30-1). This research uses Sweden’s local governments as the site of case studies and data collection for the study of a global phenomenon. Sweden was chosen as the location for the main units of analysis (local governments) for a number of reasons that align with Yin’s (1993) criteria of feasibility, access, and topicality of case:

- the propensity for public management reforms to take hold in Swedish local governments (see for example Olson et al 1998, Siverbo 2003);
- community engagement has been appearing on the agenda of individual Swedish local governments and by the peak body SALAR (see for example Torsby 2008, Langlet 2009); and
- the researcher has had access to resources and a network of academics, practitioners and institutions of government.

So the focus of this study is on a global phenomenon (community engagement) with Sweden providing the cases for data collection due to reasons of resources and access.

This study reflects replication logic to the extent that it has used collective case studies of local governments with some reputation for ‘good practice’ in community engagement initiatives. Purposive sampling has been used, since it is appropriate for obtaining useful information about cases that fit categories of interest (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000; de Vaus 2002). To select each embedded unit of analysis on an exemplary basis of ‘good practice’, the researcher sought the assistance of two experts in the field of Swedish Local Government who have an interest in community engagement. A professor of public administration and the leader of the SALAR (the peak Swedish local government body) project on community engagement were contacted by the researcher for guidance on identifying ‘good practice’ cases of councils with community engagement initiatives that provide “... strong, positive examples of the phenomena of interest” (Yin 1993, p. 12). From a joint ninety-minute discussion in Stockholm, ten *Kommuns* were targeted as sites for investigating community engagement initiatives – of which six subsequently proved amenable to access in the timeframe available to the researcher. The screening and selection of local systems of community engagement via the experts’ knowledge of good practice drove the implementation of a replication logic through purposive sampling, and embodied Yin’s (1993) evocation that the researcher should resist any temptation to make the screening process a study in its own right.

#### **4.3.6 Country context for this study**

Typically for Swedish local governments, these six *kommuns* carry a large burden in public services as they have charge of matters such as social services. This may include care of the elderly and the disabled citizens, primary and secondary education, childcare and other activities such as refuse, water, sewerage, streets, planning and building matters, emergency preparedness, rescue services, public health protection and environmental matters (Minister for Democratic Issues and Public Administration 2000; Regeringskansliet 2005; SALAR 2007a, 2008a). Municipalities typically take voluntary responsibility for other matters of leisure, culture, housing, street maintenance and energy provision (SALAR 2008b), and share with regional governments tasks relating to local public transport (Regeringskansliet 2005).

While local governments are dependant on transfers from the State, significant autonomy accrues from their ability to raise taxes (Regeringskansliet 2005; RPA 2006; SALAR 2007a). Elections to the municipal assembly of each *kommun* occurs every four years and this ‘council’ can delegate decision-making powers on a range of such matters to the executive committee or other committees and boards (Regeringskansliet 2005) which are staffed by politicians voted-in

by the inhabitants or 'elected' (appointed) by the assembly. In a practical sense, an Executive Committee (or Board) of a kommun acts as “ ... something like a government for the local authority ... ” since it “ ... directs and coordinates the administration of the local authority's affairs and supervises the activities of the other committees” and prioritises the actioning of projects decided on by the assembly (Regeringskansliet 2005, p. 9). Executive Committees vary between kommuns in the way they balance the division of their work between policy and planning versus purely operational and administrative matters (RPA 2006). The Head of the Executive Committee is the equivalent of a Mayor, and is a democratically elected politician who is appointed to that role by the council.

Contemporary factors impinging on local democracy include (SALAR 2007c, p. 8):

- reduction in political party membership and difficulty in recruiting new members
- increased support going to less democratic parties
- lower voter turnout at elections
- reduced trust and a widening gap between citizens and politicians
- a more divergent society
- more security creating a democratically lazy society
- younger people shunning conventional political ideologies
- a more ignorant society in an era of increased media power.

While most municipalities have had their own attempts at involving citizens in one way or another, progress is patchy (Langlet 2009; SALAR 2007b) - and there is little evidence of systematic approaches to community engagement - see for example Brorström (2002) and Brorström & Siverbo (2002). But times are changing, and kommuns are urged to clarify their roles, forge an internal culture and develop systems and processes to allow citizen involvement to “ ... become a natural part of governance” (SALAR 2007c, p. 12).

#### **4.4 Quality issues in case study design**

A case study approach can present practical difficulties to the researcher by often being resource intensive and costly in terms of time and money; requiring strong organisational skills; posing challenges in finding and maintaining a focus and structure; and requiring work with large volumes of data (Sciulli 1999). While a case study methodology can lead to a deep and meaningful contextual analysis of important contemporary phenomena, there are also potential weaknesses in the approach that must be addressed in order to maintain research quality (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000; Collis & Hussey 2003; Creswell 2007; Yin 1993, 1994).

This maintenance of quality can be seen through four tests: external validity, internal validity, construct validity and reliability.

External validity addresses the issue of whether findings from a study can be generalised to another situation (Baker 1999; Bryman 2004; Yin 1993, 1994). Yin (1994, p. 36) argues that case studies rely on an “analytical” approach (rather than statistical generalisation) and so the findings may be generalised to the domain of a theory or model rather than to the population. Here the ideas, concepts or patterns that have come from a comprehensive understanding of cases studied in a particular environment can be applied in other situations (Collis & Hussey 2003). This study is about gathering, analysing, and interpreting data in order to inform debate and practice and further research, so it is compatible with the concept of analytic generalisation in which ideas and models are generated.

Internal validity attests to the confidence that can be placed on cause-effect findings (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000). There are strategies to ameliorate concerns about internal validity in case study research where such findings are relevant (see for example Baker 1999; Yin 1994) – but they are not of importance for this study since exploration, and not cause-effect explanation, is the objective.

Construct validity concerns the ability to operationally measure the factors and concepts being studied, and the question posed is whether the operationalised measure articulates what the researcher states it does (Baker 1999; Yin 1994). Two tactics to strengthen prospects for construct validity were applied to this study as recommended by Yin (1994): the use of multiple evidential sources at each council that were captured via notes and transcripts, and the establishment of a chain of evidence. The chain of evidence is the link between the assembly of raw data and the case study report, and can allow re-interpretation or questioning of the data and improve construct validity (along with reliability) (Gray 2004). In this study, the chain is maintained by secure electronic storage and retrieval of all printed and electronic materials ranging from planning sheets to notes, drafts and final chapters. Developing research instruments from the literature and using these in a semi-structured way to draw interviews to the phenomenon under investigation (whilst allowing for alternative themes or ideas to emerge) is another way to strengthen construct validity (Abernethy et al. 1999) – and this is utilised in this study by development of the research framework (refer Figure 3-9) that helps identify and define constructs for data collection and analysis.

#### **4.4.1 Reliability**

Reliability concerns the ability to replicate the parts of the study and obtain the same results. Having good reliability reduces chances of biases or errors in the study (Yin 1994). Along with a ‘chain of evidence’ for data, a ‘research protocol’ that outlines sound policies and procedures can strengthen the replicability and reliability of a case study (Yin 1994). The research protocol for this study is described in section 4.7 and summarised in Table 4-3. These initiatives increase the reliability of case study information as they facilitate the researcher, readers, reviewers or replications of the research in tracing steps from conclusions or visa-versa, and consider issues such as whether evidence was properly considered and used (Yin 1994).

### **4.5 Data collection**

#### **4.5.1 Sources of evidence**

The choice of a case study design does not presuppose a particular data collection technique, and the sources of evidence can be interrogated for qualitative or quantitative data (de Vaus 2001; Yin 1993).

Interviews in which participants are asked about “ the facts of the matter as well as for the respondent’s opinions about events” (Yin 1994, p. 84) are a common source of evidence case study research (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000; Yin 1993, 1994). Interviews were beneficial to this study as they allowed: an insightful targeting of the topic; complex questions; and flexibility and follow-up in questioning and clarification of questions. Interviews can be divided along a continuum between highly structured and highly unstructured (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000; Collis & Hussey 2003). Semi-structured interviews that employ open-ended questions are useful for probing and uncovering information in exploratory studies with an interpretivist underpinning (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000; Collis & Hussey 2003). A less-structured approach to interviews was applied in this study of a nascent issue since that aided the “process of open discovery” and was appropriate as a step-by-step logic was not clear, and because the basis of beliefs and opinions were sought (Collis & Hussey 2003, p. 168).

This choice of data collection method is supported by a study of sustainability reporting in Swedish local governments (Mineur 2007) and research into characteristics that mark a Swedish municipality (Brorström 2002). Mineur (2007) argues that the use of semi-structured interviews with administrative officers and politicians who are deemed to carry the main responsibility for the phenomena studied provides many benefits over other data collection methods (such as closed-ended questions, text analysis or surveys). Since a less-formal and less-structured

interview process encourages spontaneous ideas and open dialogue, and gives interviewees an opportunity to respond with questions and thoughts in an extensive and reflective manner, they can explain responses and develop ideas as the discourse ensues. Mineur (2007) further contends that a semi-structured regime discourages public officials from using pre-prepared answers and cautions that issuing questions in advance might tempt interviewees to prepare “overly-structured and formalized responses, which could have limited the information collected” or provide answers that they believed the interviewer would want to hear (Mineur 2007, p. 76). The degree of structure in interview-based studies will vary, but Brorström (2002, p. 60) notes the utility of “long conversations” for gathering perceptions about the present situation, processes in the future, and the value in arrangements to give interviewees scope to freely expand on their answers.

Multiple sources of evidence are a feature of case study research and can reduce weaknesses such as bias or incomplete information (Yin 1993, 1994), and so every endeavour was made to secure two senior public officials as sources of evidence in each case study.

#### **4.5.2 The interviews**

A conscious decision was made by the researcher to approach senior public officials (managers and politicians) for interviews rather than middle-level staff with a policy or operational role, since their elevated positions should give them a broad overview of issues to do with community engagement initiatives; government decision making processes; and the motifs of better decision making, better government and better communities that underlie the research framework. The researcher judged that senior officials are in a reasonable position to ‘cut through’ the organisation, dissect its processes and context, and holistically consider the form and function of their important community engagement initiatives. Middle-level public officials were reasoned to probably have a more local and limited (a less holistic) perspective on the form and function of community engagement initiatives. This approach of targeting senior executives where complex interactions between community engagement and the local government institution are being investigated reflects the strategy adopted by Wang (2001). However, a limitation in this approach is acknowledged since, to use a military analogy, senior managers may have a ‘general’s eye-view’ – where things are seen to play out like pieces on a chess board, in contrast with the actual chaos on the ground that is known to other ranks.

In Sweden, compared to countries like Australia, it is common for Mayors, Deputy Mayors and a proportion of councillors to work at these roles in a full-time capacity and therefore be more

deeply immersed in local authority programs and operations than would otherwise be the case. All politicians and managers interviewed were engaged full-time at their respective councils.

Interviews that simultaneously involve more than one actor provide a different dynamic to a single-person approach method (Collis & Hussey 2003). Wherever possible, subjects at a Kommun were interviewed at the same time so that descriptions and perceptions about the phenomena and the context could be captured and built-upon in a dynamic, free-flowing and cumulative way through the discourse. The study seeks evidence through semi-structured depth interviews featuring open-ended questions, and incorporating multiple participants and simultaneous interviews in each case where possible. If the study had focused on a comparison of perceptions and a ‘contest of ideas’ (Sheehan 2007) rather than this ‘accumulation of ideas’, then a different approach of separate interviews would have been applied. From the researchers’ prior experience, a potential shortcoming of a simultaneous interview as a vehicle for capturing contradictory perceptions is acknowledged, since matters of ‘diplomacy’ and a need to sustain on-going working relationships may dampen the propensity of one participant to challenge the perceptions or assertions of a colleague to their face ‘in company’.

The author does not speak Swedish, and every interview was conducted in English without the use of an interpreter as each participant had a good command of that language and was comfortable with, and agreeable to, that arrangement. Details of interviews at six kommuner are provided in Table 4-2.

**Table 4-2 Swedish local government authorities as main units of analysis**

<b>Kommun case</b>	<b>Subject Positions</b>	<b>Time</b> 0.25 increments	<b>Instruments used</b>	<b>Reporting</b>
1	Mayor Controller	1.75 hours	Semi-structured depth interview with both subjects	Full case analysis: <i>Chapter 5</i>
2	Deputy Mayor CEO	2.25 hours	Semi-structured depth interview with both subjects	Full case analysis: <i>Chapter 6</i>
3	Department Head Senior politician	1.75 hours	Semi-structured depth interview with both subjects	Full case analysis: <i>Chapter 7</i>
4	Mayor CEO	2.0 hours	Semi-structured depth interview with both subjects	Condensed case analysis: <i>Chapter 8 and Appendix 1</i>
5	Mayor	1.50 hours	Semi-structured depth interview with the subject	Condensed case analysis: <i>Chapter 8 and Appendix 2</i>
6	Development Manager Project Manager	2.00 hours 0.75 hours	Semi-structured depth interviews with each subject separately	Condensed case analysis: <i>Chapter 8 and Appendix 3</i>

To reflect the size limitations of a DBA thesis and yet keep a level of descriptive analysis that is sufficient to inform professional practice, the first three case studies are reported in full in the body of this thesis whilst the other three cases are reported in a condensed form that highlights the key findings which assist in answering research questions RQ2 and RQ3 (refer section 1.4). The three condensed cases are reported in full in Appendices 5, 6 and 7.

#### **4.5.3 The role of the research framework in the data collection**

The research framework (refer Figure 3-9) provides what Yin (1993, p. 27) describes as an ‘array’ of ideas that can be “... tested in the field”. The dimensions in the research framework provide general topics to be woven into the semi-structured interviews and provide the ‘basic questions’ and agenda for the interview process. De Vaus (2001, p. 244) notes the axiom that ‘chance favours the prepared mind’, and emphasises that without an awareness of “... relevant theories, debate and the alike, we will probably miss the significance of much of what we come across. Without having *some idea* (emphasis added) of what we are looking for we will not know what we have found”. Starting a case study with a body of knowledge is not only efficient and effective in terms of generating findings, but these are more likely to add to the “... cumulative body of knowledge rather than just (be) isolated empirical enquiries (Yin 1993, p. 27). Yin (1993) emphasises that to have framed some important issues about the phenomenon as a point of departure does not preclude unanticipated findings – such data can still be collected and analysed – but provides structure in data collection.

#### **4.5.4 The interview process**

Data collection was conducted in a relatively informal manner as semi-structured depth interviews that were guided, but not bounded, by the dimensions and elements of the research framework (refer Figure 3-9). The interviewer specified the principal interest of the research with an open question like: “I am interested in your community engagement initiatives – what they look like, and what happens as a result for the processes of decision making, for the government and for the community. Would you please tell me about your experiences?”. Then the interviewer used the dimensions of the research framework as additional probes during what were typically free-flowing conversations. Care was taken by the researcher not to raise questions about any factors in a normative way that made an agenda or preference obvious. The open-ended questions around the dimensions in the research framework were deliberately not bounded by a raft of specific sub-questions, and were kept at a high level of abstraction in order not to ‘lead’ the subjects towards particular answers and emphases.

Given that the key objective of a DBA thesis is to inform practitioners and practice, it was essential to allow interviewees to explain the reality of ‘a community engagement initiative’ as they perceived it. Some interviewees wanted to give their account by describing in detail what was more obviously a ‘stand-alone’ community engagement initiative. And some interviewees were determined to discuss a portfolio of devices that they considered to be inextricably linked, and which together made up a community engagement initiative as they saw it – but which others may have interpreted as a group of separate projects. The researcher dealt with this variation in how subjects construed ‘an initiative’ by allowing interviewees free rein to focus on an engagement initiative as they saw it - rather than to attempt to steer all descriptions into a particular and artificial compartmentalisation.

The description and analysis of the data from each of the three fully reported case studies of a community engagement initiative is reported through a separate chapter for each. The summarised description and analysis of the data from the three condensed case studies is reported in one chapter. Each of the case studies is structured into three parts:

- i. Contextual features at each kommun were briefly outlined – and this was limited due to the need to retain confidentiality.
- ii. The nature of each community engagement initiative was briefly described and themes arising from the interview data were presented along with relevant interviewee quotations and links back to the literature review. The themes were then consolidated into emerging categories.
- iii. The themes for each community engagement initiative were analysed with reference to: the research framework (refer Figure 3-9) in order to explore connections to the questions of better decision making, better government, better communities, and honouring democratic ideals; and to good practice criteria.

The descriptive analyses of the case studies presented in each of the separate chapters were then interrogated for the purposes of an inter-initiative comparison and the development of an appropriate model for describing factors to be considered by public officials in establishing and sustaining citizen participation. These conclusions and implications for practice were reported in the final chapter.

## **4.6 Data analysis**

Case study analysis is a ‘process’ for collecting, organizing, and analysing data in order to provide “comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest”

Patton (2001, p. 447). There is no universally accepted convention for presenting and analysing the qualitative data (Robson 1993), and this provides a more “fluid position” for the researcher (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 12). This study used inductive analysis, which involves immersion in the data to discover important dimensions, themes, and interrelationships (Patton 2001, p. 453). ‘Analytic induction’ was applied rather than ‘grounded theory’, since ‘sensitising’ propositions from the literature (community engagement leads to better decision making, better government, and better communities) framed the study (Patton 2001, p. 454).

The study took the thematic approach of Ryan and Bernard (2003) in which key aspects from the transcripts of interview data were placed on quotation slips - which were then sorted and resorted into groups with similar ideas and meanings. Each pile of slips was then named to constitute a theme. In turn themes were melded into higher level categories utilised a matrix approach (Miles & Huberman 1994). Direct quotations were blended into the description and analysis since they reveal “ ... respondents' depth of emotion ... “ and permit the reader to enter the respondents’ situation, thoughts, basic perceptions and experiences (Patton 2001, p. 21).

#### **4.7 Research protocol**

As noted in section 4.4.1 a research protocol of sound policies and procedures can improve the reliability of the research. A summary of the protocol is presented in Table 4-3.

#### **4.8 Model development**

The final research question, RQ3 (refer section 1.4), concerned the development of a model to guide practice in considerations about the form and function of community engagement initiatives. The model was developed by synthesising insights for practice that came from: the descriptive analysis of case studies; and the conceptualisation of factors and characteristics that constitute the form and function of individual community engagement initiatives as derived from the literature and the construction and application of the research framework. The resultant management model highlights the nature and ordering of important considerations for professional practice in the planning, implementation or evaluation of community engagement initiatives.

**Table 4-3 Summary protocol for data collection and analysis**

Preamble	Exploratory research using a case study approach to investigate the interaction of community engagement initiatives and government decision making
Objective	Obtain an in-depth, rich, contextual understanding of the interaction (in the reality of managers) and develop a model that will inform discourse and practice
Nature of evidence	Perceptions of senior public officials with knowledge of engagement initiatives and decision making processes
Evidence collection	Semi-structured open-ended face-to-face interviews with senior public officials at multiple case studies of local government authorities
Access to local government authorities	Referrals of good practice from local experts in public administration and political science; initial contacts made via those providing the referrals or by the researcher; dates, times, scope of research and public officials to be involved in interviews at six local governments confirmed by researcher; and issues of confidentiality and anonymity communicated
Schedule	A schedule of interviews constructed for mutually agreed times and locations
Language support	Interviews were conducted with public officials who were comfortable dealing in the English language
Informed consent	Consent attested by interviewees prior to data being collected by interview and anonymity confirmed
Interview	Open ended questions on the nature of a local authority's community engagement initiatives and the interaction with government decision making with broad factors of forces, mechanisms, people involved and impacts as signposts
Data form	All interviews digitally taped, transcribed and securely stored and interview notes copied and securely stored
Data analysis	Manual slip and matrix-based approaches to data analysis (data displays, data reduction & conclusion drawing/verification) within and between cases; and analysis fuels development of a model of the interaction between engagement initiatives and the work of governments
Preliminary findings	Preliminary findings presented at internal and external conferences (see Demediuk 2007, 2008b)
Data triangulation	Multiple data sources attempted at each local government (two participants where possible). Themes of these interviews compared to preliminary findings and model developed
Final findings and follow-up	When the thesis is completed, a copy of the model and summary is to be sent to each public official who was interviewed

**Derived** through a combination of relevant factors from sections 4.1 to 4.6

## 4.9 Ethical considerations

Victoria University's ethical approval of the study was obtained, and this incorporated: gaining of consent from the interviewees; a promise of anonymity in the names of public officials and institutions; subjects having the option to decline the taping of conversations; and interviewees being given the opportunity to identify any information provided as being 'off the record'.

## 4.10 Summary

This research has used a case-study approach of Swedish local governments' experiences to explore the general questions about form and function of community engagement initiatives – ones that face municipalities world-wide. The engagement initiatives and government decision-making processes have been treated as 'embedded' units of analysis in order to discern themes, patterns and categories that add to the understanding of how citizen participation relates to the ideals of better decision making, better government and better communities.

This research has sought, captured and analysed qualitative data obtained from a series of interviews that span multiple case study sites. In pursuit of deep, contextual and comparative information from multiple case studies that can inform discourse, research and practice, care has been taken to reduce the risks in terms of reliability, validity and generalisability through a research design with transparent and structured processes for data collection and analysis. Knowledge of the potential limitations of case-based approaches to research have been kept ‘front-of-mind’, and addressed by the overall methodological design – and therefore have less chance of compromising the integrity of this research. The next four chapters provide individual case descriptions and an analysis of the data, and these are followed by the final chapter which discusses the implications for professional practice and presents an emergent model to guide practice and further research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The citizen panel**

The first case to be examined involved an in-depth interview conducted in December 2007 with the Mayor and a Senior Officer - the Controller. The case concerned the participation of inhabitants in the Kommun's activities through the implementation of a citizen panel.

#### **5.1 Background**

The municipality was formed in the 1960s from an amalgamation of a small market town and a large rural district. The population is approximately 20,000 inhabitants with all but 1,500 split fairly evenly between two main population centres. The municipality is the biggest employer in the area; a university is also a significant presence and there is a proliferation of small enterprises. The employment situation is buoyant for men and women. The Kommun has extensive housing developments of small houses and blocks of flats occurring, with the waiting time for housing varying from one to three years. The local authorities offer pre-school from the age of one year and pre- and after-school child care up to the 6th year of school. The Kommun offers a wide range of recreational pursuits, with numerous sporting complexes, a safe harbour and over 100 societies and clubs. Libraries have long opening hours, large stocks of print and audio-visual matter along with advanced computer facilities and individual services for old and disabled persons.

The population is, in general, relatively affluent, highly educated and well informed. The Kommun has never had a ranking lower than number six in school rankings in Sweden, and has won high rankings for its economy, infrastructure, and community dialogue, and featured in the top end of 'most liveable' city and municipality awards. Voter participation in elections and referendums is extremely high and increasing over time – contrary to the national trend.

#### **5.2 Community engagement initiative: The citizen panel**

This initiative relates to a citizen panel which was introduced in 2005 and is currently still in operation. Citizen panels are commonly seen to act as 'sounding' boards for a governing authority (Abelson & Gauvin 2006) or as 'listening' devices (Coleman & Gotze 2001). The panel of interested citizens advises the Kommun on issues that range from major infrastructure projects to service delivery and the development of a new website.

The nature of the citizen panel initiative and key themes induced from the data are discussed in the following section.

### **5.3 Themes**

#### **Function not fashion**

The panel project was instigated by the Mayor and the Controller through a joint realisation that

we have many well educated, easily-engaged inhabitants that have good ideas. We want them to take part in those questions even if they are not directly concerned, if they are not very physically asked what is your opinion, we won't get it - so we wanted to make it easy for those who are interested, to get their ideas across [Mayor].

The Mayor and the Controller were very keen on experimenting with different processes and routines that would benefit the community and consequently keep the Kommun towards the top of the league tables. The panel was a functional tool for accessing two key underutilised resources; community interest and knowledge. Until the Kommun started focusing on community engagement in 2005/2006, dialogue with the public mostly centred on complaints.

A number of forces for community engagement that are highlighted in the literature (refer Figure 2-3) apply here. There was a 'feeling of necessity' by two key public officials initially, and there was a 'belief in efficacy' of such engagement in being able to generate and capture more numerous and better quality ideas to assist in the Kommun's work. None of the forces that can emanate from external stakeholders (refer Figure 2-3) are particularly visible here, and there was no sense that reduced trust or any of the other factors impinging on Swedish local government were at play - refer SALAR (2007c) in section 4.3.6. Nor did particular local contextual forces drive the engagement. Rather than a 'new generation of public officials' being a force for the engagement, it is more a case of a new generation of thinking rather than one of age, given the extensive experience and service of the proponents.

The concept of institutional isomorphic change (refer section 2.3) - which suggests that adoption can come from external pressure or from mimicking other initiatives - does not resonate here, since the participants stress that the impetus for the engagement initiative has been to get good ideas rather than follow, or be subjected to, a fashion or a dictate.

As discussed in section 2.3, the quest to improve performance in order to bridge perceived deficits can be a key driver for community engagement. However, this Kommun is widely acknowledged as ‘at the top of the game’ (as evidenced by awards), and so improving performance in this case is about exceeding, rather than meeting, expectations.

### **Home-grown**

From the determination that some innovative approach to engagement was necessary, through to the development and adoption of particular objectives, structure and processes, the approach to the panel project has been very much a ‘home grown’ creation - despite the fact that generally

We steal ideas from everywhere in the world, including other municipalities in Sweden, and they steal from us [Mayor].

The Kommun had examined alternative engagement mechanisms – especially in the UK – and the concept of citizen panels seemed attractive. The Controller visited Aberdeen in Scotland to study their citizen panel initiative. These panels had operated for two years and were designed to be representative of the demographics in that community. The study-tour by the Controller concluded that the demographic mix and issues at home were vastly different than those facing Aberdeen – which has, for example, much greater unemployment, lower educational levels, and high teenage pregnancy rates – and there was no need for an emphasis on representativeness that was evident in the Scottish panel model given the greater homogeneity at home and the desire to capture ideas. In fact, no observed panel design elsewhere, nor any other form of engagement, matched the Mayor and Controller’s desires for an ‘ideas machine’, and to all intents and purposes the citizen panel ended up being home grown. So whilst ‘ideas travel’ (Czarniawska 1996; Solli, Demediuk & Sims 2005), in this case the ‘home grown’ theme indicates that travel was done for the sake of reform name rather than the reform’s structure and processes.

This panel initiative had received interest from other kommuns, and had prompted discussions elsewhere about different citizen panel formats and processes. The interviewees did not know of a municipality that was working systematically to implement a very similar approach, and sensed that other municipalities contemplating panels might be tending towards models that are statistically representative; have shorter life-spans; commit less time to open dialogue; use the interactivity of the Web; or deal with narrower questions.

## **Not representative**

The investigation of engagement initiatives in other local governments had not revealed structures and processes that the Kommun wanted to directly adopt, but it did reveal undesirable elements. For example, the citizen panels examined in Scotland were intended to be reasonably representative - with some 1,500 people statistically selected to be part of citizen panels. The Kommun Mayor and Controller concluded that the representativeness in the Scottish approach would not be contemplated in any shape or form. The instigators' stance was that their municipality already had a representative council - chosen by 90 per cent of the inhabitants - to make the decisions, and they did not want to have a panel that could be regarded as providing outputs akin some other competing representative body, and absolutely did not want the panel's ideas or preferences to be seen like

some sort of referendum result [Mayor].

## **Get those that want to be engaged**

A second reason for dismissing the Scottish model was the preference for a citizen panel constituted of people who are drawn by personal interest or conviction, rather than for statistical representativeness.

no, we don't want to have that, we would rather have people that would like to be engaged [Mayor].

Anyone with a contribution to make was welcome to 'bring something to the table'. The only stipulation for inclusion in the panel was that the person should not simultaneously be engaged as a politician in that kommun. The list of who is on the panel in general, or in working groups addressing particular questions, has not been a confidential matter, but neither has it been widely publicized.

In order to find those who wanted to be engaged, a questionnaire centring on 'what do you think about democracy?' was sent to four hundred citizens. That questionnaire formed a 'hook' to recruit citizen panel members, because at the end of the survey there was an additional question: 'are you also interested in being in our citizen panel?' A request for expressions of interest for citizen panel membership also appeared on the Kommun's website and in the community newspaper. The local media also reported the initiative as a headline, and that seemed to increase interest amongst citizens to join. Coercing inhabitants through individual targeting or

other more direct methods of recruitment were dismissed as they could compromise the premise of desiring to engage.

About 100 citizens were interested in joining the citizen panel. The proponents (and the few opponents) of this project were concerned about the mix of age and gender that would result – they wanted an array of ideas – so they were surprised and gratified that the biggest group was between 30 and 40 years old, which is traditionally a difficult group to engage in local politics due to matters of career, children, and the like. The concern was that the panel has

people 20 years old, people over 80, and those in the middle – but never someone who is 14, 15, or 16 ... but issues concern them not today but tomorrow, the day after, so our ambition is to engage, to make them interested in the community

It was thought possible to stimulate youth to be engaged by giving them a separate panel run on different lines, where ICTs would play a major part as technologies of connection (White, N 2001), and where the same issues contemplated by the existing panel and specific youth-related questions would be addressed. So ‘wanting to be engaged’ is not just a state of mind: for some participants it will have to be triggered by the structures and processes used for participation.

### **Clean citizenship**

The panel participants’ ideas should come from a perspective of what the Mayor terms “clean citizenship” - where members respond as interested thinkers or observers. .

So young, old, male, female, (those) known as being hyper-engaged citizens - we didn't want to disqualify anyone ... they shouldn't be engaged because something is happening just outside their door, so it should be a citizen's point of view ... a user's question ... is also very important but that is something else [Mayor].

Clean citizenship reflects Roberts’ (2004) concept of citizens as co-learners and co-finders of issues and solutions in a social learning system (refer section 2.8). In contrast, the Kommun has quite separate engagement initiatives orientated to a ‘user’ perspective – for example in meetings with school parents. There is perceived to be a real distinction between the responses a person may give as a user and as a citizen – and any one person can think and act as either.

We know it's the same individuals but they think in different ways when it's a citizen's point of view and it's a user point of view [Mayor].

The role of the civil servants in orchestrating the meetings aligns with Roberts' (2004) depiction of facilitators. To some extent, the politicians and administrators also act as 'co-learners' and 'co-finders' of issues and solutions - along with the panel members - as they listen and learn from the dialogue and conclusions.

### **Fresh ideas**

The emphasis is on fresh ideas rather than a critique of what has been done. Ideas

to lift-up our eyes to the horizon [Mayor].

The central objective of generating ideas is well illustrated by the discussion of how to redevelop the main square – a key space for public activity in the Kommun's centre. Everyone on the panel list was invited to become involved in these discussions, and about 30 people were interested in contributing. Discussion started with a very open question: 'how would you like the new square to look?' People on the panel responded with ideas in terms of things like activities, surrounding shops, and so on. The Kommun had an initial draft plan, but did not show it at the beginning of discussions because they wanted to know what the panel group thought as citizens. After the initial ideas of the panel members about means and ends had been captured, the original council plan was also discussed by the group and reactions and further ideas were recorded.

Thus, the philosophy underpinning the citizen panel engagement initiative is very much one concerning the improvement of government services and infrastructure.

We're looking for the good ideas ... we wanted them to have good ideas about what we should have or shouldn't have, and we have a broader dialogue giving us better information, leading to a better plan or a better reconstruction or refurbishing or whatever. Now we don't have any lack of good ideas. We have lack of time, we have lack of other resources but not the lack of ideas [Mayor].

There can be an 'autopoietic' tendency for organisations to reproduce decisions if they operate in a relatively closed loop (Luhmann 2005, p. 103) (refer section 2.8). In providing inspiration for decision making, the citizen panel appears to be a counter to autopoietic tendencies by introducing new ways of thinking that provides different pathways for the organisation.

Double loop learning (Argyris & Schon 1978) (refer section 3.4) appears to be central to this engagement initiative, since the work of the citizen panel revolves around generating fresh ideas about means and ends within an ‘issue’s’ context, rather than adjustments in the means used to achieve the status quo ends.

### **Visible and systematic use of panel ideas**

There is no obligation or commitment by public officials to act on the panel reports and incorporate the ideas into policy and implementation – but a conscious decision was made from the outset to reach for a visible, active and systematic use of the panel’s output. In practice, the panel’s ideas are visibly ingested into the Kommun’s decision process and can be seen to have been actively considered at the very least, and not just treated as another pool of attitudinal information. Indeed, the panel’s ideas are highly visible in the Kommun’s final plans and implementation for almost all of the issues that the members have worked on:

you can see these things in the decisions [Controller].

The visible and systematic attention that public officials have accorded to the panel’s ideas, and the extent of their influence on decision making, allows the citizens to contribute as ‘makers and shapers’ (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001, p. 34) of government services – which is seen by interviewees as important in motivating panel members and public officials and in making this a sustainable community engagement initiative.

### **Ideas evolve**

A lot of things can happen to panel ideas after they are subjected to further debate by public officials and collide with factors such as economic constraints, political party agendas, professional preferences, competing agendas and so on.

When an idea is born to when we make the decisions, that idea has been changed many times. That's the way it should be [Mayor].

The fact that the panel feeds ideas that may ultimately be adopted, discarded or altered into the Kommun’s decision making process supports suggestions in the literature (refer Figure 2-7) that citizen panels are compatible mechanism for an *involve* level of participation . The citizen panel clearly passes the *involve* hurdle in the IAP2 spectrum (2004, p. 1) (refer Figure 2-5) that citizens’ “concerns and issues are clearly understood ... and ... are directly reflected in alternatives developed”. The panel may go part the way towards the IAP2 *collaborate* level

since it is looked to for “direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions”, and these are to be incorporated into “the decisions to the maximum extent possible” (IAP2 2004, p. 1).

However, the further stipulation for the *collaborate* level, that the institution will “... partner with the public in each aspect of the decision” (IAP2 2004, p. 1) is a stronger representation than the case themes suggest. Also, identification of the preferred solution is not a mandate for the panel, so the level of participation in the panel initiative appears to be in the ‘*involve-consult*’ intersection that is indicated by (Creighton 2005, p. 9) (refer Figure 2-6).

While the discovery of fresh ideas is the key rationale for the panel, Walters’ (2000) issues-mechanisms-purpose model does not suggest citizen panels for such searches for alternatives or criteria.

### **A wide agenda**

The agenda for the panel focuses on specific issues, like a website or a city square, and attention can be directed within these to some or all of: formulating problems; detecting sub-problems; suggesting priorities and ends; and considering the means of attaining them. Beyond the issue(s) ‘on the table’, panel members are free to initiate discussions about other things.

I don't think you should stop the dialogue too much because the meeting are for the citizens and they should feel that whatever they want to talk about (indistinct) they should do it [Controller].

For this reason, panel meetings that are generally planned to go for about two hours, but sometimes run for up to four hours before the public officials dare or desire to call a halt to proceedings.

### **‘Mid-impact’ ideas**

The work of the citizen panel needs to be positioned in relation to the breadth of the issue and the stage of the decision making. The panel needs to be oriented to produce ‘mid-impact ideas’ - ones that address issues which are neither very broad or very narrow, and ones that are not sought very early or very late in the Kommun’s decision making processes. The interviewees stressed that from the outset they were not interested in panels that are designed to give

.narrow answers to narrow questions [Controller].

The perception was that if the questions asked are too narrow, then the result will be narrow answers, which inhibit panel creativity and limit the potential benefits of the engagement initiative. But if the question put to the panel is too broad and lacks reasonable boundaries then

discussions would be a waste of time because it becomes: how would you like the future to be? ... there will be no focus, there will be no cost control, there will be no time control and so on [Mayor].

The OECD (2001b) suggests that the earlier the community engagement occurs, the greater the chance for evolution of a range of solutions and time to implement them. However, the interviewees believe that if the panel advice is sought very early in the Kommun's internal discussions and decision process regarding an issue, benefits of timeliness are outweighed by the lack of clarity about resource implications and political support – which may render the panel's ideas economically or technically impractical, or politically unsupported. At the other extreme, if the government is quite far along the decision-making process before a panel considers the issue, there can be clear boundaries and inputs for the panel dialogue, leading to focused and reasonable ideas, but these might have

a 10 percent chance of significant influence ... because most of the decisions are already made. The impact that they can have is very, very small ... (so) ... we try to have something like in the mid impact or mid influence area ... not in the early stage ... but it is also bad to discuss things late in the piece [Mayor].

So the production of fresh 'mid-impact' ideas – ones aimed at a mid-range breadth of the issue and generated at a mid-range point in the Kommun's processes of decision making – is the target of the citizen panel. This case suggests that engagement that occurs very early in a decision process (OECD 2001b) is not always an appropriate strategy.

### **A contest of ideas**

The composition of the panel members that constitute working groups changes due to the dynamics of self selection and manipulation by council officials. For example, if 30 people from the pool of 100 volunteer to form a group to discuss and comment on a particular question, then they are likely to be a somewhat different mix of people than those who volunteered for other questions since interests and availabilities differ. As an extra strategy for having different people mixing and discussing matters, each working group is in turn broken down into a number of subgroups (for example three subgroups of ten people from a group of thirty citizens) who each

address the same question. And the composition of each subgroup is adjusted by council officers so, if possible, the same individuals do not work together more than once. Participants have been pleasantly surprised with this mixing arrangement. The Kommun's objective is to avoid 'group think' and prompt individuals to voice and discuss their own ideas.

We try to mix it every time because I think if they are a small group, after a couple of times you have the opinion from the group and not from the individual [Controller].

So whilst Roberts' (2004) concept (refer section 2.8) of citizens as co-learners holds in this case, their ideas are sought as individual rather than in consensus views.

### **Baby steps**

The Kommun's strategy was founded on the belief that it is better to start the panel experiment with a clear intent - capturing and contesting ideas - and let the initiative structure and processes evolve through experimentation. The approach was to start with simpler issues and a panel process that was nothing like a fully-formed model of how to capture and use information.

We didn't know what we should ask about, or exactly how, and they (the community) didn't know. The only question was: do you want to be in discussion with things, whatever it might be that will come up in our municipality [Mayor].

The first question for the panel was about a project for the coastline, and was chosen as a relatively confined and straight-forward issue. During 2006 and 2007 the panel was asked for their ideas on six additional questions. During these two years, as council staff and panel members gained more experience with the panel engagement process, the substance of the issues tackled became progressively more complex. The operation of the panel has been very much about taking 'baby steps': keeping initial expectations realistic; experimenting with structures and processes for eliciting discussion and capturing ideas; starting small and getting bigger in terms of issues; and using experience 'as the teacher' for handling complexity and enabling more robust panel discussions and feedback.

It's like learning to walk – what you start with won't look so good [Controller].

While the later iterations of the citizen panel's tasks reflect Robinson's (2002, p. 4) view (refer Figure 2-8) that such advisory mechanisms suit situations of reasonably high levels of information complexity and risk, the 'baby steps' theme suggests that an initial adoption of the

citizen panel approach could incorporate a learning and experimentation phase that targets lower levels of these contingent factors.

### **Minimising the influence of public officials**

There was an assumption that the presence of public officials at the panel meeting could distort what the citizens might otherwise say – thus contaminating or limiting their ‘fresh ideas’.

Therefore politicians do not participate in panel meetings on the grounds that their presence could lead citizen members to address them, ask them questions, depend on them, or try to have an impact on them rather than engage in free discussion. Civil servants facilitated the meetings to the extent of keeping the discussion equitable and on track, taking notes, and supplying background or technical information – but great care was taken to make sure that managers were very much in the background during the substantive discussion. Panel members can ask questions of the staff present, but the understanding is that

it is they who are in focus and that they should be the ones to talk [Controller].

### **Practicalities - scheduling time and place**

The attrition rate has been very low, and only a couple of the 100 originally recruited into the panel have formally dropped out or stopped contributing. A key factor in the high retention is believed to be careful scheduling of events. For example, a small workgroup of panel members met twice to discuss old and poorly functioning parts of the Kommun’s infrastructure, and this laid the groundwork for a final meeting that was convened on a Sunday - which almost the whole cohort of 100 members attended. The constant challenge is to think about issues of time, place and mood.

We tried to get the environment right when everybody comes and they get something to eat so they feel a bit like home [Controller].

### **The report as the critical engagement output**

Ideas can be quiet, fragile, and easy to ‘snuff out’ - unless they can be encapsulated in some way. A summary report captures individual and shared ideas, and is written by the management and staff who attend and facilitate the panel meetings. The report is seen as the critical engagement process’ output as it preserves ideas and forms a bridge between citizens’ ideas and government’s action. The document is reviewed by panel members and they have the ability to make amendments or additions if they find something is wrong or omitted. The report is accessible on the council website, but it does not mention who said what. Panel members can

see whether or not their opinion was somehow included or dealt with, and other citizens can follow what is happening in this group – but there is no structured way for non-members to provide commentary on the report.

that is the trick with this project, the report is extremely important ... that is the one thing that makes the difference, not those who are actually there [Mayor].

### **A legitimisation tool**

The Kommun has found that the citizen panel engagement initiative has often made tasks easier for the government because the significant front-end dialogue made subsequent decisions more understandable and legitimate in the community's eyes. The interviewees maintain that to tell the public 'well, here is the decision' is contrary to the current vision for how things should happen – at least to do with important issues. So some engagement should happen because

if you do the dialogue for the decisions it's easier ... (if) we don't have the dialogue for the decisions, you often have a long period after the decisions to discuss 'why did we decide this?' [Controller].

The locus of formal accountability has not changed with the advent of the citizen panel - since final decision choices reside with the public officials. But since the panel is widely advertised and open to all, the act of creating this engagement initiative is a strong symbolic declaration by the Kommun of its willingness to expose its past, current and future policies and implementation to scrutiny and comment by well-educated and interested citizens – thus expanding current norms and community expectations of openness and transparency. And Gale's (2008) concept of a new horizontal accountability (refer section 2.4) resonates since the panel report provides an instrument whereby any citizen can compare the actual direction and momentum of the Kommun's activities with what panel members suggested.

### **An embedded institution**

The interviewees see the citizen panel as an innovative device, a new dimension to the work of the government, and not a replacement of something that was done in another way before. When politicians were recipients of dialogue in the past, it was, aside from matters of complaint, generally from people of the same political party - people who more or less sympathised with their cause. Dialogue with citizen panels is a different thing that, and along with other engagement initiatives, allows politicians to find out what people are thinking outside the party-

room context. On the issue of gaining people's views through party discussion versus community engagement,

the one is not replacing the other, you have to have both [Mayor].

In the Kommun, community engagement has moved beyond a 'public relations' tool and entered core values in the mission and vision to become embedded in organisational processes. From the outset, the Mayor and Controller were determined to build the citizen panels to be seen and operate as part of its normal public management processes, because if it was handled as a separate project outside the usual tasks for public officials, there was concern about

who in the organisation is going to be responsible and finish it? So that's when we try to have it in normal works [Controller].

The panels have therefore become a significant part of the Controller's responsibilities these days. Cost has not been an issue, since the panel initiative attracts a very minor extra budget allocation. Whilst a small and decreasing number of politicians see the panels as a waste of time and money, and as an opportunity cost to management, the interviewees saw a clear positive cost-benefit since

It takes a lot of time but on the other hand you can get a lot of good ideas from it. It's a win-win situation, actually. I think for citizens and for us (managers) and for you (politicians) also [Controller].

To which the Mayor agreed and added as an aside,

That's one the disadvantages of the democracy, it takes time.

### **Beliefs about the locus of information and ideas**

The interviewees perceived that the Kommun's engagement initiatives in general, and the citizen panel in particular, had started to alter organisational culture because it had changed assumptions and beliefs about where the locus of information and good ideas lie - and thus altered the way that public officials think and act. For example, the way politicians and managers would allow for public participation - the extent and the mechanisms used - in a forthcoming library project would be quite different than what would have happened before. This case indicates that need to tackle lack of a compatible institutional culture - and successes

in a narrow engagement initiative can produce significant shifts in this that improve the possibilities for a wider application of citizen participation.

The new belief about the locus of ideas makes the citizen panel fit well with Carson's (2005) ideas about suitable contexts in which to use deliberative designs, as it satisfies characteristics of broad debate, creative options, staff support, institutional preparedness to act and diversity of opinion. The panel also appears to mirror a 'transformative' participatory experience as envisioned by (White, S 1996) to the extent that it changes motivations, competencies and opportunities.

### **Reputational effects**

Engagement initiatives, along with other economic and social factors that they co-exist with and influence, have contributed to the reputation of the Kommun - as evidenced by its awards and rankings. The Kommun's reputation has spread more obviously for some of its projects, like the harbour development and the quality of its schools, than for the panel and other engagement initiatives. But the interviewees stressed that the engagement has contributed to the infrastructure and quality of services and,

this together gets us very good reputation and this reputation gets us very good possibilities to attract good people and when we attract good people we can keep good people ... that means that we are getting even better results and you are in the good circle.

Several hundred visitors from all over Europe and Scandinavia have visited on fact-finding tours about the infrastructure and services, but community engagement as a process is somewhat harder to show off than a school or a port. But given the rapid rise in local and international interest in community engagement, the Kommun expect to see visitors in the future investigating the citizen panel, and might (jokingly) be

starting to charge for them [Mayor].

### **Revitalisation of the panel**

When the panel project was imagined, the instigators were clear that there would be a process of experimentation and learning for kommun staff and participants – and there was a need to set some time and task limits on the questions put to the panel. Two issues arose: would a citizen panel in its current form become more or less a permanent fixture; and if so, at what point

would its membership need to be refreshed? The Kommun decided that the panel had proved its worth as an ongoing institution, but concluded that operating for two years and covering six major questions was about the lifespan of a panel. The interviewees stressed that they were not interested in panels that have a short life. An open invitation in the media or by some other arrangement was envisaged with the hope that something between 100 to 130 members could be recruited – as that seems to be about the number which ensured each individual wouldn't be subjected to too many tasks. If more inhabitants volunteer, that is felt to be manageable. In the quest for a new panel,

The most important thing is that if someone likes to be part of it again, so fine, but the most important thing is that we get some new people in it [Mayor].

### **Multiplier effects**

The experience with the citizen panel initiative has energised public officials and the public, and now that

the interest for the citizen dialogue is very, very big ... we will be in much more dialogue in more regards and taking impressions from the dialogues - you will find that [Mayor].

So the Kommun is actively investigating new forms of engagement initiatives to expand the interaction of citizens and the work of the government, and anticipates that maybe 40 or 50 per cent of things it does now to engage will be replaced by new recipes. The belief is that

in a couple of years we have opened up even more than we have today, showing resolve [Controller].

But the orbit of existing and new engagement initiatives will remain fixed by the basic principle that the politicians

have been elected to take the total responsibility for all the decisions; that means that we are not asking for citizens to make any decisions. In some municipalities in Sweden you find that but you won't find that here [Mayor].

So for example, the interviewees do not anticipate seeing power sharing or devolution experiments like participative budgeting, which has started to become widely discussed in Sweden.

## **5.4 Emerging categories**

The preceding themes can be aggregated into emerging categories to do with: building and maintaining an institution, locking onto a new perspective; seeking ideas; using ideas; and developing reputations.

### **Organic institution building**

This emerging category draws attention to issues of why and how the new institution - the citizen panel - is developed, maintained and applied. The themes from this case that inform the ideal of organic institution building are:

- Function not fashion – exploit underutilised community resources as the *raison d'être*
- Home-grown – the approach has been developed from within
- Baby steps – start simple, build slowly with expectations, issues & procedures
- Minimising the influence of public officials – neutrally facilitate the groups and listen & learn
- Practicalities - schedule the time and place to maximise citizen take-up
- An embedded institution – meld the panel and its report into organisational routines
- Revitalisation – a panel should have a long but finite life
- Multiplier effects – impetus for more experimentation in an orbit where politicians make decisions.

### **'Locking on' to a new perspective**

The Kommun wants to see possibilities for policy and action through the eyes of interested individuals as they peer through a new lens of 'clean citizenship'. To lock onto this new perspective, the Kommun had to construct that lens and facilitate multiple interested observers in looking through it. This can be explored in the themes of:

- Not representative – new perspectives are not the same as majority views
- Get those that want to be engaged – only source people who want to make a contribution
- Clean citizenship – ideas come from a thinker's not user's perspective.

## **Ideas hunger and hunting**

A real hunger for information has developed and the Kommun is not afraid of being awash with good ideas. The Kommun is not waiting for opinions or suggestions to come to it, and is actively hunting for ideas of a particular species which are identified by the themes of:

- Fresh ideas – consider problems, ends, and means in a new, not historical, light
- A wide agenda – consider an issue for problems, priorities; means; ends; and then more
- ‘Mid-impact’ ideas – focus on issues with moderate width and reasonable prior consideration
- A contest of ideas – individual ideas tempered in group discussion, rather than group ideas.

## **Using ideas**

It is one thing to hunt for ideas, but another to use them. The Kommun is keen to have a device that is not a mere ‘fig leaf’ covering what really happens, but something that can reach to the heart of the policy responses. The Kommun has visible systems in place by which the panel’s ideas are considered and then adapted, adopted or discarded by public officials who have retained total control of making the decision. Themes which indicate that the engagement is about use, rather than lip-service, are:

- Visible and systematic use of panel ideas – ingest them and treat them seriously for sustainability
- Ideas evolve – citizen’s ideas can, do, and should change between birth and use by others
- The report as the critical engagement output – provides evidence for action, or of inaction.

## **Developing reputations**

A range of reputations are advanced: the Kommun as an organisation; public officials as decision makers; the decisions as legitimate decisions; and the citizenry as a repository of knowledge. The themes that inform the ideal of enhanced reputations are:

- A legitimisation tool – front end discussion helps legitimise choices made
- Beliefs about the locus of information and ideas – citizens as a repository
- Reputational effects – engagement as another marker of a progressive kommun.

## **5.5 Informing the research framework**

This section presents a succinct summary of how this engagement initiative relates to the proposition in the literature (refer Chapter 2) that engagement initiatives have the potential to provide better decision making, better government, and better communities, as well as honouring democratic ideals. A brief summary of how the citizen panel initiative relates to these four areas of function is provided, and then Figure 5-1 indicates, using dot point summary notes, how the themes from the case study inform the dimensions and factors that comprise the research framework (refer Figure 3-9), which encompasses the form of engagement and the concepts of decision making, government and community.

### **Better decision making**

The municipality puts specific issues before interested panel members who then discuss and report on the ideas coming from individuals about desired ends and possible means to achieve these. The panel is not convened over issues that are very technical and programmable, but ones that can do with some combination of environmental sensibility and fresh or unconventional ideas about problems (or possibilities in a less negative sense) and better solutions. The panel adds another layer to the Kommun's decision making process as it feeds in fresh ideas that may evolve to provide a foundation for better decisions to be made by the politicians and managers about policy, service and infrastructure. These ideas are not representative ideas, not consensus ideas, not ideas from 'user' perspective, but ideas from interested individuals presented in a spirit of 'clean citizenship'.

Within the 'ideas hunting' and 'using ideas' categories, the themes induced and the illustrations given by interviewees indicate that the panel initiative reflects positively on the bulk of functions to do with better decision making that are listed in Figure 2-4. There is a visible development and use of issues, ideas, and solutions that are born out of a leveraging of dispersed knowledge and there is an indication that a better decision process results in improved policy and implication.

The interviewees did not specifically mention the function of risk reduction and risk management, and alternate readings of the data may suggest different possibilities. For example the theme of 'fresh ideas' indicates that new, more appropriate ways of doing things are illuminated, thus implying a decrease in risk through possibilities for new and more contextually-compatible approaches by government if autopoietic tendencies are resisted. On the other hand, the idea of shedding historical ways of seeing and acting implies an increase in

experimentation and associated political, managerial and user risk – even though the final choice resides with public officials.

As noted in the theme of the ‘ideas evolve’, the level of participation is around the ‘*involve-consult*’ intersection in the IAP2 (2004) spectrum because the work of the citizen panel allows for an exploration of options and preferences. This exploration aligns with first four elements of decision making in the management cycle (refer Figure 3-9), since it is bound up with identifying issues, opportunities and priorities connected with the general matter at hand (for example improving a harbour facility) and suggesting objectives and matching policy and implementation options.

### **Better government**

The case study supports the idea that community engagement can improve the sustainability of government. Applying the themes to the intellectual capital theory (refer section 3.3.2) indicates that the panel has enabled significant change in the Kommun’s capabilities. Human capital of public officials is strengthened as they take in new ideas and re-orient their views about the locus of knowledge. In terms of the Kommun’s organisational capital, the panel has seen some shift towards a more outward-looking organisational culture – especially in relation to where knowledge resources are situated – and has driven the development and embedding of new routines, structures and processes for tapping, reporting and using the widely-dispersed stakeholder knowledge. Added to this, the openness of panel membership and attention to practical considerations has provided the external capital linkages to access the capacity within the community. Using the terminology from the list of functions for improving the sustainability of government noted in Figure 2-4, the panel has functioned to: foster new networks, relationships, co-operation, co-ordination and government learning; and mobilised and integrated the resources of government. And as the case themes suggest, other functions of the citizen panel have to do with positive impacts with openness, transparency, accountability and legitimisation of decisions taken. Each function has its own limits – for example the theme of ‘a legitimisation tool’ indicates that accountability is elevated in a symbolic and informal way, rather than as a structured routine, through the openness of membership; the increased exposure of government work to the community’s gaze; and the panel report as a reference point for assessing subsequent action.

A number of observations can be made in relation to the continuum of models for local governing and their attributes (refer Figure 2-1 and Figure 2-2). Whilst official plans are still the ultimate source of rationality for government work, and these are developed by the ‘experts’ in

political, technical and administrative matters with an eye to efficient government, they now incorporate citizen ideas. The expansion in the locus of knowledge to include the well-educated citizenry allows for a more widely informed system that reduces the risks to responsiveness and accountability that the United Nations (2004) perceive where processes are too heavily technocratic. But whilst the intention with the panel is to shift the rationality source towards the public domain by way of more pluralist processes, an equal leap along the dominant values continuum (towards local democracy) is not an agenda for the Kommun. The themes stress that this is not an exercise in giving people voice and choice, nor is it about intentionally expanding community governance - it is about efficiency. Despite the Kommun's objectives, by having more people interacting with their local government and co-operating in the generation of ideas, the panels have brought with them a measure of community governance – although the interviewees do not care to describe it in those terms.

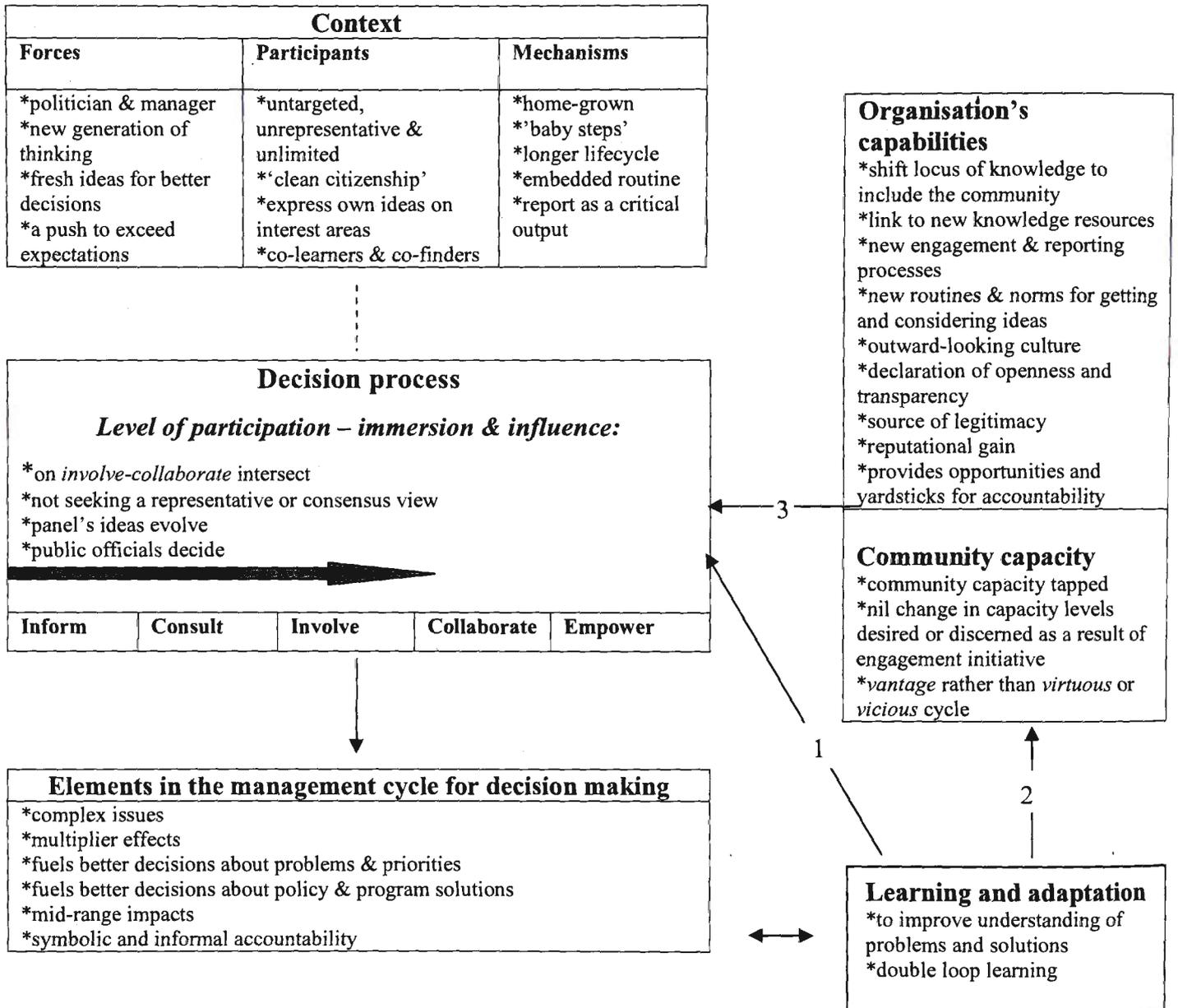
### **Better community**

The desire has been for people to think, talk, be creative, and generate good ideas that 'wash through' to better policy and programs. This case indicates that the citizen panel has, in good measure, fulfilled that desire through better Kommun decisions and hence better community conditions. But the citizen panel engagement initiative is not about developing community capacity or about giving citizens voice or choice - the largely well-educated, affluent and assertive community has always had good levels of these things. The ambition to make the youth more interested and engaged is noted, but that will have to be tackled by an engagement initiative different to this one. So the themes from the citizen panel are not substantively about any of the functions for 'strengthening cohesion and capacity in the community' (refer Figure 2-4), and do not accord with the notions of enhanced citizen ability, enhanced community group ability, or collaborative community culture that are advanced by (Cuthill & Fien 2005) (refer section 3.3.3). That said, neither is the engagement leading to a degradation of social capital and community-to-government relations as described in Hartz-Karp's (2004, p. 15) 'vicious cycle' (refer section 3.3.3), because there is some element of collaboration and also the themes indicate that the views of interested citizens are listened to; documented; taken account of by political and administrative decision makers; and are often reflected in final decisions. The harmony and community capacity building of a fully-formed 'virtuous cycle' was not what is striven for in this case, and may be considered unnecessary given the demographics and the strength of the social fabric. Sticking with the 'v' emblem in Hartz-Karp's (2004, p. 15) existing model of vicious and virtuous cycles, this case offers evidence for advancing the idea of an intermediate 'vantage' cycle – where a situation is created that affords the government a comprehensive or commanding perspective without damaging the social fabric.

## Honouring democratic ideals

There is no sense that this engagement initiative has a significant connection to the ideals of participation as a right or duty as referred to in Figure 2-4.

**Figure 5-1 Research framework: the form & function of the citizen panel initiative**



Developed from Figure 3-9, the themes in sections 5.3 & 5.4, and discussion in section 5.5

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Radslags**

This in-depth interview was conducted in March 2007 with the Deputy-Mayor and the CEO, and concerned an initiative where citizens could debate and vote on alternative project proposals.

#### **6.1 Background**

The Kommun has about 40,000 inhabitants 2,200 employees, and comprises of two main areas which are extremely different. Twenty percent of the population live in the affluent historical area and seventy percent reside in a town which represents a less prosperous and more varied new society with a high immigrant population. Therefore, the Kommun has a very mixed cohort of inhabitants from different economic, cultural and educational backgrounds. This mix impacts how and why engagement is practised within the Kommun, particularly because inhabitants in the lower socio-economic parts have less belief that they can, or should, influence the work of government - and less knowledge of how to go about it.

#### **6.2 Community engagement initiative: Radslags**

Referendums can offer the highest level of community participation in government through the delegation of decision making to the will of the people (Coleman & Gotze 2001). A Radslag is essentially a referendum where this local government puts concrete options to the community in order to secure debate and ascertain preferences through a vote. The Radslag initiative commenced in 2005, and has encompassed a wide range of topics including building size and location, road and landscaping design, school designs and marina facilities.

The nature of the Radslag engagement initiative and key themes induced are discussed in the following section.

#### **6.3 Themes**

##### **Increase interest in politics and democracy**

The Radslag project was initiated by a group of politicians and managers who had been active in driving other engagement projects which had focused on disadvantaged or marginalised groups in the community.

The main pressures for community engagement have come from the growing local disconnection between citizens and politics, government and democracy. A key trigger for action was a drop in voting participation 90% to 74% in 10 years, and the substantial further decrease of the community's involvement in the political process through a decline in political party membership.

As this disconnection started to become more noticeable, the Kommun conducted the sort of community engagement initiatives typical in local governments across Sweden - opening up committee meetings to public scrutiny, expanding the number and diversity of boards, and carrying out capacity building projects in less-privileged areas. By 2004, a group of politicians who had been active in these engagement initiatives decided that a bolder experiment was needed, so the 'Radslag' project was created as a way to reverse this trend by involving citizens more directly in council decision making.

There is not a good English translation for this term but we can try to use 'deliberative referendum' to describe this project [CEO].

The rationale of the Radslag project has been to inculcate the desire and the capacity for the community to be involved in democracy and local governance through their participation in a process of debate and choice. In essence the 'voting on alternative solutions' aspect of this engagement initiative masks the main event, which is not to make the decision, but to build community interest in democracy and government, and to develop community capacity through the processes of debate and choice embedded in decision making. Here the process for a decision is more important than the final decision made.

The drivers of the Radslags reflect an amalgam of forces for community engagement that are noted in the literature (refer Figure 2-3): a changing political context (dropping membership of parties); increased acceptance of necessity by public officials (who had been involved in lower-profile engagement initiatives); espoused functional benefits (the possibility of increasing interest in government and democracy and to a much lesser extent the possibility of better decisions); and enabling information technologies (for debate and voting). The Radslags are a response to a number of the contemporary factors impinging on Swedish local government - refer SALAR (2007c) in section 4.3.6 - including trends in party membership; decreased voter turnout; a more divergent society (given the increasing proportion of migrants); and a widening gap between people and their politicians.

The engagement initiative appears not to be a matter of gaining legitimacy or replicating successful practices of others – rather the interviewees gave the clear message that the Radslags project was chosen to gain particular results in terms of citizen interest, involvement and capabilities. Whilst the idea of a Radslag and technical expertise has travelled from practice in Sweden and elsewhere, and been translated for the local context (Czarniawska 1996), it was chosen to match an efficiency goal in connecting people with their Kommun.

### **Go boldly - buy-in expertise**

The proponents decided that the scale of the initiative had to be such that it could make a significant difference in curbing apathy and send a very strong message to the community about their importance to local governance, and so they

started in quite a big way with 8 deliberative referendums in 2005 [CEO].

In order to commence the initiative boldly, the Kommun decided that the Radslag structure and processes could not rely on in-house development, and a key decision was to incur significant costs in contracting a company that had been involved in some forms of deliberative referendums elsewhere in Sweden to provide the expertise in important processes such as the communication of information and the voting.

### **Old and new questions simply-put**

To use the Radslag methodology, the council looked for suitable questions for referendums to solve. It was a case of a solution device looking for a problem (as discussed in section 3.2) and not the other way around. Some of these questions had been on the agenda for a while and some were emerging issues. Radslag does not present a blank canvas for comment or allow for the generation of a ‘wish list’ by the community. Instead, the Radslag project asks citizens from different groups, backgrounds or interests to choose between highly specified alternatives. The questions asked in each referendum require a very simple yes or no answer, or an ‘A,B,C’-style choice. For example: should this road be opened or closed; should this building be 12 floors or 4; or should the new school be structured to amalgamate higher and lower levels or not? The referendums have proven to be a good way of tackling emerging problems, such as the need for new aged care and recreational facilities. But they have also been a good way to clean-up some issues lingering from the past.

should that street be opened and closed is a question over 40 years ... we are getting rid of some old and new questions [Deputy Mayor].

## Limited scope of issues and options

The limited choices available in each Radslag vote formed the decision boundaries that the Kommun considered to be two reasonable and workable options which satisfied economic, legal, social, environmental and other base criteria. The public officials may have personally preferred one option over the other, but strove to ensure the Radslag materials issued were fact-based rather than indicating a preference, since

the two alternatives were not one bad and one good, but two quite different but reasonable alternatives [CEO].

The construction of voting alternatives for some Radslags have been informed from separate engagement initiatives – for example, students being invited to produce paintings and drawings of what they want their school redevelopment to look like. But since the voting options for Radslags are, by and large, not the direct products of formal engagement activities, the OECD (2001b) ideal of early engagement is compromised by a lack of front-end engagement to frame the choices offered.

The need to do an exposition of the alternative solutions in a way that informed and engaged citizens had stretched the creativity and communication skills of public officials, but the nature of the alternatives short-listed for citizen choice were deemed in line with what would have been ‘on the table’ if the final decision had been an internal one,

more or less. [Deputy Mayor].

The Radslags do not appear to tackle autopoietic tendencies (Luhmann 2005) (refer section 2.8) in the short-term, since the options put to a vote are internally constructed ‘safe and acceptable’ alternatives and there is no indication that the extra work in articulating alternatives had been produced ‘out of the square’ thinking and options. However, autopoietic tendencies may be challenged in the longer-term since the interviewees were hoping that the Radslag-induced debate and relationship building within the community and between citizens and government would bring new ways of thinking by all stakeholders in succeeding matters.

The scope of issues that can be addressed through Radslags is limited to solving a particular issue, rather than for wider resource allocation matters because

most people are interested in one or two questions but the (politicians) elected have to

take an overall perspective, we can't give all the money to schools ... Well that is politics, and you can ask the people and they can say this is more important than that, but you can't have a municipality without roads and aged care [Deputy Mayor].

This engagement initiative accords with the suggestion in the literature (refer Figure 2-7) that referendums are appropriate mechanisms if the desire is to empower citizens to make the decision in question. However, the interviewees did not support Walters et al's (2000) contention that referendums are an appropriate engagement mechanism for any issue where legitimisation is the purpose (refer Table 2-2), but pointed to different principle drivers, like increasing citizens' interest in democracy. Robinson's (2002, p. 4) contingency model asserts that a referendum suits a context where reasonably simple information is available and where the possible impacts are high-risk. This model is not fully reflected in this case, since the Radslags satisfy the information simplicity requirement, but the risk in decision making appears quite moderate given the issues involved and the range of 'acceptable' options able to be offered as solutions.

The Kommune have no immediate plans to use a Radslag to allocate resources between competing projects of a different nature due to a perceived difficulty in public understanding of the balance between short term and longer-term consequences, and the conflict that resource allocation debates could bring,

but never say never [Deputy Mayor].

### **Voting on means or ends**

Even where higher level objectives that surround a Radslag issue have been clear and subject to strong agreement - for example an objective to provide infrastructure that allows for better community conditions - lower-level objectives (ends) have driven the voting choices about preferred solutions (means). For example, objectives of financial efficiencies from dense development of an available building site clashed with objectives about aesthetics and visual bulk. In the high-versus-modest size building choice when considering two means (5 versus 12 stories), voters were in effect debating their respective ends: a big building appears to be a rational means for low cost per unit of service delivery and maximum service supply ends; and a small building is an appropriate means towards lower infrastructure spending and streetscape impact ends. So in a sense, the Radslag provides a space for dialogue on issues where there is more certainty about actions (means to achieve ends) and less agreement on objectives. Therefore, the idea of double loop learning (Argyris & Schon 1978) (refer section 3.4) is

relevant here since the Radslag is designed to improve the program and/or service choice for an issue through the consideration of alternative objectives and alternative solutions within the current paradigm.

### **Targeted Participants**

The number of potential voters specified by the Kommun as eligible to vote on a particular Radslag depends on the nature of the issue and how it relates the structure of the community. The idea is that the Kommun decides who is eligible to vote on a particular matter by determining those impacted by the question, but in the end this comes down to

a political decision as to what part of the population who should be included in a referendum [Deputy Mayor].

The minimum age limit for Radslag voting is set at 16, which is two years before normal election voting – thus providing young people with an early taste of democratic processes. The smallest Radslag engaged two thousand inhabitants, and the largest took-in twelve thousand people - almost the entire eligible voting population on the issue of where to put the new aged care facility. Whilst the question of who gets to vote is restricted by a political decision, the debate is open to anyone who is interested and includes politicians and managers.

People are contacted by mail and electronically. Each prospective voter receives an envelope in the mail that contains information brochures on the context of that Radslag and the choice of options, paper voting forms with a return stamped envelope, and instructions about e-voting using an individual Internet code supplied.

### **Self-organised groups**

In most cases, the options for each Radslag were quite different, and residents

formed groups to publicise one view or another ... a lot of activities [Deputy Mayor].

These groups engaged in a lot of robust promotional activities which increased the profile of a Radslag in a way that the Kommun's own publicity machine could not. The publicity served to intensify debate and interest and thus gave traction to the issue whilst gaining the attention of individual citizens. Some of these groups were of a very ad-hoc nature, and some employed more sophisticated systems like allocating tasks to 'members', producing pamphlets, and

building communication linkages via email and SMS. Discussion within and between groups made many participants able to

recognise the wide interest of others on the question that was not the same [Deputy Mayor].

The taxonomies of the role of citizens that are outlined in section 2.8 (for example (Roberts 2004, p. 328), (Epstein et al. 2005) and (Marshall et al. 2004)) do not provide a simple or all-encompassing description of what is occurring with the Radslags. Whilst a vote does occur, that is only a small part of the story. The Radslag ideal is about people looking at an issue, thinking about repercussions for today and tomorrow, and in doing so finding themselves interested in local government, discussing with friends, neighbours and others (either individually or as part of a group), thus becoming part of local governance. Citizens are also drawn to evaluation activities, and they are well informed about when, where and how the action should take place, and what the anticipated results are. As inhabitants who have been deemed by the Kommun as interested parties and become connected in discussion and debate, participants can act partly as a 'voter', 'co-learner' and an 'evaluator', or they can simply 'tick' a box randomly or with limited inquiry and thought. The role of inhabitants, therefore, is determined by how strongly they become involved in the debate.

### **Shared responsibilities**

The Radslags echo Gaventa's (2004, p. 17) idea of 'shared responsibilities'. Shared decision making occurs because the community makes the final decision, but this is based on alternatives advanced by the public officials. However the interviewees' ultimate responsibility and accountability firmly remain with the Kommun since the

political level decided the questions ... (the) referendum was the method and there was an output ..... it's rather the same way as usual except that the answer came from someone else and the council then formally confirmed that answer [Deputy Mayor].

### **Front-end campaigns to grab interest**

A lot of 'front end' informational campaigns were connected to each Radslag using different kinds of media activities. The Kommun used fairly typical community meetings - forums favoured by many councils in Sweden and abroad where politicians and officials make presentations and take questions and comments from the public. For the first time, the Kommun

also used Internet chats with inhabitants, and these interactions included 'real-time' sessions to discuss referendum issues, which have been

popular, interesting and useful [CEO].

In addition, innovative ways of describing the decision alternatives were used. For example, to indicate the two decision options for the height of a proposed building, large balloons were tethered aloft the proposed site to provide visual reference points for decision making, and to stoke interest in the issue and the upcoming vote.

It is an example of how we worked with simple means to describe what we were doing. Under the line and balloon there were descriptions of what this is about – we hoped people see the balloon and get interested and they did [Deputy Mayor].

Another imaginative example concerns major changes proposed for an important road that had become a quite dangerous 'speedway'. There were 10,000 people living along or near this road and it had become a significant problem. The two alternatives available for voting were represented in two huge cakes (replete with edible depictions of road surfaces, intersection roundabouts, lights and trees) and these were displayed on-site in large tents - and then consumed after inspection by community members. As an aside, the Deputy Mayor was unsure whether proponents of one solution ate the cake representing that option or consumed the 'opposition' cake to make that visually disappear.

### **Immersion not the decision**

Certainly the debate can be heated, and the absolute preferences of politicians and managers can collide with the choice made by the referendum voters. For example, the majority of politicians and managers were keen to have a taller building in the Radslag that marked alternative heights with coloured balloons, and hoped that the 'high' balloon would carry the day. It did not, and the community selected the low-rise option.

We had to change balloons because someone often cut the wire ... and there were a lot of balloons ... (used) [CEO].

However, the loss of the preferred model was not a setback because the Kommun

didn't try to convince people ... just some facts ... this option will look like this with X

floors, rooms and occupants [Deputy Mayor].

There was no hesitation in sending up a higher balloon compared to a lower balloon – although it could be something that could actually make it harder for council's preferred choice to win.

There was no sense of disappointment in outcome because the balloons worked

to achieve our main objective of getting more interest ... the important conclusion in this case was not the alternative chosen but that we asked and people participated, and there was much approval and people wish to do more (Radslags) in the future ... the input (of people) is more important than the result [CEO].

Whilst the Radslags look, on the surface, to be primarily about making a decision in a democratic way, 'the' decision is not the main thing of interest to the Kommun – it is the immersion of the public in debate or thought about competing ends. And, except for one case where there was a lot of 'history' and subsequent legal appeal after the Radslag result, the public were perceived to be rather ambivalent about the decision once it was made, and simply glad to have been part of the process of decision making.

the evaluation of how people felt found a usual reaction that even if I did not have my vote win the result, it was good to take part [CEO].

### **Quick and obvious impact**

An imperative for the sustainability of Radslag ideal is that

it is important for participants to see the results of their vote very quickly [CEO].

In the Radslag about the alternative main road designs, trees and other components were ordered immediately and work undertaken speedily. The result of the vote is described in the local newspaper and the Internet home site as soon as possible. Quick publication of the voting result, and rapid implementation of the construction (facilitated by pre-prepared contractual and technical documentation), are seen to be vital incentives for participation by inhabitants in future community engagement activities.

### **Technologies of connection**

A key question is how online technologies can be used in participatory activities to allow people to communicate, give feedback, ask questions, complain, exchange information, and build

relationships (Coleman & Gotze 2001). White's (2001) label of 'technologies of connection' is an apt way to headline a theme about the robust application of ICTs within the Radslags. The mode of communication is a sophisticated combination of conventional practices like public meeting forums along with innovative practices like real-time electronic discussions and illustrative models set up in the field that both engage interest and help conceptualise the voting options. The innovative physical displays, like the cake and the balloons that could be seen in-situ or in full colour on the Kommun website sections devoted to particular Radslags, were perceived as trigger points for a fertile debate which increasingly centred on interactive web chat, email lists, newsgroups and forums like web-blogs. E-voting is anticipated to eclipse paper ballots in the near future and is credited for providing a level of convenience that beckons high voting participation.

The Radslags have provided an impetus for more marginalised immigrant and elderly groups to increase their access to Internet technologies via the Kommun's infrastructure, training and advice that is available through libraries and community centres. In taking these opportunities, some (but not all) people from marginalised or disadvantaged groups have formed new personal networks and developed skills that can be transferred to their every day life - for example now being able to email family overseas and deal with Internet transactions. The technological dimension, among other parts of the Radslag experience, are also perceived as allowing some people to feel that the community centres, libraries, local government offices and the wider community are a welcoming and accessible place where they 'belong'. The strategies of more public access to technology, rather open Internet discussions and a serious involvement of local politicians in the on-line forums concur with Ranerup's (2000) recommendations for increasing the level of debate.

### **Cost as asset or expense?**

The first ten Radslags have been an ambitious project incurring at least 2.5 million Kronor (about \$350,000 USD) in direct costs, and consuming significant but uncalculated amounts of public officials' time and other resources. A key cost component was consulting fees, as they had to buy in expertise on some processes, especially on secure Internet voting technology and the professional evaluation of results. The interviewees were adamant that the initiative was cost effective. Whilst acknowledging that the Kommun is relatively well-resourced, they argue that for other local governments, the costs of conventional and ICT dimensions of a Radslag-type approach

should not be impossible with some compromise [CEO].

Each of the ten Radslags varied in cost due to their scope and where they were positioned along the learning curve – costs tended to reduce as experience with the processes grew. Radslags became easier and easier to operate both for the Kommun and for the community. At the start there is

a learning cost ... and we have made it easier and easier ... not all an expense as built up social capital and learning but that's hard to describe and have to report it as an expense [CEO].

### **What does success look like?**

One seal of approval is that the political majority agree with a political plan to keep using Radslags - which in the future will be the responsibility of the new Democracy Committee. And a statistically representative sample of the whole population - and not just people who opted to take part in a Radslag - found over eighty percent rated the initiative as good and hoped there would be further opportunities to take part. But the 'acid-test', according to the CEO, is the degree to which engagement between the election cycle drove voting on the subsequent election day. In the September 2006 election, voter participation increased 3.4 percent in the municipality overall and 7.4 percent in one of the less affluent areas.

must be some sort of world's record or European one at least ... and the increase in a context of a trend going down.....Hopefully a trend breaker [Deputy Mayor].

But some small sections of the community have not interacted very constructively with Radslags, and the Kommun is searching for new ways to connect those citizens.

doesn't have the 'door openers' so to say [CEO].

### **Challenging traditional roles**

The Deputy Mayor noted that whilst it might seem hard for individual politicians or their party to argue that community engagement is not a good idea publicly, a few had strong reservations about the Radslag project on the grounds that referendums are an abrogation of the decision making role of the politicians, a slight against their own knowledge of local people and context, and that it questions their ability and track-record in advocating and acting on community needs. That said, there was perceived to be sufficient history and experience in lesser-scale engagement initiatives in the Kommun to have incrementally shifted the organisational culture to one that is

accepting of citizen participation. So the case underlines that an effective way of meeting the challenge in gaining the support of public officials for a more major engagement initiative is to opt for prior experiments in more modest projects.

The interviewees note that on the surface, it may appear that the role of politicians and managers is very different when they hand over decision making power to someone else, since

the formal tradition is that politicians tell management what should be done and managers are supposed to figure out how it should be done ... traditional how and what questions ... (and now) the community appears to give the orders [CEO].

But the changes to the traditional system are not so extensive or incompatible as they might first appear. The political level decided the questions and approved the alternative responses to be put to the public. So giving decision making authority to the community through Radslag was not seen as particularly revolutionary, especially since the responsibility and accountability still rests with the Kommun.

it was the political level decided what areas and what questions and from what (voting) age and my responsibility was almost as a project manager to see that the (Radslag) structure delivered the actual result [CEO].

The method for delivering the result, and not the final choice made, was the main concern - since the process of engagement and participation was the thing designed to bring about positive changes in the community's attitude to, and interaction with, the business of government.

The interviewees note that some politicians who were initially doubtful have become stronger advocates of the community participation in council decision making – and have found the interaction has refreshed their role.

1000's vote for you and expect you to do a job ... they give you a mandate and you become representatives for a lot of people ... (but) being a good representative can be to ask them in other ways, like referendums - and that is a good thing [Deputy Mayor].

The mostly positive views and reaction from politicians to the engagement initiative collides somewhat with allegiances to their political parties - who they must be nominated by - and any contrary views of their own party bureaucrats. The perception is that policies formed within

political parties can easily become more distanced from the evolving needs and wants in the community since fewer and fewer people are involved directly in political parties. The CEO and Deputy Mayor note that in a country where around eight percent of people are members of a party, and just two percent are active, there are electoral difficulties and equity issues when policies of political parties are out of alignment with the views of the broader community. Therefore, tensions between politicians and party members and party officials have arisen over the Radslag project and engagement initiatives in general. These difficulties are not easy to resolve because

you are selected and have to listen to the party to do things as the party and if the party says do more of this and citizens say we want less of it – who should you listen to? If people say less and party has said more, then I will take the discussion within the party and say look this is what the people say and we had thought this is our way - but is it really? ... and (that debate) may change things or maybe not [Deputy Mayor].

### **Empowerment not control**

The politicians of the Kommun have committed to follow the community's decision in the referendum. The commitment stands no matter the size of the voter turnout or the margin between the alternatives. The council

has not had to face an issue of what to do if say only 10% turned out to vote, as the referendum with the least participation was 29% and most 64% ... and we were very satisfied with the attention [Deputy Mayor].

Because a binding choice is made by the citizens' vote, the '*empower* level' is reached on the IAP2 (2004) participation spectrum (refer Figure 2-5). But the Radslag project emphasises the difference between an engagement initiative that 'empowers' citizens to make a choice between limited alternatives that they did not necessarily have a hand in constructing, and an initiative in which people directly inform or fashion alternative solutions while being empowered to choose between them. Since the Radslag process informs the public about the voting options and invites debate about the relative merits of these options, the *inform* and *consult* criteria on the public participation spectrum are met. But the *involve* and *collaborate* phases are not necessarily satisfied since it is not necessarily true that the public's "concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed", nor is there necessarily a "taking of direct advice on formulating solutions" (IAP2 2004, p. 1) since alternate solutions have already been formulated by the Kommun.

Therefore, it appears a linear application of the IAP2 (2004) participation spectrum does not properly reflect the Radslag initiative, since a ‘tick’ for the *empower* level does not mean that all lesser levels of impact have been met. Indeed, the eligible voters in a Radslag have been empowered but lack control – given the very narrow range of options put before them. While there has been devolution of decision making to the community in a way that appears atypical in Swedish local government - refer section refer SALAR (2007c) in section 4.3.6 - the decision making role afforded to the community is thus more limited than a linear depiction would suggest.

Despite the *empower* level of participation, it is hard to claim that they are resoundingly ‘makers and shapers’ (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001, p. 34) here because inhabitants have not had the decisive or integral role in choosing the topic and alternatives. There are also questions about how the Radslags fit with key factors suggested by Carson (2005) for considering deliberative mechanisms. At one level the fit is tight – there is broad debate about the voting alternatives; a measure of diversity in opinions reflected in the debate and the alternatives themselves; enthusiastic internal support and a readiness to act on the decision. The caveat is that the broad debate is about a ‘fait accompli’ – the official alternatives – and does not expand early in the whole decision process as some might advocate - see for example (OECD 2001b).

## **Fatigue**

There is a key unresolved issue about how much of the work of council could be put out for consideration in deliberative referendums. Practical constraints that limit the number of Radslags are perceived to be the danger of voter fatigue, internal resourcing costs, and managerial overload. Whilst the Kommun has a policy of continuing with this initiative, there is a realisation amongst Radslag advocates that it

can’t put too much out in an organised way [CEO].

Whilst the evaluation survey suggested that the vast majority of the Kommun’s inhabitants wanted more deliberative referendums, the interviewees indicated that the number is not as critical as the message that should get out as a result.

It can’t be like this deliberative referendum that will follow you every way ... it is consistent to say your vote counts between the election and this can be fun, let’s do this together [Deputy Mayor].

Radslags have extended the work of managers in a number of ways. The options for voting will be on-show and put in front of many inhabitants, so there is added pressure to consider the views of multiple stakeholders in the setting of alternatives. Also, the 'facts' must be articulated and communicated in the way that is accessible to the community - accounting for variations in their abode, literacy, numeracy and access to technology. In addition, significant time and effort is required of managers in the interactive Internet chats and other meeting methods. The consultation and participation processes consume much of the managers' time and attention, and puts their plans under very strong and very public scrutiny. While managers are, in the main, supportive of current referendums and other engagement initiatives, their appetite and support for any expansion:

is an open question [CEO].

### **New judgements of plans and performance**

The Radslag process exposes the Kommun's design alternatives (that are subject to the vote) to interrogation and allows them to be debated and judged by the community. Indeed, they are judged by all stakeholders, such as managerial or political peers, in terms of attributes such as cost, operational suitability, sophistication, and so on. Therefore, the quality of concepts and work of politicians and management staff becomes much more visible and open to scrutiny under Radslags because, as well as choosing between options,

the community have a judgement on the alternatives given [Deputy Mayor].

The Radslags provides a transparency far removed from decisions made behind closed doors. The Kommun's descriptions of the alternatives, and the promise to abide by the people's ultimate choice, provide concrete benchmarks against which performance will be tested by the public. Here, knowledge and visibility of targets spreads from the normal custodians (public officials) to the public. This new connection and information flow between government and community could be argued to reflect Gale's (2008) idea of a new horizontal accountability (refer section 2.4).

### **Part of a puzzle**

The interviewees stress that while the Radslag initiative constitutes a major and different part of the community engagement in the Kommun, it is only a section of a puzzle containing projects like mobile voting stations at election time and the micro-projects of marginalised groups. But while community engagement itself is only one device used in governing, it is perceived as

a pearl of what we are doing over 10 years ... trying to convince people that they are a part of what is going on here ... getting women to go out and meet - not just the men ... helping students with homework – very practical things [Deputy Mayor].

### **‘Doors’ into the future**

Whilst current Radslag initiatives have not provided the “doors” to connect with some marginalised inhabitants, each Radslag is perceived as opening another metaphorical “door” [Deputy Mayor] that encourages citizens and public officials to think about the future, the big picture, and sustainability – and therefore have a different perspective on what the work of government should be and what society should look like in the future. Whilst the Radslag issues are about practical things like building and landscaping a new roadway, they do more than solve a current problem.

Long term thinking is based in very concrete ideas and things that you can manage - and when you add up all these concrete ideas you find the long term. You never start with ‘we should make a green world’ and go down to ‘trees in the park’, you start from the trees in the park and end up with we want a green world [CEO].

## **6.4 Emerging categories**

The preceding themes can be aggregated into six emerging categories to do with a necessary investment; the burden of choice; new roles and responsibilities; the pursuit of democracy and local governance; actioning decisions and constraints.

### **An investment**

This emerging category draws attention to the significant investment that the Kommun believed was necessary for the engagement initiative to have a significant impact on the interest and activity of the community in relation to local politics and local governance. The themes in the Radslag case that highlight the ideal of a significant investment are:

- Go boldly - buy-in expertise – a significant return requires a strong investment
- Cost as asset or expense? – there is a learning cost but expenditure builds worthwhile assets
- Technologies of connection – ICTs can be employed for the purposes of accessibility, promotion, networking, debate and voting
- Front-end campaigns to grab interest – innovative approaches capture attention and simplify issues

- Part of a puzzle – other engagement initiatives are required to make people feel part of things.

### **Choice can be a burden**

Choice can be a burden, and the Kommun sensed a need to restrict the scope of the tasks for the community by providing limited options for well-structured and very concrete questions. This still requires some consideration about means and ends. The scope is noted in the themes of:

- Old and new questions simply-put – simple questions and not open issues are brought up
- Scope of issues and options – well structured problems and different but reasonable alternatives
- Voting on means or ends – vote for a solution, but choice depends on desired ends.

### **New roles and responsibilities**

Individuals and groups within the community become charged with sharing the responsibilities of debating and making ‘the decision’, whilst the roles of politicians and managers adjust. There is a sense of people - citizens and public officials - coming together and getting meaning from it. This new demeanour is indicated by the themes of:

- Targeted Participants – it is a political decision as to who has an interest in a given question
- Self-organised groups – groups have organically formed to pursue a particular point of view
- Shared responsibilities – citizens undertake a shared, but not ultimate, responsibility
- Empowerment not control – power within the confines of narrow options is not control
- Challenging traditional roles – roles of politicians, their political parties, and managers alter.

### **Chasing democracy and local governance**

Radslags appears to be about making the decision, but they are mainly about motivating and facilitating the interest of inhabitants in politics and the work of government, as evidenced by the following themes:

- Increased interest in politics & democracy – declining voting as a symptom of a lack of public interest
- Immersion not the decision – the processes of connection, thinking and debate as the essence

- Doors into the future – people can develop a more holistic and long-term view.

### **Bringing the decision to life**

When people have put time and effort into thinking about an issue, and the voting for an option, they quickly need to hear the result and see ‘something that they can kick’ – some tangible output of the decision making – which they can evaluate in their own way.

- Quick and obvious impact – need for rapid action to demonstrate that the choice led to something
- What does success look like – a wish for more engagement and an increase in election voting
- New judgements of plans and performance – judging the Kommun on the quality of options provided.

### **Constraints**

The future number of Radslags is limited, as indicated by the theme of:

- Fatigue – voter and management desensitisation or burnout can serve to constrain the future for Radslags.

## **6.5 Informing the research framework**

This section presents a brief summary of how the Radslag panel initiative relates to the ideals from the literature (refer Chapter 2) of better decision making, better government, better communities, as well as honouring democratic ideals. Then Figure 6-1 indicates how thematic content from the case study informs the research framework (refer Figure 3-9).

### **Better decision making**

The case resonates in a very limited way with the functions of better decision making that are summarised in Figure 2-4. This engagement initiative is not designed to capture and leverage widely dispersed knowledge, nor improve the identification of issues and problems. Neither did the interviewees indicate an expansion to informed and equitable solutions or the functions of identifying emerging issues or risks. The notion of better decision making through the ideal of ‘improved generation of solutions’ gains limited short-run traction in the case, since the theme of ‘limited scope of issues and options’ indicates that the alternative solutions presented for public consumption via the Radslags were no more or less creative or bold than what would have been considered if the decision had been an internal matter. Then again, the ‘doors into the future’ theme suggests that the interaction and debate in Radslags may engender stakeholders taking a more attuned and amenable approach of looking at the future, sustainability and the

‘big picture’ – and it would be difficult to imagine that if such a shift occurs, the types of alternatives considered in future issues would be the same as those derived under the status quo mindsets and processes.

The functional ideal of ‘better policy and implementation’ is difficult to consider in this case because the alternatives put to a Radslag are ‘good decisions’ in the Kommun’s view – not absolutely equal from the view of public officials, but both entirely acceptable. And either alternative could have been invoked by political decree without a deliberative referendum. Therefore it is difficult to proclaim that the Radslags have led to ‘better decisions’ in the sense of quality policy and programs that ensued – unless one took the view that the most popular decision is the better decision. So whilst on the surface this initiative seems to be all about the community making the decision, at its core is the aim of increasing interest in government and governing whilst at the same time strengthening the community rather than making better choices. Indeed, the interviewees at no stage mentioned a better or best decision – they talked about options that some of the public officials preferred, but never claimed those to be best.

The Radslags gain little traction with reference to the first three elements in the management cycle (refer Figure 3-9), but directly affects a narrow but important part of the fourth element: ‘develop policies or programs around objectives’ – making the final choice of what action to take. So in terms of Simon’s (1977) sequence of ‘intelligence’ leading to ‘design of alternatives’ and then current ‘choice’ (refer section 3.2), citizens get an entrée to the ‘current choice’ only - as reflected by the *empower* position on the IAP2 spectrum. The case indicates the danger in assuming the IAP2 model to be a linear one, since empowerment does not necessarily presuppose that information, consultation or empowerment were necessarily applied to the formulation of alternative solutions that underpin the engagement at hand.

The theme ‘new judgements of plans and performance’ suggests that the Radslags make the role of citizens rather important in elements six and seven in the management cycle. Citizens connect with element six because they are now in a good position to ‘monitor and evaluate outputs and outcomes’ - as they have a clear picture from the Kommun’s publicity about what they should expect, and where and how to look for the evidence of performance. It is also apparent that element seven of the management cycle (refer Figure 3-9) is affected, since new informal, horizontal accountabilities develop out of the Radslags.

## Better government

The Radslag initiative indicates considerable changes to the Kommun's knowledge resources and networks, and therefore to its intellectual capital – human, internal and external (refer section 3.3.2).

In terms of human capital, the Radslags have driven changes in the way that politicians and staff think and act – as emphasised in the 'doors into the future' and 'limited scope of issues and options' themes. There are increased roles for politicians and staff in framing and articulating acceptable alternatives and describing the contextual issues. New technical, dialogue, and ICT skills have accompanied changes in the motivation for politicians and managers as they interact more with community members. In particular, the Radslags have moved many politicians to reassess the idea of party influence versus other ways of establishing what should be done.

The existence of Radslags has increased the 'opportunity space' in which the organisation can interact with the community that it serves. So within that opportunity space, new and innovative structures and processes have been developed to communicate ideas and promote and enable dialogue and action – such as ICT-based dialogue and voting processes, and the devolved routines for making choices. This space represents significant advancements in internal capital. That capital is also supplemented by organisational culture in which there is now a willingness not just to engage, but to *empower* citizens in some decision making. This culture may have predated the Radslags, but the agreement by politicians and the willingness of managers to invest in further Radslags may be evidence that the incremental change in culture that was perceived to flow from previous engagement experiments continues. Organisational culture also changed as politicians and civil servants collaborate strongly with each other in the front-end development of decision alternatives, and with citizens in the dialogue phase.

The opportunity spaces created by the Radslags are a portal for expanding external capital, as is evidenced by more plentiful and deeper relations with mainstream and marginalised groups in the community. In simple terms, an increasing number of marginalised citizens have found a new 'fit' within their government as an institution, and within its physical spaces – and vice-versa.

The preceding discussion of intellectual capital supports a number of the functions which the literature suggests community engagement can provide in improving the sustainability of government (refer Figure 2-4), such as stronger relationships and learning for public officials, greater openness and accountability, and improved trust and confidence. The initiative also

appears highly successful in functioning to 'correct apathy', since the Radslags have been attributed by interviewees to the relatively dramatic reversal of the decline in election voting. Deferring the final choice to local community members who are seen to be directly affected is one way of serving the function of 'recognising minority needs'. Whilst the Radslag issues and alternatives have not focused exclusively on the needs of disadvantaged or migrant minority groups, these have at least been given some tools and opportunities for a new level of input.

The Radslag project does not fit neatly with all of the precepts and trade-offs in the alternative models of local governing (refer Figure 2-1 and Figure 2-2). The clear shift towards a community governance role - at least in some significant activity areas - in order to further values of local democracy is not accompanied by an obvious jettisoning of economic efficiency, technocratic control or a rationality source of public officials because the alternatives presented are the products of conventional management planning. So the Radslags appear to offer a situation where the emphasis on technocratic processes and conventional rationality remain strong, and the layers of pluralistic processes (the debate and voting) and public-domain rationality become additions to the status quo rather than a substitution.

### **Better community**

Whilst current Radslag initiatives have failed to fully connect with some marginalised groups and individuals, the impacts on community capacity have been significant. The process of Radslag dialogue is perceived to have provided individuals with the skills, confidence and motivation for further engagement with the institutions of government and fellow citizens – as attested by the survey results. The 'technologies of connection' theme provides another concrete, but not to be overstated, example of community capacity building through the possibility for migrant, elderly and less-affluent members to access ICT's and gain an enhanced familiarity that benefits in their daily lives. So as the 'doors into the future' and other themes suggest, the Radslags have been a vehicle for increasing the interest and ability of individuals to participate in future local governance issues. The 'self-organised group' theme indicates that the Radslags have given citizens opportunities to develop new skills in assessing ends and means, and in developing networks or working within groups.

Enhanced community group ability is evident, as networks and relationships developed in the Radslag process and new groups formed to champion or contest alternatives proposed by the Kommun. Because groups form, reflect, debate, compromise, learn, and act, the interviewees perceive that community has an expanded capability for future group functioning and influence.

A collaborative community culture is enhanced through open and constructive dialogue amongst citizens, and between the populace and politicians and staff of the institution. Certainly, citizens – the more marginalised inhabitants in particular - have the opportunity to increase their social capital if they do not feel like ‘bowling alone’ (Putnam 2000) on the Radslag issues.

The case themes suggest that all of the functions for ‘strengthening cohesion and capacity in the community’ that are noted in Figure 2-4 are alive, to one degree or another, in the Radslag community engagement initiative. The functional ideals of more ‘linkages’, the appetite for ‘civil activity’, and the development of ‘skills and knowledge’ are especially supported by evidence. The interviewees perceive that the information presented as part of the options combined with group discussions have allowed people to recognise there is a wider interest - which is at least a prelude to the ideal of a preparedness ‘to compromise and act for the common good’. The case provides only a partial match with Hartz-Karp’s (2004) virtuous cycle of engagement: the community is engaged in an influential way and there is perceived to be an increased level of understanding about solutions, but the part of the cycle concerning citizen participation in the derivation of issues and solutions that are a prelude to the alternatives arrayed for voting is not a consistent or formal routine here.

### **Honouring democratic ideals**

The interviewees have clearly seen a ‘hole’ in the local democracy and have decided to fill it with the Radslag community engagement initiative. There is no doubt that giving ‘empowerment’ to citizens in decision making is emblematic of democratic ideals and practice. But the Radslags have not principally been introduced to operationalise ideals of participation as a right or duty – they have been introduced for the more instrumental reasons of securing better government and better communities by virtue of shared communication and interest – which is then evidenced in election voting patterns.



## **Chapter 7**

### **The ‘walks and talks’ meetings**

The in-depth interview was conducted in December 2007 with a Senior Politician and a Senior Manager, and concerned a suite of devices for public meetings.

#### **7.1 Background**

The organisation studied is a stadsdelsnämnder (a district board) which operates as the basic unit of local government for inhabitants in their area. In 1998 a number of these stadsdelsnämnder applied to be designated as separate kommun, but this was not allowed. The stadsdelsnämnder decide on activities in a district that have great importance for people's daily lives that are to be delivered by the stadsdelsförvaltning (district administration). In these notes the organisation is referred to as a ‘kommun’ – because it is undertaking works typical of a kommun on the bequest of, and as part of, the large municipal kommun.

The Kommun has around forty thousand inhabitants – more than many stand-alone municipalities – and manages municipal services to inhabitants including preschool, primary, individual and family care, libraries, recreational activities, social services and support to elderly and disabled people, security, power, environmental and public health. The district contains many different-sized businesses, and has seen significant property development along with a recent influx of migrant and young families.

#### **7.2 Community engagement initiative – walks and talks public meetings**

The Kommun’s ‘public meetings’ community engagement initiative is at the core of its attempts to have citizens participate in the work of local government. Public meetings are open forums where community views can be expressed (Department of Communities 2005b).

The Kommun has two key components in this initiative. The ‘walks’ part of the initiative is a rather special type of public meeting in which public officials ‘hit the streets’ with residents in order to hear and see concerns first hand – and reflect on possible priorities for action and alternative solutions. The ‘talks’ part of the initiative are open public meetings that can vary in size and scope – for example they can tackle the broad range of issues facing newly arrived migrant families or narrower questions about safety in a particular area. While the walk and talk components of the public meetings initiative could also be seen as two separate initiatives in their own right, the interviewees see them as two inter-related parts of a whole.

The nature of the engagement initiative and key themes induced are discussed in the following section.

### **7.3 Themes**

#### **Political determination to engage**

The Kommun has long had the typical range of possibilities for inhabitants to have a say about the services they receive via complaints mechanisms and opportunities to join or speak-to various boards and committees. But the Kommun was determined to go much further with community engagement.

we the politicians have decided, it's a goal for us ... we want to work with people ... we want them to talk with us politicians, we want them to talk with the people who work there every day [Senior politician].

There is very much a sense that politicians did not want people to be John Stuart Mill's "flock of sheep innocently nibbling the grass side by side" (Ginsborg 2008b, p. 1), and so the bolder and more coordinated 'walk' and 'talk' engagement initiative replaced modest prior ad-hoc engagement initiatives in the form of small low-key localised monthly meetings with its citizens.

The instigating politicians were troubled by the thought that traditional practice in local government can leave busy public officials distanced from what people think and feel, and so the public meetings engagement responds to a disconnect of people and local government in Sweden - refer SALAR (2007c) in section 4.3.6. There is no hint of motives like respectability or the weight of public opinion driving this engagement – but rather a desire by politicians for closeness to people and their concerns for the instrumental purpose of zeroing-in on priority problems in a better fashion than previously. So the forces of efficacy and necessity (refer Figure 2-1 and Figure 2-2) were the impetus for this engagement as politicians believed it could generate decent information about problems, priorities and reactions to alternative solutions. And this view was shared by senior management.

It's very important that the inhabitants, they have to create the agenda, we shall not do that, so we have the political will to work with these questions and then we have to have very big ears and listen very much [Senior politician];  
it cannot be a good result if you don't involve the users or inhabitants [Senior manager].

Politicians were also reacting to forces of a changing economic and social context (refer Figure 2-3) resulting from an influx of new residents from widely-varying income groups and ethnic origins.

### **Going walkabout to find reality**

Whilst the pressure for a new initiative emanated from politicians, the specific idea of the walks came from the practical imagination of a manager who suggested that some issues could be better understood and resolved by a stroll through an area by citizens and public officials. The logic is that that during the walks, residents can quite literally point out their reality, and communicate their concerns and ideas to politicians and managers from the Kommun and stakeholders from other agencies who have an interest in the issue. This part of the broad commitment to engagement initiative is described as “going walkabout” by the interviewees - who had both visited Australia as tourists and appropriated the term used for an indigenous ritual of journeying back into one’s natural surroundings.

Typical issues for a walkabout are things like security, public safety and amenity. The Kommun invites citizens to come together on an evening, and typically 10 to 15 inhabitants show-up for a one or two kilometre walk and tell the public officials what they like and what they dislike. For example, in a walkabout on security matters, typical issues may be

here it is too dark, here the traffic is not good, you can't see your car from here [Senior manager].

Walkabouts are publicised through the resources of institutions that control local housing: by direct in-person approaches to people from particular demographics in an area; from names recorded on the Kommun’s various complaints and information systems; and via information sheets and posters around local premises and at municipal facilities.

The Kommun is willing to run walkabouts on issues where it has limited influence, limited funds or limited powers – so that inhabitants have a voice and their views can be captured and negotiated on by the Kommun on their behalf.

we don't own these questions, but we can be like to help ... to see what is most important to do [Senior manager].

## **Deliberations on a narrow agenda**

The interviewees use the English term 'deliberation' to describe the nature of the 'talks', and from the case descriptions it is possible to discern two tranches: those with narrow focus; and those with a wider agenda. In the talks with narrow focus people come together to discuss how they see a particular problem, and also to consider alternative solutions suggested by the municipality. As an example of deliberations with a narrow agenda, the Kommun called a meeting about a neighbourhood

where it was a very rough area, you can say [Senior politician].

There were concerns about organised criminality in this area, the police were in attendance day and night, there had been unprovoked attacks on people who just happened to be in the 'wrong place at the wrong time' (including their own home) - and so people were very concerned about their safety.

A very large number of inhabitants came to this meeting, and the desire of the Kommun was to get people to talk about their worries, and consider a range of solutions. Due to the multiple-ownership of the security-related issues, attendees included Kommun politicians and civil servants, the police, planning officials from the central city kommun, and officials from the private institution that owned many of the residences that were the seat of trouble-making.

People described their worries. The police and other parties explained how they proposed to deal with these concerns. The bodies present had pre-formulated a robust and radical solution of taking away some of the houses and building new homes to attract some different types of people than those who had been causing trouble. As a result of the discussions, now the public

can see that we have taken this very seriously so now we are working with this [Senior politician].

## **Deliberations on a wide agenda**

A more open-ended agenda typifies the second tranche of 'talk' meetings; those where 'new citizens' hear about services offered and get to express and discuss their own perspectives and priorities. Publicity occurs through the 'welcome to the kommun letter' that each new resident gets and through posters. In the past many new inhabitants were transitory; now a lot of young families with children are moving into the apartments for a longer term and consequently the

Kommun has had to double the number of welcome meetings where people can network with other citizens and public officials.

### **Picking up those who don't say anything**

The best way found to stop particularly vocal individuals from taking over a meeting is to have facilitators who are good at picking up the persons

who doesn't say anything [CEO].

The Kommun has a limited number of staff with the ability to balance the level of contributions of participants, and it has been crucial to engage outside specialist facilitators to assist in this regard.

### **Front desk where inhabitants meet the city**

The Kommuns 'front desk' is a constantly evolving 'one-stop-shop' for residents that was adapted from a Danish local government's experiment. It is a community-interface device that handles citizens' queries and concerns; 'senses' the issues that end up prompting and shaping the walks and talks; and handles the publicity, invitations and other arrangements for the public meetings.

This is where inhabitants can meet the city ... we don't say: no, we don't handle that ...  
So I would say we can handle nearly every question they come with [Senior manager].

The front desk is perceived as integral to successful walks and talks and is viewed as an engagement initiative in its own right; one that has brought with it new or refreshed staff who are skilled and motivated in dealing with people and problems. So it appears that the front desk has averted two of the major challenges to effective community engagement: entrenched traditional forms of public administration and an embedded culture that is antagonistic to citizen participation.

I have people that are very, very good .... yes, and they like it [Senior manager].

### **Being heard**

Participants were targeted through databases maintained by the front desk about people's interests or concerns, general advertising at council venues and apartment buildings, and local press. A key objective of the public meetings engagement initiative is for people to gain a

measure of assurance and release by knowing, and experiencing, that their story can be heard. So the processes around connection and voice, and not just 'the' decision made, are perceived as a critical thing. Through the walks and other meetings, the inhabitants

feel that we listened to their worries ... and then you can say we involved them [Senior manager];

what you are concerned about, what is important for you, what are your opinions about our service, what would be better, what is good? [Senior politician].

Being 'heard' means that where the Kommun runs public meetings, it must attract a reasonable number of participants with a diversity of views. For example, a walk concerning security and amenity needed to take in concerns of elderly people who are typically more afraid, as well as seeing issues from the perspective of parents with young children who care about parks.

Without a reasonable cross-section to balance-out particular interests

then the information will not be so useful for you [Senior politician].

Inclusivity of a cross-section of inhabitants in discussions better positions the community to act in concert with government to consider problems and solutions and transcends the tradition of public officials engaging for the purposes of telling the community what the Kommun is about to do for them.

that we show them immediately, okay, you said so, now we are going to do something together. They saw that was a very good idea to work in this way [Senior politician].

Using Roberts' (2004) taxonomy of roles, citizens are initially responding to walks and talks as 'clients' (for example aged care) or customers of government services. But by joining public meetings and voicing or supporting opinions, they become 'co-learners' or 'co-finders' of problems and solutions in the social learning system (refer section 2.8).

### **Rescaling issues**

Going walkabout to find 'reality' means experiencing an issue and its 'landscape' by being there with some of those who understand or are affected by it. The Kommun will know of a problem - very often through the front desk - but has recognised that a very different impression is formed when public officials interact with people in their own space and conditions compared to phone calls, reports or more-clinical meetings. Being there provides a strong motivating factor for

politicians and managers to rethink the scale of a problem and the appropriate response; a problem that appears to be a minor issue in a report can become more real and large when it is experienced in their way [Senior manager].

The talks component of the public meetings initiative is perceived to attune public officials to the magnitude of the problems faced by citizens, but the walks are seen as especially good for bringing the scale and practical dimensions into strong relief due to the relatively intimate yet informal and grounded form of communication which frees up people to express their concerns.

### **Listen and learn to detect and dissect problems**

The strategy with public meetings is for public officials to allocate sufficient time and space to take things in

... (it is) ... about listening, not telling things [Senior politician].

A key role of the public meetings initiative is to illuminate the critical facets of these generally understood problems identified by the front desk or through contacts between public officials and the community.

The walks are perceived as being particularly effective in identifying what things matter most to people so as to enable a fairer allocation of scarce resources. The listening and learning in walkabouts can be seen as a way of dissecting a general problem (identified by the front desk or public officials) in the field as it were, in order to discern the facets (the sub-problems or inter-related problems) that can be recognised, prioritised and then factored into alternative solutions.. The walks have enabled the Kommun to consider if the issues are a symptom of a bigger social or economic issue, and whether joined-up responses with other agencies are necessary. For example a generally understood problem was that many people were afraid to take the tram at a particular location. Sub-problems highlighted in the walkabout were fear inducing access through a narrow tunnel with poor visibility of other occupants; poor lighting and stair access; and problems of the poor information system for arrival and departure. Understanding the range of sub-problems enabled the Kommun to negotiate and work cooperatively with range of stakeholders from different organisations to have remedial work undertaken.

The wide-agenda talks do inform newly-arrived citizens about kommun services, but a key outcome is for politicians and managers is to be informed about priority needs and concerns and

gaps in service delivery. Similarly, the key idea behind the narrowly-focused talks is to listen and learn in order to reveal what the inhabitants see as important issues and what the people think about the Kommun's alternative solutions.

The public meeting components, the walks and the talks, share the objective of dissecting problems and crystallising important facets in a way that makes them amenable for prioritisation and timely solution; while at the same time building up relationships, rapport and shared understanding within the citizen body, and between citizens and Kommun staff and politicians. The 'drilling-down' into issues and teasing out of sub problems initiative appears a foil to Williams (1999) concern about tendencies for governments to manage complex non-linear issues as reactive input-output-outcome processes.

### **Move on issues early in the pathway**

The walks and talks mirror the suggestion that citizen participation is most effective if instigated early (OECD 2001b), since they are perceived as helping to reveal the real shape and dimensions of problems in a timely fashion; an image that may be at odds with the version logged in the front desk information system or residing in the minds of public officials. Early 'learnings' obtained through interrogating issues in the public meetings appear to have immense value in avoiding the situation where a problem is only properly recognised and tackled downstream after it has spawned other issues, or escalated and got more complicated and costly to fix, or where inhabitants have got very angry, accusative and negative.

there is huge energy and money going into the end of pathways [Senior manager];

I think it's easier for all of us if we are not always waiting until the question is so difficult so you can't discuss it anymore [Senior politician].

### **What can't wait anymore?**

The idea with the public meetings is to uncover, air and pinpoint the issues that might be 'bogged down' in a slow planning phase, or perhaps would have taken another two or three years to get around to. These are the

what can't wait anymore' issues [Senior manager].

The interviewees perceive that a trap for politicians and managers is to think that a municipality that looks very active and efficient is on the right path

but if the inhabitants don't care about these things then it's not important, I think [Senior politician].

### **Managing expectations**

There is a perception that the public meetings initiative has contributed to a situation where people have begun to realise that the Kommun has limited resources and cannot afford to do everything. This has provided a 'reality-check' on expectations about the Kommun's activities and what the 'welfare state'(RPA 2006) can mean today. The Kommun's message to people is

that it makes a difference if you engage ... if you care yourself, that is very important for us, that everyone understands that, because we have a very long tradition in Sweden with 'Welfare Society' and a lot of people they have got used to (the idea that) someone (else) will fix this, I will not [Senior politician].

### **Compromise**

The public meetings are seen to have increased the possibilities of citizens being able to compromise about the problem or sub-problems that should be addressed and/or alternative solutions. These compromises have ranged from accepting that one's desires will only be partially met, to accepting that they will not be met at all, or accepting deferral into the future. In a sense, compromise has meant pushing ideas about problems or solutions back to the community for more reflection, and then increasing the onus on citizens to understand and accept a different or wider set of interests.

The compromise reached by inhabitants regarding a safety and traffic issue illustrates a situation where the locus of the problem is pushed back deep into the community itself – and so for some time at least the issue moves back from being the Kommun's problem to belonging to the community. One interest group amongst the 150 people who attended a deliberation comprised local parents who wanted a solution to do with pedestrian road safety. Another was made up of local drivers who wanted quick and easy access from the smaller streets. It was clear that neither the kommun budget nor any particular solution could satisfy both sets of competing needs.

They wanted us to solve this problem ... I told them: I can't solve this, this is not a political question ... you are neighbours in the same area ... you have to talk to each other ... to decide what you want us to do, because we can't solve two problems [Senior politician].

The upshot of getting neighbours thinking and talking further after the public meeting is that the car owners are now silent, and this is perceived to shape future budget allocation towards traffic

works to facilitate pedestrians. Here the drivers have been willing to compromise to the extent of having their entire initial wants being deferred indefinitely.

In another example of compromise that relates to the relocation of bus stops, after hearing first-hand about disadvantages for some elderly fellow inhabitants, proponents for a shift deferred to the municipality's position and did not appeal the Kommun's decision to maintain the status-quo. These and other examples given by the interviewees indicate that although all inhabitants may not be universally or equally happy with the directions subsequently taken by the Kommun, they are more likely to find the approaches to be acceptable if arrived at in a context of citizen participation.

when all the people see it's not so easy, it's not only my way, there are other ways too, then it's much easier to have a dialogue with all the different groups [Senior politician].

The fact that citizens have been able to come to some compromises of their own volition through the engagement process - where they partly or fully defer their wants to the needs of others – leads to a very particular version of Cornwall and Gaventa's idea (2001) about citizens as 'makers and shapers' of services.

### **Make no promises but show results**

In the walks and talks engagement, immediate solutions are neither promised nor always forthcoming due to: the complex nature of some problems; disagreements within and between the citizen groups and institutional actors; practicalities like fiscal constraints; or overlapping institutional authorities and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the public meetings have retained momentum and community interest because inhabitants see the value of their input through enough problems being pinpointed, prioritised and subsequently solved.

because you can see the changes [Senior manager].

The active participation by the public in determining the questions to solve, their discussion of the alternative solutions put forward by the Kommun, and some evidence of their views being reflected in changes suggests that the *involve* hurdle of the IAP2 framework (2004) (refer Figure 2-5) is met by the walks and talks initiative- because people's ideas and preferences are taken on board and become reflected in the problems tackled and the alternatives developed around contemporary shorter-term issues - rather than longer-term matters. Whilst the IAP2 spectrum concentrates on the institution-to- community interface, the case study indicates that an *involve*

level of impact can also allow people to understand and consider issues in new ways, and thus allow for compromise to occur between citizens, and not just between the institution and the citizenry. The *collaborate* level of public participation does not appear to have been reached, since the engagement is on more of an ad-hoc case basis than a real partnering relationship would imply.

### **Embedded practice versus routines**

While the walkabouts have become an institutionalised practice in the Kommun, they are not a routine for regular use and about three or four each year seems to be about the right number. A walk should only be done if the issue and context demand and trigger it.

when something has to be changed. But if nothing has to be changed you shouldn't do this walk [Senior politician].

The wide-agenda 'deliberations' for new inhabitants have become a regular event, and the narrow-issue deliberations are conducted if intelligence and some initial analysis by public officials suggest a pressing need for citizen participation.

Depending on the issue, its history, who showed up, and the context, each engagement meeting appears to have had a different mix of emphasis on: illuminating problems; affecting expectation levels; prioritising issues; consideration of suggested alternate solutions; and facilitating compromise. Walter's (2000) contingency model (refer Table 2-2) considers a number of variants in public meetings - based on the structuredness of issues and the purpose of the exercise. The Kommun's walks initiative is akin to a special type of 'neighbourhood meeting' - which tackles 'ill-structured issues' and has 'discovery' of problems and sub-problems as the key purpose. The Kommun's talks appear to combine the characteristics of the 'neighbourhood meeting' and 'town hall meeting' in the model as the issues tackled are moderately-structured or ill-structured, and have an 'educative' purpose (for example the meetings around dysfunctional local behaviour and those for new citizens), as well as a 'discovery' purpose (for example in uncovering issues that impact on new arrivals).

In Figure 2-7 'site tours and meetings' are noted as mechanisms compatible with an *involve* level of participation – and that label appears to be a good alternative way of describing the nature of the Kommun's walks. In Figure 2-7, 'public' and 'precinct meetings' are aligned with the *consult* level of participation - and so the *involve* level of the Kommun's talks match better with the 'community forums' label. This comparison of terminologies indicate that to make

simple assumptions about public impact based on the application of generic or special labels for mechanisms can be fraught with problems. As an example, Robinson's (2002) complexity and risk model (refer Figure 2-8) suggests that public meetings are appropriate where a mid-level complexity of information meets a mid-level risk in the situation concerning adverse outcomes, and where public impact is at the *consult* level. The walks and talks in the Kommun's public meetings initiative align with these mid-range risk and complexity criteria, but are operated at the higher *involve* level of public impact.

The use by the interviewees of 'deliberation' (as opposed to debate or dialogue) to describe what walks and talks are about appears somewhat apt. For example, participants do identify, clarify and prioritise issues and seek common ground and learning via structures and processes that are flexible and adaptive. And participants also rely on experts to respond and propose solutions. The characteristic of 'choose' is harder to pin down since individuals and groups make their preferences known and make choices in the form of compromise they offer, but do not vote in any formal sense and any preferences are not binding on the Kommun. This community engagement initiative happens in a context which displays many of the key factors appropriate for the application of deliberative mechanisms (Carson 2005), including: complexity and sensitivity of issues (though some matters are simpler cases of service fixes); need for creative and acceptable options; enthusiastic staff support and preparedness to act on recommendations; and diverse opinions beyond those of the usual players.

The meetings initiative and the symbiotic front office border on being 'transformative' (White, S 1996) because they are perceived to: change the motivation and competencies of public officials; expand the opportunities for citizen participation; beckon a new consciousness for people; and incline internal and external stakeholders towards future initiatives.

### **Follow-up procedures**

The politicians and managers work very systematically, so after each walk or other meeting a working paper is prepared on what has been found, what has to be done, and who will do it. And there is a post-audit of action after some months, where public officials enquire about progress. New systems of information capture, reporting, and follow-up have been instituted. Consequently, if the planned action has not taken place or had the desired effect, explanations are required of staff. These follow-up procedures have been needed in a functional sense, for planning, implementation and to track progress – but they are also needed to declare to internal and external stakeholders that the engagement is an enterprise that the Kommun takes seriously, and from which much is expected.

## **Connecting people**

There is a perception that there are socialisation outcomes from the walks and talks as people start to talk at the meetings, introduce themselves as neighbours or local residents, and more freely meet and acknowledge each other after the event. The participants also appear to become more familiar with the politicians and local managers who attend, and the interviewees have experience of this in their time spent inside and outside Kommun duties.

people start to talk to each other ... so I think this is a good way to hear ideas and to make them feel safe and engaged ... what's the word in English? Involved [Senior politician].

## **Giving migrants a new experience of democracy**

The interviewees are hoping that the public meetings will give people who come from different countries a desire to further engage with their local government by voting at elections or even consider standing as politicians. The public meetings provide a platform for migrants to understand the role and nature of local government, meet public officials, network with other residents, help in discussing problems and solutions, and see that there is a

difference between their experiences from the countries they are coming from and the experiences they can get here [Senior politician].

## **Short-run user focus**

The walk and talk engagement initiatives target contemporary issues for decision making because the matters that confront people in their daily lives are what they are interested in engaging on. The public are not so interested in talking about

things very theoretical, about democratic questions or the planning in five or 10 years, they are not interested, because we have tried that [Senior politician].

The interviewees have not dismissed the idea that sometime in the future, community engagement initiatives can revolve around bigger-picture or longer-term matters. The perception is that the experience people have over deliberations on the smaller short-term matters may lead them to believe that they can gain a voice and make a difference with the bigger longer-term issues.

The role of the walks and talks in shaping the Kommun's policy and program responses to contemporary issues indicates that the learning occurs on two levels – single and double loop

(Argyris & Schon 1978) (refer section 3.4). Single loop learning occurs because adjustments are made in the delivery of current services – for example where information from the walks indicates that facilities have become degraded and remedial action can be taken. Where information in the public meetings brings new understandings of underlying problems or spurs on the development of objectives and solutions, then double loop learning occurs such as in the ends-means discourse about pedestrian priority road infrastructure. The learning is not confined to the organisation - for example, some migrants may change their core understandings and beliefs about the role and nature of government.

### **Home-grown and continual change**

The methodology for the walks and talks meetings was developed ‘in-house’, while the idea for the former came from a manager and the imperative for the latter came from strong representations by an elderly couple. The idea of having an open and active office with a wide-reach had ‘travelled’ (Czarniawska 1996), and front desk started a replica of another Kommun’s ‘one-stop shop’ experiment but evolved to match the local context and facilitate the public meetings engagement initiative. All of these engagement devices appear to be work-in-progress and subject to continual transformation as organisational processes; which suggests a municipality responding to ideas of instrumental effectiveness rather than other pressures.

we have done them, we have changed them, and I think it's more like that [Senior manager].

### **A pragmatic mixing of ideas**

The walks and talks have given politicians new linkages and experience with the community and have reframed the party policy-centric focus and rather opinionated stance of some. Community engagement is also perceived as improving election chances for those who can claim that they have listened to the people’s voice.

okay, we have some ideas what we are going to tell, but I want to listen to what you need ... now so we can see if they are mixed together [Senior politician].

### **Staff culture and workloads**

Experiences with the engagement is perceived to have affected some discernable changes to organisational culture and reflected practice – as evidenced by less tendency for staff to

just let that other phone ring and ring ... think ‘that not my problem’ [Senior manager].

But it appears that in order to maximise the traction that engagement initiatives achieve, it is also important to proactively tackle culture at the front end – as exemplified by the series of role-plays where officials consider how they think and act in responding to scenarios of dialogue with inhabitants.

The interviewees indicated that the predominant view amongst public officials was that the engagement had led to better responses to the inhabitants. But there was internal disagreement about whether, on the whole, the public meetings make the overall work required in the lifecycle of an issue or a project easier. Some managers in particular are perceived as believing that staff would come up with satisfactory solutions from their agenda and knowledge, and on average things would progress more quickly and smoothly without citizen participation. An increasingly held contrary view is that in the absence of community engagement, public officials have to work harder in searching for problems and framing responses - and then have the added burden of having to justify them post-hoc to any disaffected actors:

usually most of it I think it makes it easier ... to have some meetings and to listen to what people are saying, we can do that in that way ... I think most of these contacts are very positive and it makes it easier in the end [Senior politician].

### **Locus of decision making**

One of the most compelling changes that has grown out of the engagement initiative experiences is its fuelling of an internal debate a shift in ‘who solves - who decides’ mindset at the Kommun

That's the difference making ... because you have to change your thinking - the thinking of the employees that I am educated, I know what you need [Senior politician].

This debate is perceived as perhaps heralding experiments such as giving more choice to recipients about their aged or home-care services; whereas staff have traditionally taken the approach of listening to them and then being determined to make the choice on the person's behalf on the basis of professional experience and judgement. This is an example of one successful engagement initiative driving public officials towards new experiments in an iterative fashion (see for example Nylén 2003).

## **Economics question at end not start**

The point of departure for the Kommun wanting to create more community engagement is

because you are positive about people and you want them to be involved because it's good for the society when you have involvement from people

The interviewees perceive that involving people in initiatives like the walks and talks makes for happier citizens and better-informed decisions about means and ends - which in turn can properly focus the work of government on priority needs and so lowers costs and improves effectiveness. So community engagement is an economic question for the Kommun in the end, but not at the start.

## **Missing youth**

A stated political goal is for the Kommun to work with young people, but there has been a lack of their involvement in the walks and talks and consideration of 'technologies of connection' (Coleman & Gotze 2001; White, N 2001) or more personal means. The perception is that the Kommun cannot use the methods with youth that they apply to adults, and so it must meet young people at their cyber or earthly 'places' to discuss their questions.

we have to work in new ways and we are not so good at that yet [Senior manager].

## **7.4 Emerging categories**

The preceding themes can be aggregated into emerging categories that provide insights to do with: together; understanding which problem; multiple mechanisms; new organisational practices; pragmatic organisational perspective; onus on citizens; and results matter.

### **Together**

This emerging category indicates the desire for the public meetings engagement initiative to connect citizens with each other and with the Kommun, and invokes a sense of the actors working together to address and resolve issues, obtain good results, and reframe experiences of governments and governing. Relevant themes are:

- Political determination to engage – good results require involving inhabitants
- Being heard – a process of doing something together
- Connecting people – building networks through a sense of involvement and belonging
- Giving migrants a new experience of democracy – creating new perceptions of government

- Missing youth – a search for different methods to engage with young people.

### **Understanding which problem**

The Kommun is putting significant emphasis on using appropriate public meetings as early as possible in the pathway of an issue, so as to better understand in a timely manner the current practical problems that matter - and therefore be better placed to adopt efficient and effective solutions. Indicative themes are:

- Short run user focus – concentrating on immediate practical problems
- Rescaling issues - reassessing the scale of problems
- Listen and learn to detect and dissect problems – understanding the facets of a problem
- What can't wait anymore – prioritising problems
- Move on issues early in the pathway– engaging in dialogue before problems escalate.

### **Multiple mechanisms**

The Kommun finds it useful to have a palette of three different formats for public meetings – wide-issue talks, narrow-issue talks, and the walks - and their application depends on factors like the breadth of the agenda and how closely the lived-lives of inhabitants need to be experienced and examined to properly understand and appreciate their realities. The multiple mechanisms at the Kommun's disposal are represented by the themes of:

- Going walkabout to find reality – finding the residents' reality
- Deliberations on a narrow agenda – discussing solutions for particular problems
- Deliberations on a wide agenda - exposing problems and solutions
- Front desk where inhabitants meet the city – constructing a central clearing house.

### **New organisational practices**

The Kommun has developed, embedded, and continually adapted new practices and processes to run the public meetings and to use the information generated – as demonstrated by the themes of:

- Home-grown and continual change – public meetings evolve
- Embedded practice versus routines – run meetings on the basis of need rather than as routines
- Follow-up procedures – systematic work for practical and declarative ends.

### **New organisational perspective**

Kommun staff and politicians have been able to gain new perspectives about their roles and the place of citizens' views, as evidenced by the themes of:

- A pragmatic mixing of ideas – all politicians see some benefits
- Staff culture and workloads – some certain implications for culture but uncertain workload effects
- Locus of decision making – a flow-on to empower citizens in other matters.

### **A social vaccine**

The engagement acts as a sort of ‘social vaccine’ for problems, since some of the onus in deciding what should be done or not done in the context of limited resources can be pushed back to citizens - by using public meetings to provide an awareness of competing wants and limited resources, and engender a preparedness for compromise. The relevant themes are:

- Managing expectations – a reality-check in a welfare state
- Compromise - pushing questions back to the community.

### **Results matter**

The public meetings help improve efficiency and effectiveness -which makes economic sense for Kommun and community, and give the public an incentive to participate in future events.

The concept that results matter is captured in the themes of:

- Make no promises but show results – momentum requires results
- Economics question at end not start – engagement ends in economic sense but starts as social sense.

## **7.5 Informing the research framework**

This section presents a brief summary of how the public meetings engagement initiative relates to the ideals from the literature (refer Chapter 2) of better decision making, better government, better communities – as well as honouring democratic ideals. Then Figure 7-1 indicates how thematic content from the case study informs the research framework (refer Figure 3-9).

### **Better decision making**

The public meetings initiative is not a universal practice that pervades all decision making, and so has only directly touched upon a limited number of the Kommun’s decisions about policy and programs. Nonetheless, the engagement appears to have been a force for better decision making on a number of issues that range from very localised neighbourhood problems through to more widespread matters that confront new citizens. The senior politician indicated that the Kommun’s determination to engage was founded on the idea that you cannot get good results without the involvement of the citizenry. The interviewees were emphatic that the public meetings have informed public officials about priority problems and solutions in a way that has

led to better decision making by the Kommun and other stakeholder agencies because the decisions touched by the engagement have enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in policy and implementation.

The real focus of the public meetings is on informing and shaping the first two elements for decision making in the management cycle (refer Figure 3-9) – problem identification and prioritisation and prioritisation. But the public meetings also inform the Kommun’s determination of means and ends – as noted in the theme of ‘make no promises but show results’. The case indicates that the public meetings have had some substantial influence on the ‘goals and objectives’ and ‘policy and programs’ elements of the management cycle as well.

A rather literal interpretation of the IAP2 (2004) framework noted in the theme of ‘make no promises but show results’ suggested an *involve* level of participation – since concerns were understood and did inform program solutions but the public did not actually partner with the Kommun in the development of those alternative policy or implementation responses. However Simon’s (1977) ideas about decision making as ‘wheels within wheels’ (refer section 3.2) indicates an alternative way of interpreting what ‘solutions’ can mean in the IAP2 cycle, and to municipalities in real life. An expanded interpretation of a ‘solution’ can see that construct as relating to alternative choices about the identification and prioritisation of problems. This contrasts to a more literal view of solutions being about alternative policy and implementation responses for service delivery and infrastructure. With the less literal interpretation of a ‘solution’, the level of public impact on the IAP2 scale could be reinterpreted as *collaborate* - since responsibility for ‘a solution’ (which problem? which priority?) is shared.

Whatever the conclusion reached about the IAP2 (2004) levels of participation, the desire to inform the work of government in new ways demonstrates a conscious movement by the Kommun to alleviate autopoietic tendencies (Luhmann 2005) (refer section 2.8).

The preceding discussion of the case themes has explicitly or implicitly revealed instances of numerous functions to do with better decision making from the literature (refer Figure 2-4). Decision making has been perceived as better because of improved identification of issues and ideas about relatively simple or complex matters. There appears to be much more emphasis in the meetings on ‘drilling down’ into the issues that are already known through the front desk operations and other feedback mechanisms, in order to improve understanding, prioritisation, and compromise of problems – rather than any elaborate efforts to involve citizens in the

function of framing of solutions. The constructions of solution alternatives appears to be mainly the domain of public officials, and these are put to the meetings in order to get some opinions, responses and ‘buy-in’ from the public.

The interviewees show much pride in how the engagement has pushed some decision making back to the community –in the sense that citizens come face-to-face with the realities of limited resources and the need to break out of the mindset that the entire resolution of the problem necessarily sits with the government. One of the functions to assist good decision making is the generation of equitable decisions. For example, the meetings have helped public officials and citizens to look deeply at who is affected by problems and alternative actions, and get actors to think beyond their own interests or preconceptions towards what might be in the common good. And where this consideration causes proponents of particular courses to drop their claims, so the Kommun’s palette of choices changes.

### **Better government**

The public meetings have impacted on the resources of the Kommun and thus helped mould the Kommun’s intellectual capital (refer section 3.3.2). Human capital has been bolstered by new information, understandings and relationships gained by public officials through their engagement with citizens. This ranged from simple yet potent things like people recognising politicians on a bus from exposure during large meetings and feeling free to continue the ‘conversation’; to substantial shifts in understanding the facets of particular problems. Engagement activities are reported to have brought about a new motivation for politicians and managers and an *esprit de coeur* amongst staff. Politicians and staff have expanded their organisational and communication skills in concert with the processes of community engagement, and the knowledge base of politicians and administrators about inhabitants and their context has increased.

Internal capital was enhanced through: the development of a customer-focused organisational culture; the institutionalisation of engagement processes; an expanded opportunity space for dialogue amongst and between politicians, managers and citizens; and the implementation of methodologies for capturing, tracking and reporting the results of citizen contact and subsequent action. Both the nature of the walks and talks, and the reporting systems developed to log them and track the Kommun’s responses, have strengthened the system of accountability. In particular the front office has transformed the capabilities of the institution to interact with inhabitants, capture critical information from them, share information, and assist them with problems that relate to the municipality’s work or the responsibilities of other institutions. The

participants noted the emergence of a new organisational culture which coincided with the engagement initiative – but some change was perceived to be a product of the participation processes, and some had been developed at the front-end in order to gain proper traction. As a flow-on from the public meetings initiative, the interviewees noted a shift in beliefs by public officials about the locus of decision making – and this was perceived as increasing the likelihood of citizens being empowered in relation to decisions about things like elderly care.

External capital has expanded with increased interactions and relations between the Kommun and mainstream and more marginalised individuals and groups in the community. The relational networks have expanded through the nesting of the public meetings within the normal business of government - thus providing a conduit for two-way communication between the public and the municipality.

The meetings initiative provides a substantial number of functions to do with the sustainability of government that are noted in the literature (refer Figure 2-4). The public meetings highlight issues outside the debate of the election cycle and provide a measure of transparency and openness by exposing public officials' ideas about problems and solutions to questioning and debate. There is evidence of relationships between actors from the political, managerial and public spheres being developed and government learning resulting from those interactions. Whether the meetings led to more trust and confidence in government and a legitimisation are open questions – but that certainly is an aim of the engagement – especially in terms of migrant groups whose prior experiences with governments have not always been so positive. The 'managing expectations' theme indicates that the function of a 'reality check' and reducing reliance on government is operative here – even given the paradox that the meetings also work to expose more problems and sub-problems – and this filters the relationship between government and governed.

The Kommun is concerned that without interrogating problems in conjunction with citizens, the technocratic arguments (United Nations 2004) may proceed in the right way but from wrong principles – leading to policy and programs that do not best meet priority needs. In other words, good logical defensible decisions are made about solutions - except that they are based on the wrong premise about problems. In terms of the attributes of local governing presented in Figure 2-2, for the issues that aired at the walks and talks, the source of rationality about *problems* shifts towards the citizens - but the source of rationality about *solution alternatives* stays close to the technocrats. And so the model is read rather differently when aligned against questions of

problems and solutions – there being a ‘nudge’ to the right with the former, and more-or-less the status-quo with the latter (despite the airing of solutions at some public meetings).

### **Better community**

There was some indication in the interviews that the public meetings had a function to play in making some members of the community feel more included – especially new inhabitants – and had helped establish some new networks within the community. Progress in these areas might be expected to signal some improvements in citizen ability, as social interactivity and social capital are linked to a sense of being and belonging (Putnam 2000). The engagement has contributed to enhanced citizen ability by providing inhabitants with motivation and practical outlets through which they can become better informed about their situation and context, and also express their views and debate options. Not only is there an increased ability for citizens to deal with local government matters, the walks, talks and the related front office activities provide avenues through which citizen issues relating to other institutions may be solved.

Community group ability is about groups reflecting, learning and acting in a concerted fashion. And this appears to have been strongly facilitated by the public being prepared to discuss things as neighbours and to come to compromises that embody interests other than narrow personal ones. The idea of citizens being more in tune with considering a common good is a very powerful part of this story. So while in a formal sense the Kommun makes the choices about the problems to be tackled and the solutions to be employed, through the meetings it does push back a responsibility for the community to make choices about issues they wish to pursue – thus invoking some sense of ‘shared responsibilities’ (Gaventa 2004).

A collaborative community culture is strengthened by the open and constructive dialogue that has been a feature of the walks and talks and is manifested in the collaboration of citizens - between themselves and with Kommun managers and politicians. Examples of the collaborative relationships emerging from the issues to do with bus stop positioning and traffic flows indicate how engagement has also increased sensibilities about the competing needs of fellow citizens and fostered the development of a willingness of citizens to compromise on problems and action - with the Kommun and with each other. While all of the meetings were open to any participants who wanted to show up, it was unclear from the interview data as to whether any other groups beside youth stood apart from these linkages and collaborative relationships. The emerging category of ‘together’ emphasises that co-operation and collaboration – rather than gaining a representative viewpoint – are the essence here, and match the originating rationale driving the engagement proponents. A key point is that whilst the ‘short-run focus’ theme notes that the

starting point of the engagement is inhabitants as users of services, the discussion and compromise that ensue often finds people thinking and acting from the perspective of citizens rather than self-interested users.

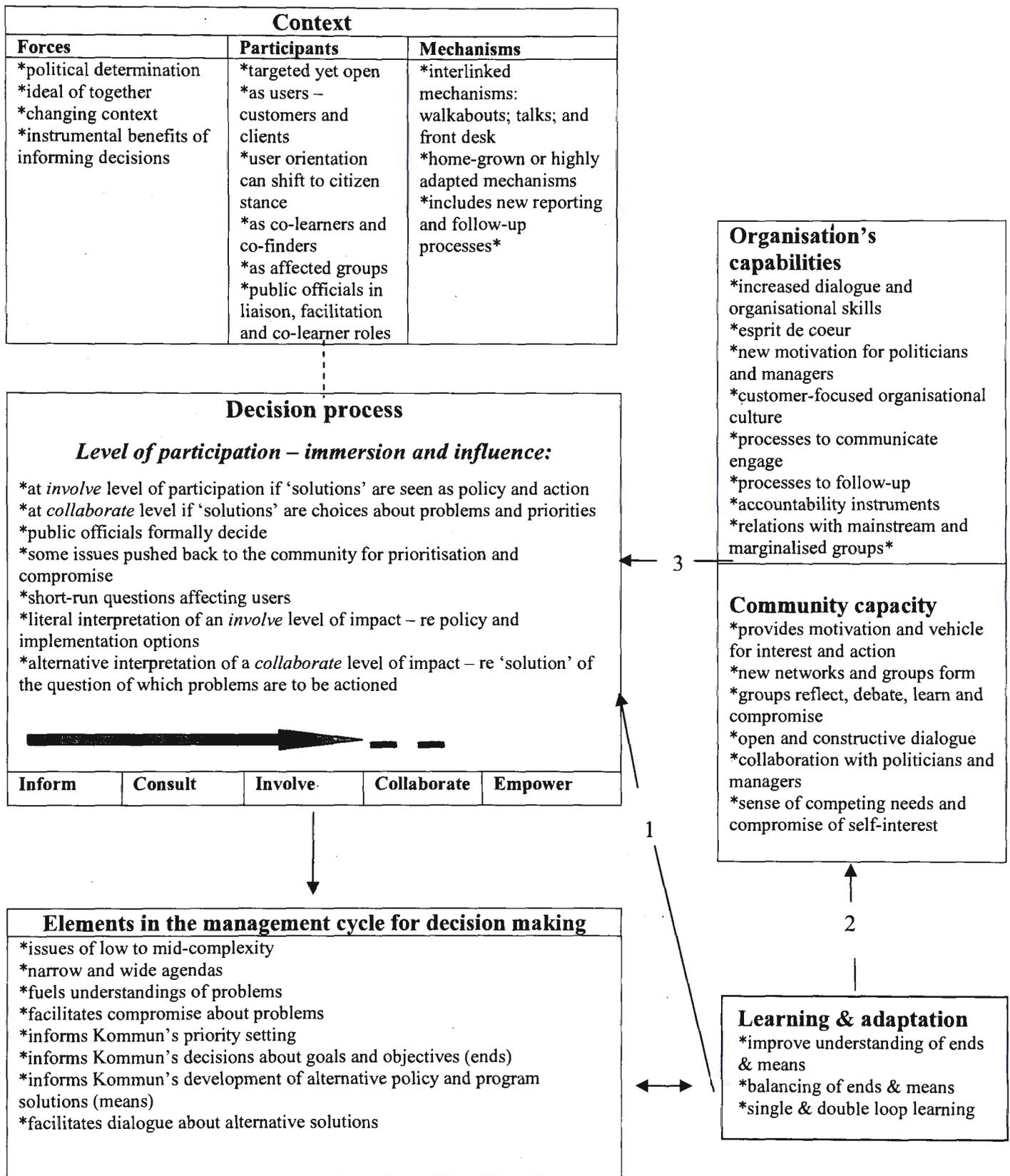
With the exception of the propensity for more civic duty, all of the functions to do with strengthening cohesion and capacity in the community that are noted in the literature (refer Figure 2-4) were advanced by this engagement initiative to some degree.

A rather literal reading of the IAP2 (2004) criteria suggests that the engagement only reaches the participative heights of *involve*, and yet Hartz-Karp's (2004) 'vicious cycle' model warns that this level of participation can end with solutions that do not properly reflect the ideas and preferences of the community, thus causing a cycle of frustration and distrust and a diminution of social capital. There was no evidence offered in the case to suggest that this cycle applied to the engagement initiative - despite the fact that program policy and implementation solutions were shaped by public officials. Perhaps Hartz-Karp's coupling of *inform*-level participation with 'vicious cycle' fails to acknowledge the potential benefits to community capacity (and related dimensions of trust and social capital) that ensue from the sort of compromise and shared understandings that were exhibited in this case – regardless of who fashioned the ultimate program solutions. Or, as noted in the preceding 'better decisions' discussion, if this situation is reinterpreted as being at the 'collaboration'-level of participation (since 'solutions' can also be about packaging-up alternative choices regarding which problems or sub-problems to tackle) then a virtuous cycle comes into view as far as Hartz-Karp's model is concerned – and better accords with the Kommun's experiences.

### **Honouring democratic ideals**

The interviewees spoke of engagement in terms of efficacy rather than as a right or a duty.

**Figure 7-1 Research framework: form and function of the walks and talks initiative**



Developed from Figure 3-9, the themes in sections 7.3 and 7.4, and discussion in section 7.5

## **Chapter 8**

### **The visioning meetings, visioning boards and participatory budgeting initiatives**

Three additional cases studies to those reported in detail in Chapters 5 to 7 were undertaken as part of this exploratory study: the visioning meetings, visioning boards, and participatory budgeting initiatives. A condensed report of the findings in each of these cases studies is presented in this chapter. The descriptive analysis of the three cases in this chapter each tells an important story in its own right – but Appendices 1, 2 and 3 provide an expanded level of detail about the form, effect and context of these three cases of engagement initiatives for readers who desire such information for their own decision making purposes.

#### **8.1 The visioning meetings**

##### **8.1.1 Background**

The Kommun has a population of about 20,000 inhabitants and this is expected to grow by 35% in 15 years due to its good transport links and proximity to major Danish cities and to Swedish hubs of industry, commerce and education situated in neighbouring areas. By and large the citizenry is well-educated, articulate, and comfortably off, and there are few pockets of disadvantaged groups.

##### **8.1.2 Community engagement initiative – visioning meetings**

The initiative involved the community in setting up a vision for the municipality as a whole, and for important separate parts of its work. In a two-tier approach, seven focus groups of invited participants were used to generate ideas which were then considered and debated in four open meetings. The engagement activities were largely a response to a perceived lack of identity affecting public officials and the inhabitants in what essentially had become a growing ‘dormitory’ community.

##### **8.1.3 Insights for professional practice**

In this section the key themes from the visioning meetings case study are summarised and aggregated into seven emerging categories in order to provide insights - descriptions and learnings - that inform debate and decision making in professional practice.

## **Central things can be transacted**

The visioning meetings initiative was driven by the belief of the Mayor, CEO and Deputy CEO in the efficacy of community engagement as a way to respond to a citizen-to-government disconnect - through forming and expanding relationships and dialogue in the process of creating a shared identity for the institution and community. The aim was to come up with a clear vision, but it was the participative processes - rather than the contents of vision statement as an artefact - that the proponents believed could reconnect the community to their local government. As it transpired, the quality of public input into the Kommun's high level objectives surpassed expectations and the case indicates that community engagement initiatives can be a device for shaping deep and complex issues – as evidenced by the contribution that citizen participation has made in identifying the values that are central to the functioning of the community and its local government. Where central things like big picture ideas and vision objectives are ably transacted through participation, consideration of the means to those ends can be left to public officials. The vision meetings initiative had an immediate effect on the Kommun's decision making about the objectives and values that should be incorporated into their vision statement. The engagement has also had longer lasting impacts since that articulated vision - heavily influenced by the participation – has provided a guiding light that drives and shapes ongoing decision making about policy and programs to do with services and infrastructure. The case also indicates that the way values are articulated, and the flexibility allowed in their interpretation, can allow 'buy-in' from different political parties and others with diverse perspectives, expectations and experiences.

## **A hook for participants**

The case indicates that engagement is not a natural default setting for stakeholders, and in a context where engagement has not been a norm, it appears important that the engagement initiative has processes and outcomes that provide the 'hook' to capture the interest and participation of citizens. Here there was a need to 'sell' the relevance of citizen participation to people in terms of their lived-lives. In the heavy 'selling' of the idea that a clear and agreed vision has ramifications for the future of the institution and the lives of community members, the Kommun made sure that there was some evidence in practice to support such assertions. There has also been an attempt to demonstrate, through the processes of engagement, that inhabitants' views will be noticed and that these should gain a degree of traction; be the influence modest or significant. So even where no promises of application or effect are made, the case indicates that visible impact of the public's ideas on policy and programs - linking vision words to action – can spur on future public interest. Although wide interest and input can

supply consistent ideas, the case highlights the need for strategies to draw in the reticent spectators.

### **Learning from the past**

The past can be a powerful teacher, and provide sage guidance as to what practices may or may not work and the context in which particular engagement initiatives should operate. Learning and momentum for future engagement activities has been gained from good and bad engagement experiences, and even the proponents - who have been badly bruised in prior participatory activities projects and are operating well out of their comfort zone – have still clearly relished the additional challenges and possibilities of another engagement initiative. The Kommun showed resolve and inner strength in identifying and acknowledging mistakes, learning from them, and making changes to strategies and implementation for engagement - rather than shying away from the political and reputational risk by curtailing future attempts at citizen participation. However, the case indicates that a failed prior engagement activity may mean that a particular group of inhabitants will now lack trust and be cynical about, or opt out of, future engagement initiatives. There is also the indication of lost opportunities when the institution fails to leverage knowledge from less-formal community engagement processes.

### **Linked devices**

The prospects for engagement appear to be enhanced where a municipality is genuinely open to ideas and perspectives, rather than having a detailed and strongly held proposal at the beginning. The case indicates that there is a risk of alienating participants if they perceive that their kommun already has, prior to any engagement, independently established fairly fully formed plans around the issue under consideration. There appears to be improved prospects for success where any highly developed proposals that are put to the citizens do carry the hallmark of community input having been taken up to some degree along the way. The case study demonstrates that a two stage process can be effective in starting up engagement in a context of low connectivity. Here, ideas elicited from selected people in the first tranche of engagement can fuel interest, content, and validity for a subsequent wider and more open iteration of dialogue. The coupling of the visioning meetings with the networks, organising skills, and reporting devices of a citizens' front office indicates that constructive engagement is aided where an initiative is not treated as unitary stand-alone device, but where its component parts are linked to complementary structures and processes.

## **New internal and external culture**

The traditional cultures that frame the way in which public officials and inhabitants see the world may be reflected in attitudes and behaviours that are at odds with community engagement. The case study emphasises that organisational culture must be compatible with the principles and processes of participation, and there is a danger of initiatives being disbanded or relegated to a token activity if engagement champions leave before the right culture is in place. There is a clear need to make support from senior politicians and civil servants visible from the outset. But getting a unified approach is made more difficult if different influential actors - such as a Mayor and CEO in this case - have different experiences and expectations, and so can view the sophistication and progress of engagement quite differently. A new generation of public officials can be a driving force for engagement. Certainly not all officials can change their competencies and motivation to those required to engage or utilise the information from citizen participation, and so some personnel changes may be necessary. The process of engagement can have a positive effect on public officials' competencies and motivation, but experts - in meeting facilitation for example - need to be brought in to supplement local human resources if necessary. In particular public officials especially need to adjust their modus operandi and listen and learn. From the community side, engagement can shift mindsets and break people's reliance on the Kommun for taking care of most things - but that reliance in turn can impede the willingness of inhabitants to engage.

## **Multiplier effect**

The visioning meetings initiative indicates that a wider pattern of engagement between stakeholders can grow from a particular initiative, and an array of subsequent projects may provide the necessary momentum to expand citizen participation in the work of governments beyond experiments and towards embedded practice. The case indicates that from small things big things grow, and the visioning meetings initiative illustrates that there can be good informational, connectivity and service outcomes in expanding engagement from individual inhabitants to community groups, companies, police and others.

## **An independent pathway to engagement**

The case suggests that while notice may be taken about what the neighbouring kommuns are doing in regards to community engagement initiatives, this may be more about recognising that they are doing 'something' - rather than a desire to replicate that something. Here there appears to have been no particular disincentive for the Kommun to develop engagement process and structures locally and organically, and indeed the momentum from those experiences appears to have driven a quest for more engagement activity in the future.

#### **8.1.4 Informing the research framework**

This section presents a brief summary of how the visioning meetings engagement initiative relates to the ideals from the literature (refer Chapter 2) of good decision making, good government, and good communities. Then Figure 8-1 indicates how thematic content from the case study informs the research framework (refer Figure 3-9).

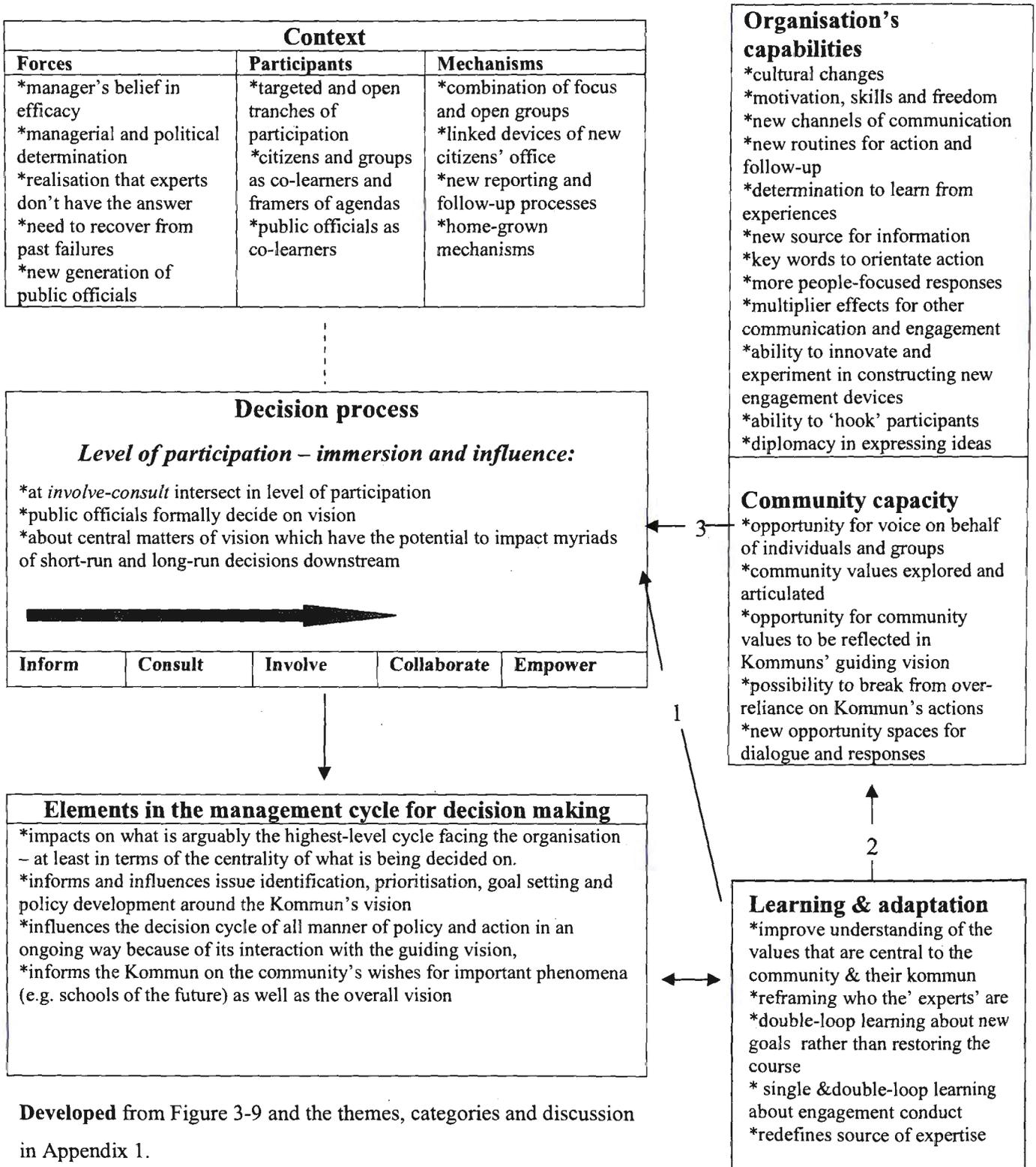
The engagement initiative has influenced short-run and long-run decision making at the Kommun in two major ways - and directly led to better policy and implementation. Firstly, the output of the focus groups and open meetings impacted on the political decision making about what the Kommun's official vision should be - since many ideas from the inhabitants have been incorporated into formal policy documents. Secondly, since the vision statement is being used in a robust manner within the Kommun as a 'guiding light' for determining service and infrastructure policy and implementation responses, the engagement initiative can be seen to have had an on-going and far reaching effect on decision making about the vision and a myriad of other downstream Kommun work.

The engagement initiative is held up as having influenced the knowledge base of politicians and civil servants, had discernable positive personal motivational effects, and given public officials more scope and freedom to use their imagination and competencies. The initiative also reframed attitudes of public officials as to where the expertise lay. Internal capital was enhanced through: cultural changes; the recognition of the benefits of a certain 'diplomacy' within the Kommun; new sources of external information; improved structures and processes for capturing and distributing knowledge within the institution; and superior routines for action and follow up. Such improvements were seen to flow from the visioning initiative and its interaction with the citizen office as a linked device. The ability of the Kommun to 'hook' participants into the engagement initiative, and the visible effect that the citizen participation had on decision making, both strengthened the networks and relationships that external capital is built on - and thus gave the Kommun readier access to that capacity in the community.

The case strongly indicates a general empowerment and advancement of civil society compared to the status quo. There is no exact way to gauge any increase in the community's skills and knowledge, but the visioning meetings initiative provided a major opportunity space for participants to leverage and build on what competencies they had. Through the engagement, the potential for participants to break a mindset of reliance on the Kommun can be viewed as an enhancement of citizen ability. A collaborative community culture appears to have been

strengthened by the open and constructive dialogue, and there is a strong sense that efforts to foster engagement have gone some way towards giving people a common bond as members of a particular community – rather than fundamentally being seen as fellow residents of a dormitory suburb. The opportunity space provided for people to engage together in a cooperative manner in order to find shared meanings appears to be a good counter to Putman's (2000) fear of diminution of social capital through isolation as exemplified in 'bowling alone'.

**Figure 8-1 Research framework - the form and function of the visioning meetings initiative**



Developed from Figure 3-9 and the themes, categories and discussion in Appendix 1.

## **8.2 The visioning boards**

### **8.2.1 Background**

The Kommun has a population of around 40,000 inhabitants with generally high education and income levels. There is good transport to the nearest big city, and this facilitates the daily commute elsewhere for work or study by about a quarter of the population.

### **8.2.2 Community engagement initiative – visioning boards**

The new visioning boards have been created to cover education, culture and recreation, building society, security, care for the elderly and social welfare. Whereas in the past individual boards overseeing such areas were pressured for specific action, now the new vision boards can concentrate on questions around needs that are central for the community, feed important ideas and priorities to the assembly (the elected council), and leave the Executive Board of the assembly free to concentrate on the task of leading and coordinating the administration of the municipality's affairs and taking the action required by the vision. So the four visioning boards now handle a raft of important issues that previously had been bypassed - or had swamped the Executive Board.

The creation of the visioning boards is seen as a community engagement initiative with two related dimensions. Firstly, the initiative provides a systemic change to political and administrative structures and processes - which then acts as a platform for citizen participation activities. Secondly, the systemic change to decision-making processes in turn allows any new knowledge from the related engagement projects to be more purposefully and powerfully used. As it transpires, the shape and form of the engagement projects that are to be run on top of the platform created by the visioning boards is in a state of flux and a case of work-in-progress.

In this section the key themes from the visioning boards case study are summarised and aggregated into five emerging categories in order to provide insights - descriptions and learnings - that inform debate and decision making in professional practice.

### **A new way of structuring politics**

There are contexts where the point of departure for new levels of community engagement needs to be an overhaul of the system for political decision making and subsequent management action, rather than an immediate foray into applying engagement mechanisms. The case depicts a belief by the Mayor and senior politicians from the ruling party in the efficacy of a combined assault on a citizen-to-kommun disconnect and an inefficient political system. Here the

Kommun has aimed for a systemic change to political and administrative frameworks as an antecedent to, and vehicle of, citizen participation. The case points to the need to consider major systemic reforms prior to examining the costs and benefits of particular citizen participation activities, and in essence warns against practitioners readily building participatory activities around old political structures – hence an odyssey by public officials to search far and wide for new structures rather than focus on alternative engagement mechanisms. While the engagement initiatives will form part of the substructure of the systemic reform, in this instance their selection has been held in abeyance until the shape of the new system has been crystallised and embedded. And so a principle of community engagement can be agreed upon and announced, and then that part of the organisation responsible can be left to find its own way of achieving it. The political leaders see a potential for participatory activities to contribute to a more inclusive governance system and reverse a souring of trust and a citizen disconnect - more so than expecting better plans and action via engagement than could have been designed by public officials alone. The case also highlights the need and possibility for community engagement to help alter citizen mindsets tuned into a welfare state mentality.

### **Looking forward and back at a higher level**

Discussing important central issues for the future in the light of past performance, provides a useful focus for harnessing the potential of participation by citizens and companies to inform the work of government. For this kommun, tackling the ‘real’ political issues means that engagement initiatives aim at central things like vision - rather than just dealing with practical matters closer to people’s lived lives. The case demonstrates a necessity in political and administrative management to also look back while charting a forward course, and indicates that citizen participation can inform both aspects. Letting people steer at meetings allows fresh ideas and practical solutions to emerge. And the case demonstrates that high profile media sources like films, or controversies, can be used to present challenges to the community and kommun and fuel debate about big central issues like climate change. How questions are framed, and the amount and understandability of background information provided, are key determinants of success in participatory activities.

There is a concern that if visioning boards focus too much on activities - the means rather than the ends - then this would compromise the likelihood of the engagement challenging and refreshing conventional overriding objectives. But a related and yet unresolved issue is that without balancing consideration of ends with sufficient attention to the means, the ends that are chosen may be compromised or unrealistic through a failure to factor in the practicalities of real-life activity. The case also indicates that information value from participatory activities is

lost by a failure to have obvious and influential recipients, and it should not be assumed that the public officials who logically should be interested in the outputs of engagement will seek the findings out. There is also a perception that much valuable information falls into the proverbial black hole because of the sheer quantity, and an inability to distil and communicate the essential, rather than peripheral, matters.

### **Ghosts of the past**

The ghosts of past engagement experiences provide salutary lessons to discipline, or direct, future strategies and the levels of public impact. The case depicts engagement as a risky business given experiences with excessive voice accruing to narrow self-interests, and better as well as worse decisions eventuating – and so there is a need for a kommun to present deaf ears to closed minds or self-interest. But a decline in public trust resulting from prior failed engagement activities can be a motivating force, rather than merely a hindrance, to new engagement activities. The case notes that few in the community recognise the hardships for politicians inherent in having to make tough choices, and points to a need to blend community engagement with strong political agendas and will - especially in light of civil servants lacking skills or attitudes compatible with participation.

### **Reporting as a hook**

Innovative reporting by the Kommun about past and future performance can be coupled with strong critical and incisive reporting by the press to improve levels of interest and concern about the work of government and political life and provide drawcards for inhabitants to take up participatory activities.

### **Dialogue for democracy**

It is possible that community engagement may be looked at to provide a reasonable contribution to higher level ideas, and yet the main game the proponents have in mind is not an ideas machine but a device to build on people's connection and satisfaction with democratic processes. Consequently citizen-to-government trust and a feeling by people that it is 'their kommun' may emerge. The proponents in the case perceive that democracy and trust are well served through community engagement because regardless of which way the Kommun's decision goes, most inhabitants are seen as likely to be satisfied if they are met by public officials and have an opportunity to be heard. The case provides an argument that ad-hoc contact and discussion does not constitute 'real dialogue', and the latter can be facilitated by systematic engagement initiatives and proactive politicians. There is also a contentious and

unresolved question of whether a politician should act in engagement activities as a representative of the kommun, or their political party.

### **8.2.3 Informing the research framework**

This section presents a brief summary of how the visioning boards engagement initiative relates to the ideals from the literature (refer Chapter 2) of: good decision making, good government, and good communities. Then Figure 8-2 indicates how thematic content from the case study informs the research framework (refer Figure 3-9).

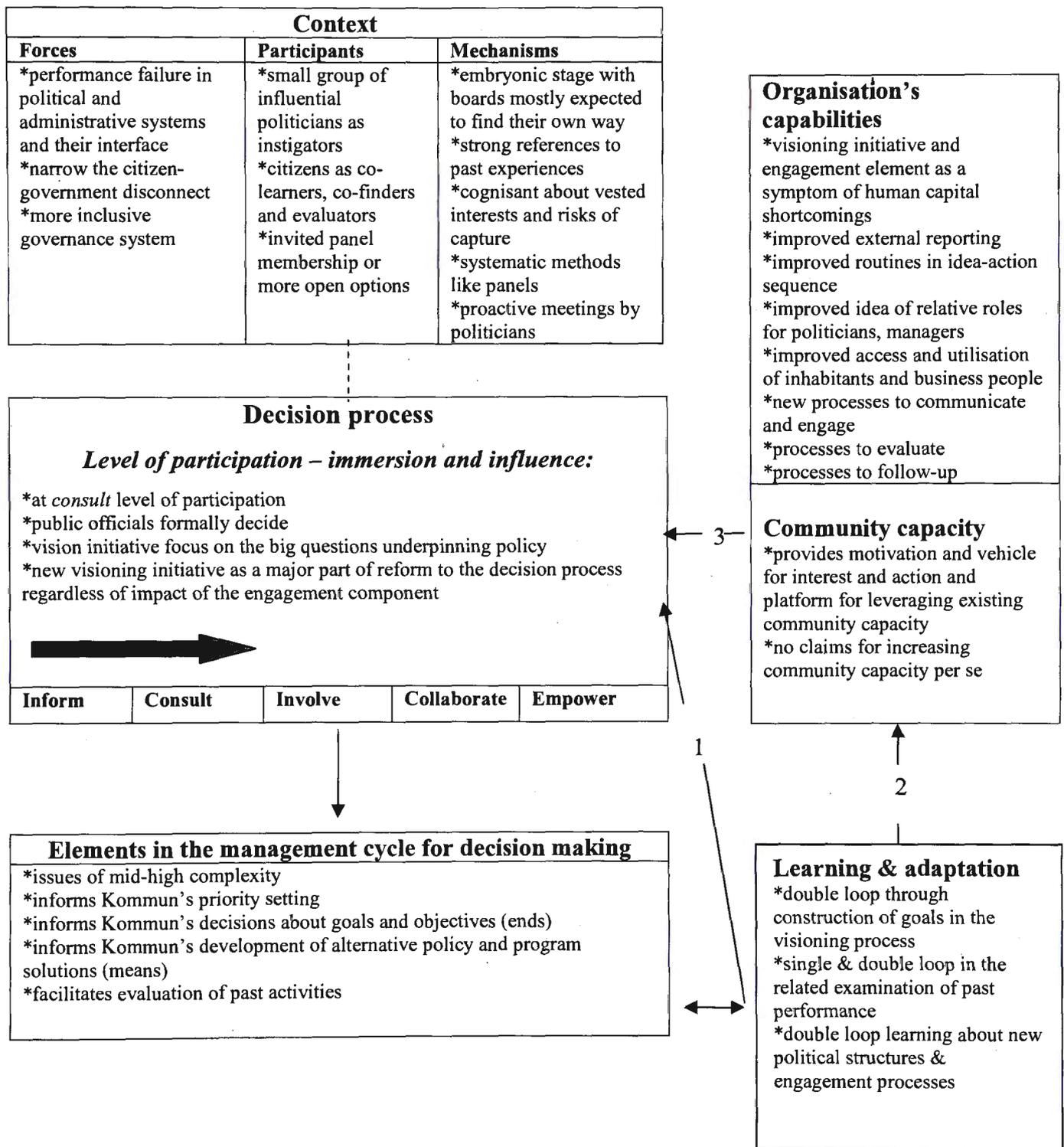
The vision board initiative is part of a wider concern to make changes to streamline and improve decision making through increased clarity and effectiveness of internal political and administrative tasks, roles and processes. While subsequent citizen participation is expected to contribute to better decision making on the substantive issues that are tackled in a vision – and include evaluations of past performance along with the capture of dispersed stakeholder knowledge - the expectation for engagement is about providing additive rather than transformative inputs into decision making – especially since the choices are to rest entirely with politicians.

The vision boards initiative is part of a bigger plan to improve internal capital - organisational culture, structures, routines and processes - through enhanced political decision-making processes and a clearer interface with civil servants' responsibilities. In creating new opportunity spaces for citizen participation, the Kommun appears alive to the dangers of capture by vested interests or in dealing with people with a narrow view or understanding. The need for the vision boards and associated community engagement can also be viewed as a response to shortcomings in the capacities within the human capital that is tied up with politicians (such as failure to communicate with and adequately represent the citizens) and administrators (for example deficits in follow-ups and evaluation). However the reluctance of the public officials to consider any more than a *consult* (IAP2 2004) level of participation risks embedding a rather technocratic approach (United Nations 2004).

The community has already shown itself to be articulate, forceful and resourceful in recent forays into community engagement; groups with common interests have demonstrated an ability to work in a concerted fashion. There is a hope that more engagement experiments will, over time, lure a wider cross-section of the community to improve the group ability through a more united approach to issues. And there is also a desire for future engagement projects to shape a

more 'collaborative community culture' through open dialogue and trusting relationships between the municipality and citizens.

**Figure 8-2 Research framework - the form and function of the visioning boards initiative**



Developed from Figure 3-9 and the themes, categories and discussion in Appendix 2.

## **8.3 Participatory budgeting**

### **8.3.1 Background**

With close to 100,000 inhabitants, the Kommun is a large municipality at the fringe of a greater metropolitan area. The population is characterised as relatively young and multicultural; around one in five inhabitants are born outside Sweden. There are neighbourhood areas with relative disadvantage in terms of employment levels, wealth and education. The ideal of citizen participation, co-operation, and open dialogue between politicians, employees and inhabitants features heavily in the Kommun's published vision and other literature.

### **8.3.2 Community engagement initiative – participatory budgeting**

The Kommun's 'participatory budgeting' program was the first in Sweden, and brought local communities into the decision-making process around formal resource allocation plans - and so enabled citizens to have a direct say in service and infrastructure expenditure. The participatory budget for infrastructure is the first and only such initiative to be operationalised by the Kommun, and involved: citizens suggesting and prioritising alternative sets of ends and means; formal alternative proposals that reflect these priorities being drawn up by consultants under the direction of public officials; and then citizens voting in a referendum to choose one of the sanctioned plans. The initiative was targeted at a disadvantaged area with high levels of population churn.

In this section the key themes from the participatory budgeting case study are summarised and aggregated into four emerging categories in order to provide insights - descriptions and learnings - that inform debate and decision making in professional practice.

#### **Political desirers and receivers**

The participatory budgeting initiative has been deployed as: a remedy for a citizen-to-government disconnect; a corrective to the fact that disadvantaged citizens lack voice and make relatively less demands; and a device to shore-up election support. The outcomes point to the potential for a community engagement initiative to remediate the lack of a strong identification that inhabitants have with each other, their area, and their kommun as an institution. Above all, the case emphasises that sustainability of substantial and systematic community engagement initiatives relies on the desire of politicians to have citizen participation fitted into the political structure, and for politicians to become active commissioners and receivers of the fruits of

engagement. Here politicians did typically show up during engagement initiatives, but their contributions were more a matter of doing one's duty rather than taking up opportunities for new ways to think and act. The difficulty is that politicians and political majorities come and go, and this churn presents problems for engagement initiatives if party policies are not orientated towards citizen participation or if an organisational culture does not exist to influence new players towards it - and so political ownership of citizen participation may be spurned by new incumbents who see the engagement initiative as inappropriate or an artefact of the previous political majority. Without natural commissioners and receivers for the engagement outputs in the political ranks, there is little pressure on civil servants to be involved in engagement process or fully utilise its informational outputs – and so what may look like a robust and successful community engagement initiative from the outside may be hollow without the reality of such influential commissioners and receivers. While citizens supplied the basic ideas for setting the participatory budget, the use of consultants to shape the alternatives for voting, and the control of public officials in development of the final options, allowed an orientation towards acceptable efficiency rather than the maximisation of economic efficiency – and this can decrease risks for the desirers and receivers.

### **Management pitfalls**

Participatory action does not imply that there really is a culture or tradition of engagement, or indicate its sustainability – especially where individual perceptions of public officials and the overall organisational culture are not predisposed to a meaningful or sustainable change to decision making processes that would fit with citizen participation. A lack of political will, an incompatible organisational culture, busy agendas and full in-trays all conspire towards a low commitment by senior civil servants to engagement. Poor management commitment to the principles and practice of community engagement can derail attempts to commence substantial engagement initiatives and also hinders the viability of good outcomes from citizen participation. In the absence of influential political and administrative champions, if middle level managers become the driving force for community engagement, then initiatives are in danger of becoming internally unloved, underutilised and possibly unsustainable. In the participatory budgeting initiative low commitment had been reflected in the culture and tradition of administrative work in the Kommun, but was masked by action instigated by a limited coterie of facilitating managers. It may be possible for a particular engagement initiative to survive briefly amongst hostile and incompatible political and managerial frameworks with the aid of a few 'true believers' as facilitators, but it is unlikely to be sustainable. The case study indicates that support and resources required for participative budgeting are readily killed off where the engagement collides with separate parallel processes of managerial and political deals – and it

is easier to get ahead with new 'pots' of money rather than fighting over the usual pool. In particular the budgeting initiative highlights the importance of lessening the time from final choice to action, in order to make the impact of engagement recognisable and provide an incentive for citizens to participate in the future.

### **Experience and education**

A foundation of experience ameliorates the risks in designing and implementing more complex or substantial engagement initiatives like participatory budgeting. The participatory budgeting activities demonstrate that new initiatives can be aided by close and heavy adaptation of systems already developed and trialled in prior participation projects, and in particular the 'future workshops' engagement initiative acted as the springboard and template for many of the participatory budgeting structures and processes. Thus, community engagement can be enhanced if initiatives first tackle practical, less complicated matters, and are then ramped up to a higher realm of questions in the nearer or longer term once citizens have the taste and experience of participation and dialogue. It even takes time and practice for politicians and managers to become skilled in actually listening - and so be able to learn from what is said. In essence the case study emphasises that competencies and experience for the 'next step' in engagement is supported by organic development, since prior projects provided a platform and competencies for the development of the new operational structures and processes for citizen participation. The case also shows the value in engaging with citizens about 'how to engage' - as this informs the kommun about practical matters that can increase interest and the rates of participation.

There is a danger in proponents of engagement making it hard for hesitant public officials to say no. Such 'over selling' can lead to a passivity that provides a false sense of support and security - given the recipient's underlying beliefs and values. The case also indicates that getting sufficient community trust and interest in citizen participation to form a direct connection between citizens and their government is an iterative process that may take years of engagement - and not just single or sporadic initiatives. Certainly, there is a need to educate the public about what community engagement is about, and what is really being offered to them in terms of their level of influence. In the participatory budgeting initiative this message was made clear: easy, informal and influential non-binding decision making along with co-operation and co-determination, rather than empowerment, is the objective and politicians must retain ultimate responsibility for decision making. The case indicates utility in a differentiated educational campaign for internal stakeholders - concentrating on issues of 'democracy' with politicians and talking 'service delivery' to civil servants. But there is also a warning that substantial activity to

educate public officials on citizen engagement may fall on barren ground in the absence of an incompatible culture and a lack of support from senior ranks – and in turn that education activity may fail to permeate the culture. In addition, the case indicates that momentum can be gained through peer networks and may improve internal acceptance and practice.

### **Public contribution**

In an initiative mainly designed as a connective device, rather high but unexpected levels of useful information can be generated for policy and program decision making – creating dual outcomes of learning about engagement processes and informing work designs. A strong concern raised in the case is that if participatory activities do not attract and substantially involve a cross section of society, then community engagement can amplify any imbalance of power and influence currently operating in the community. To avoid an imbalance, participation in the budgeting initiative was expanded by publicity and personal contact aimed at meeting people on their ‘own ground’. To maximise inclusion, it also helps to conduct participatory sessions so that inhabitants can choose to take a creative role or just be interested observers and commentators. It is important to infuse the engagement activity with understandable and digestible information as well as providing people with sufficient time – more than was allowed in the participatory budgeting process – for discussion and reflection. In addition, putting sufficient money at stake and making the issues for engagement broad signifies a seriousness that attracts public interest. The initiative indicates that the disadvantaged do not demand engagement – and the local government has to work resolutely to bring participatory activities to them.

### **8.3.3 Informing the research framework**

This section presents a brief summary of how the participatory budgeting initiative relates to the ideals from the literature (refer Chapter 2) of better decision making, better government, better communities – as well as honouring democratic ideals. Then Figure 8-3 indicates how thematic content from the case study informs the research framework (refer Figure 3-9).

In the single but significant instance of participatory budgeting in one neighbourhood area, citizens were able to identify issues and opportunities and come up with alternative proposals around a particular budgetary sum and broad object of spending. Participants were also able to debate and shortlist the proposals by a rather informal vote taken in the meetings. Then detailed alternative solutions built by consultants and public officials around these citizen choices were referred back to public meetings for comment before a final formal vote was taken by a ballot. What is especially significant is that the participatory budgeting processes tapped dispersed

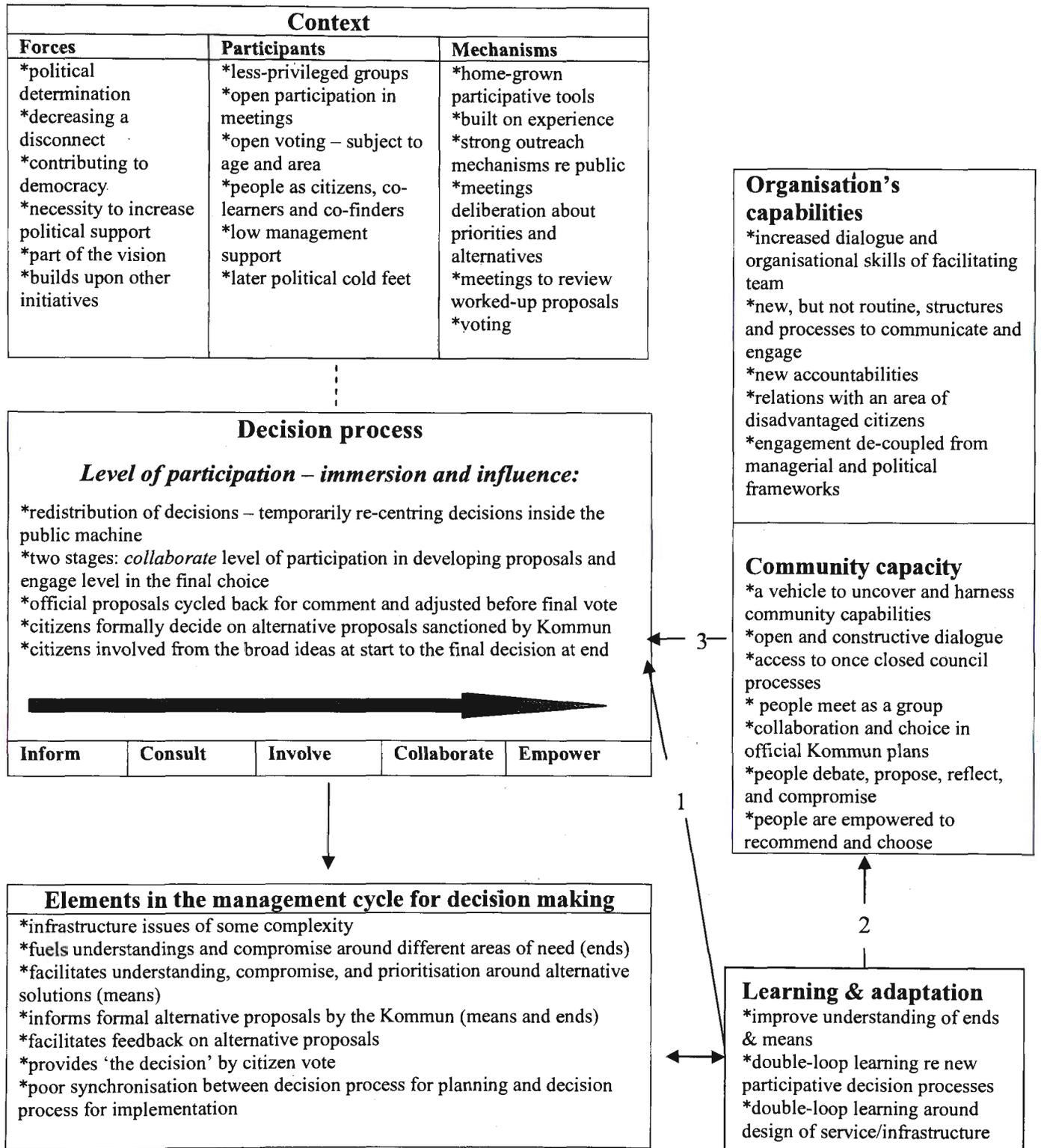
knowledge and identified issues and solutions by connecting with inhabitants who were unlikely to have communicated their ideas and preferences by alternative means – given the transitory nature of the population and their relative disinclination to engage with their municipality. However observations that the budgeting initiative has served functions related to ‘better decision making’ must be balanced against the reality that almost everyone has taken a ‘deep breath’ - as neither the politicians from the new majority, nor influential civil servants, nor the inhabitants involved, subsequently pushed for more such participatory engagement.

While the engagement exercise both used and strengthened the skills and knowledge of the facilitating team, there is no particular evidence of significantly altered competencies or motivation amongst politicians and other civil servants - despite themes indicating the existence of structured and determined education campaigns. As for internal capital, while public meetings have impacted on the formal knowledge resources of the Kommun through the ideas embedded in the original priority proposals and the formal solution options, neither the culture within the institution nor regular processes appears to have been transformed in any ongoing sense; certainly participative budgeting and associated activities have not become organisational routines. However transitory or long lasting, external capital expanded through the municipality’s substantial contact with a section of the community that was typically isolated from its local government. There are questions about the longevity of citizen participation at the Kommun since the ideal and processes of community engagement appears to be ‘decoupled’ (March & Olsen 1989) from the political framework of the new administration and the managerial frameworks past and present.

The participatory budget initiative has undoubtedly uncovered and tapped citizen ability. The competencies and motivation that form existing levels of citizen ability proved sufficient for a considerable number of citizens to participate and to make a contribution to the work of government. There are no direct indications that this community engagement increased these stocks of human capital in the community, but from philosophical and practical standpoints it can be argued that unleashing citizen ability represents advancement in community capacity, compared to a situation where that ability was largely dormant and neither mined nor exploited. Certainly, participants at the participatory budgeting meetings were able to critically learn and reflect as a group, and act in a concerted fashion through the discussion and prioritisation of their proposals. The theme in the case that ‘the disadvantaged don’t demand engagement’, combined with a lack of pressure from the community for a follow-up engagement initiative,

indicate that gaining public trust and response is an iterative process that may take many years of engagement.

**Figure 8-3 Research framework - form and function of the participatory budgeting initiative**



Developed from Figure 3-9 and the themes, categories and discussion in Appendix 3.

## 8.4 Conclusion

Each of the three cases provides a range of insights for professional practice, and each comes from an organic process of development in a different experiential and contextual base. The visioning boards initiative was at an embryonic stage, and the actual engagement activities to fit with the rather radical political and administrative restructuring had yet to be settled upon. In contrast, the participative budgeting initiative was a product of a kommun once steeped in engagement rhetoric and activities, but now marching to the drum of a different political majority. The visioning meetings initiative came out of a kommun that was relatively inexperienced in community engagement, and yet met expectations of it as a connectivity device and surpassed any imaginings of it as an idea generation 'machine'.

The next chapter draws together the implications for practice that arise out of this study. In doing so, it provides an integrative discussion based on the findings in the six cases presented in Chapters 5 to 8 and offers a model for managing community engagement initiatives.

## Chapter 9

### Implications for practice

#### 9.1 Introduction

As a DBA dissertation, the main purpose of this research has been to conduct a study of community engagement which can inform professional practice. The study aimed to explore the emergent topic of community engagement initiatives in local government in order to increase the body of knowledge about the *form* of participatory activities (the means) and the *function* that they play (the ends). In order to achieve this aim, three broad research questions (refer section 1.4) were developed to explore: the attributes that constitute *form* and *function*; the form and function of engagement initiatives by local governments; and the development of a model to inform practice.

This chapter provides insights to inform thinking, debate and action around citizen participation in the work of local governments. The chapter brings together findings from the individual case studies in an integrative discussion, and applies the key learnings in the formulation of a model to guide practice in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of community engagement initiatives. The following discussion and the emergent model add to the holistic information yielded by a reading of each individual case study chapter, and provide insights and reference points for thinking and creation in an important and developing area of practice. The originating descriptive analysis for each initiative discussed in this chapter is identified in Table 9-1.

**Table 9-1 Initiatives and originating chapters**

Reference	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7	Chapter 8 & Appendix 1	Chapter 8 & Appendix 2	Chapter 8 & Appendix 3
Initiative	Citizen panels	Radslags	Walks and talks	Visioning meetings	Visioning boards	Participatory budgeting

The notion of *implications for practice* begs the question as to who the practitioners are and to what use they may put the learnings from this study. The case studies identified a myriad of public officials who may seek ideas or evidence to inform their practice. Politicians and civil servants may:

- be in the business of championing and driving the introduction of engagement initiatives, vetting proposals, or holding them off;
- act as instigators and recipients of the information provided by community engagement, or normally ignore or side-step what is found;
- become involved in the development and implementation of the structures and processes that operationalise citizen participation, or take a neutral or resistive stance; and/or
- perform or use evaluations of participatory activities.

Each individual public official could find a way to use the learnings in a way that suits their agenda and role, and informs their professional practice. The cases studies depict others who are integral to community engagement – such as individual citizens, ad-hoc groups, more formal associations, and other stakeholders such as police and suppliers of ‘joined-up’ services - and these could apply the learnings from this study to their own thinking and conduct.

## 9.2 Conceptualising and articulating form and function – RQ1

Community engagement is a large concept that needs to be taken to lower levels of abstraction in order to facilitate exploration and understanding. Thus research question one (refer RQ1; section 1.4) asked: in what ways can notions of ‘form’ and ‘function’ be conceptualised and articulated in order to inform debate, research and practice in community engagement? The response in this study was the construction of a research framework from the literature (refer Figure 3-9) which: recast *form* into contextual considerations of the *forces*, *participants* and *mechanisms* at play; and depicted *function* in terms of *decision making*, an *organisation’s capabilities*; *community capacity*, and the related *learning and adaptation*.

The research framework has implications for practice in that it provides a structured way for politicians, civil servants and other stakeholders to think about attributes that constitute the ends and means of a community engagement initiative. In particular, the research framework provides ways of interrogating the possibilities highlighted in the literature for ends of better decision making, better government, and better community.

As the discussion in the following section on research question two attests, while in general the research framework proved a useful device for capturing significant aspects of the form and function of engagement initiatives, as currently structured it does not readily capture important aspects of practice that were revealed in the research. For example, the three factors that constitute the *form* dimension of the framework appeared to capture the contextual

considerations well, but in particular the *participants* element would prove of greater use to practice when combined with a more comprehensive taxonomy of roles for all participants – public officials, community members and other stakeholders - than was derived from the literature.

With some adjustments, the framework would better assist practitioners in separating out important elements that depict alternatives in the *function* of engagement initiatives. By and large the framework proved useful in interrogating *decision making* dimensions. However, while the representation of the decision process through the IAP2 (2004) participation spectrum captures short term levels of influence well, further development is required in order to have a framework that can separate and articulate both short and longer run impacts on the decision making. The inclusion of the management cycle and its sequence from problem identification to program evaluation proved a useful tool in capturing where an engagement initiative had effect. The use of intellectual capital theory in the research framework provided an adequate taxonomy for capturing attributes of sustainable government that were brought up in the descriptive analysis. But future research could benefit from the development and application of a conceptual model with more detailed intellectual capital elements - particularly in the area of the nature of external relationships (see for example Allee 2000). The study of community capacity and cohesion could be advanced in future research by the construction of a conceptual model that is at a lower level of abstraction than the three element taxonomy derived from (Cuthill & Fien 2005).

The research framework developed in this study assists practice by bringing important aspects of community engagement initiatives into relief, but there are opportunities for further research in developing a more detailed and sophisticated tool for interrogating and capturing the form of citizen participation and the functional implications for the decision making process, sustainable government and a strong community.

### **9.3 Interrogating form and function in practice - RQ2**

Given that community engagement is an emerging field of practice, the lack of empirical evidence about the nature and effect of participatory activities gave rise to research question two (refer RQ2; section 1.4) which asked: what is the form and function of particular community engagement initiatives in practice, and how do these activities inform and transform local government and local governance? In response, in-depth interviews were conducted with senior public officials to gain their perceptions about the context, nature and effect of a participatory initiative, and a descriptive analysis of these case studies was presented in Chapters 5 to 8 (and

Appendices 5 to 7). Each of the individual case studies provided findings that culminated in a summary of salient points being overlaid on a diagram of the research framework. In the following two sections, implications for practice are further discussed through an overview of key findings from the individual cases about form and function. This discussion is necessary in order to:

- highlight attributes of the engagement initiatives studied that provide insights for practice; and
- capture aspects of the engagement initiatives studied which inform the development of the management model posed in research question three.

### **9.3.1 The form of a community engagement initiative**

Observations about the *forces*, *participants* and *mechanisms* of the community engagement initiatives provide the following insights for practice.

#### **Forces**

Each case study explored the forces for community engagement. The literature suggested a range of potential forces to do with external stakeholders, the local government, and the context (refer Figure 2-3). Insights from across the case studies to do with the forces driving engagement initiatives are summarised in Table 9-2 and further discussed.

Elevated citizen knowledge and demands were not identified as being at the heart of the engagement initiatives, although citizens were generally described as adept at being vocal if their interests were threatened. Rather, reflecting findings in the Power Inquiry (2006), the participatory budgeting and radslag cases indicated a lack of demands and voice by disadvantaged citizens that was a concern to the public officials, and this provided an impetus for those kommuns to seek more engagement with inhabitants. The idea of a less (not more) demanding community may be usefully added to the list of forces for engagement in Figure 2-3.

**Table 9-2 Key learnings about forces for engagement**

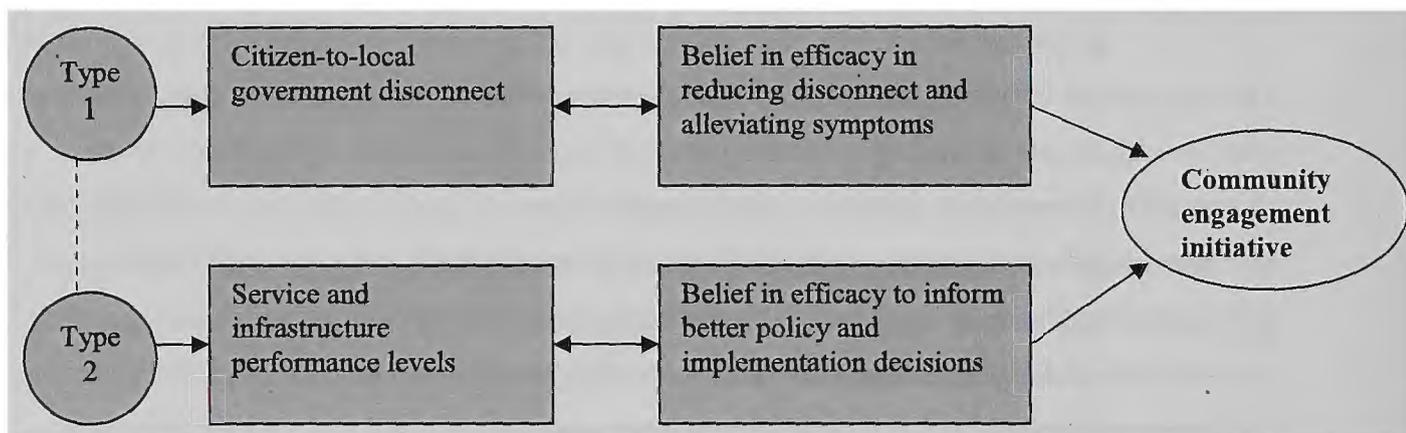
Attribute	Commentary
Driven at senior levels	Public officials at the top who are inexperienced at engagement
On behalf of disempowered	A concern for the disempowered, rather than demanding citizens, as drivers of engagement
Champions and receivers	Danger of ‘solutions looking for problems’ without the right champions and receivers
Disconnect outweighs delivery	Predominantly about breaking a citizen-government disconnect - not better services
Organic development	Finding their own way - organic development and growth rather than mimicry or imposition
Proactive responses	Getting proactive responses to a changing economic, social, and political context – and technology as a force
ICTs and youth	ICTs not typically a driver of engagement but a potential seen for technology to enable engagement with youth

**Developed** from the case study data

The engagement initiatives studied were overwhelmingly driven by very senior public officials who were quite new to the field of citizen participation, and only in the radslag case was the charge led by experienced veterans in citizen participation. Only in the participatory budgeting case were middle level managers the driving force for engagement initiatives - and these proved to be bold and substantial experiments but internally unloved, underutilised and possibly unsustainable. Practitioners need to be alive to the dangers of a vacuum if politicians and senior civil servants drop off from being active instigators, and this vacuum is filled with initiatives driven by a few managers who valorise the concept of citizen participation. Initiatives that are driven by keen managers who have carriage of community engagement practice in the kommun, run the risk of ending up as Cohen’s (1972, p. 1) notion of solutions looking for problems. In the participatory budgeting case, a shift in political power and orientation meant that there were no longer natural ‘receivers’ for the engagement outputs in the political ranks, and there was no pressure on civil servants from their political masters to be involved in the engagement process or to use its connective and informational outputs. The study highlights the hazard where civil servants are not immersed in a real culture of engagement and either do not believe in the concept, or feel burdened with other priorities.

In each case public officials had staked considerable financial and reputational capital on a belief in the efficacy of community engagement to provide necessary improvements in the connection between people and government and/or policy, and in program performance. The two main strands of necessity and efficacy discerned in the cases examined are represented as Type 1 and Type 2 forces in Figure 9-1. The visioning meetings initiative exemplifies a Type 1 scenario in which the necessity was to respond to a citizen-to-government disconnect, and there was a belief in the efficacy of engagement to do so through forming and expanding relationships and dialogue in order to create a shared identity for the institution and community. The citizen panel initiative exemplifies a Type 2 situation where necessity focuses on service and infrastructure performance, and there is a belief in the efficacy of citizen participation to inform better decisions about policy and programs. The rationale of the proponents in the citizen panel case was entirely Type 2, but all other cases melded different concentrations of Types 1 and 2 – as represented by the dotted lines. For example, in the visioning meetings initiative, a quest for new good ideas to improve services was a subsidiary driver to notions of better connectivity.

**Figure 9-1 Strands in rationales of necessity and efficacy**



**Developed** from the case study data

The balance of front end rationales of necessity and efficacy that are captured in Figure 9-1 may not eventuate in practice as planned. For example, the visioning meetings and participatory budgeting initiatives were rationalised mainly as Type 1 situations by their proponents, but in practice provided much more than expected in the way of Type 2 outcomes due to the rather high but unexpected levels of useful information generated for policy and program decision making.

Except for the ‘walks’ part of the walk and talks initiative which was an in-house inspiration, the case studies indicate that ideas about community engagement initiatives have travelled

(Czarniawska 1996). But the initiatives by and large appear to have travelled as a broad concept and not a detailed recipe - and each was translated where it landed by adaptation to meet local needs, objectives and context. Certainly each case presents a story of a kommun 'learning by doing' and transcending, rather than re-transmitting, its influences. A reluctance to appropriate detailed recipes for engagement initiatives from neighbouring kommuns and notions of 'organic growth', 'experimenting' and 'finding our own way' resonated so consistently and strongly that readers may wonder about a metaphorical 'reinventing the wheel' and associated aspects of efficiency, effectiveness and risk. Taken together, the concentration is on the immediate efficacy of the new structures and practices to provide particular fixes required by each kommun, and there is no evidence of external pressures and norms of apt or legitimate behaviour as forces for community engagement (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977). Only the proponents in the visioning boards appeared to have embarked on an odyssey to study 'good practice', and that was more a search about major systemic reforms rather than a quest to examine citizen participation activities. Given the newness of the practice field and the gaps in empirical research as emphasised by Wang (2001) and others, it is perhaps unsurprising if kommuns have had to look to their own devices and have not been pressured into mimicry - due to a lack of well publicised and acknowledged good practice models.

### **Mechanisms**

The cases provide a number of important considerations for practice regarding the development and application of mechanisms, and key insights that emerged are summarised in Table 9-3 and further discussed.

The engagement initiatives all employ different, but essentially home-grown, mechanisms. The participatory budgeting and radslag initiatives exemplify the value of participative tools being built on experience, since prior projects provided a platform and competencies for the development of the new operational structures and processes that form the mechanisms. The existence of a track record in participatory activities can also elicit 'buy-in' from internal and external stakeholders.

**Table 9-3 Key learnings about the mechanisms for engagement**

Attribute	Commentary
Home grown	Mechanisms fully home-grown or built around a general notion
Experience as teacher	Leveraging and building upon past experience
Experience as persuader	Track record can get 'buy-in'
Baby steps	Expand or improve via 'baby steps' in mechanism development
Linked mechanisms	The whole can be greater than the sum of the parts where mechanisms are linked together
Routinisation	Routinisation can cause disinterest or overload
Designing out capture	Avoiding capture by vested interests through informing widely on people's home ground and meeting in the right way
Risk and complexity	Matching mechanisms to taxonomies of complexity, risk and levels of involvement in light of motivation, resources and skills

**Developed** from the case study data

The cases demonstrate the potential to institute mechanisms that are not fully-formed and the utility of letting stakeholders find their way through practice and experimentation. The panel initiative indicated that the newness to a government of participatory mechanisms, and a desire to hone them for the local context, can require that engagement activities be implemented without being fully formed - and then adaptations, extensions and improvements can be instituted in incremental 'baby-steps' throughout the lifecycle. The visioning boards case suggests that a principle of community engagement can be agreed upon and announced for a section or area, and then that part of the organisation can be left to find its own way in the choice and deployment of mechanisms.

The walks and talks and visioning meetings indicate the utility in having complementary engagement mechanisms, such as front offices, interlinked with the processes and structures of a major engagement initiative. For example, linkages between the walks and talks and the front office provided access to staff with a customer focused culture, lists of participants and topics, and good systems to support action, reporting and evaluation.

The mechanisms for the radslags and citizen panels had become organisational routines that were ignited with some regularity. In the walks and talks initiative, the talks became a regular occurrence whereas the walks were used for special purpose situations. The radslags case

highlights the issue of routinisation of the structures and processes for engagement possibly leading to an overload or desensitisation that deflates internal and external interest and fatigues commitment and participation.

While a number of interviewees warned that one must be alive to the danger of capture by narrow or vested interests when designing and applying mechanisms – reflecting a concern in the literature (Roberts 2004; Vigoda 2002) - there is no evidence that this had actually occurred in the initiatives studied. Tools can be included in mechanisms to maximise the prospects of reasonable levels and cross-sections of participation. For example the radslag case utilised technology for internet contacts and innovative representations of balloons and cakes; while the walks and talks and participatory budgeting initiatives attempted to publicise their engagement opportunities by meeting people ‘where they live’.

In the main, the mechanisms identified in the cases matched to the level of public impact as advocated in Figure 2-7 - which was derived from taxonomies in the literature. The exception was the participative budgeting initiative, which was not included in mechanisms linked in the literature to the *empower*-level of engagement. Robinson’s (2002) public participation matrix (Figure 2-8), which positions mechanisms against a display of participation levels relative to impact risk and information complexity, is intuitively appealing, and actually appeared to largely accord with practice uncovered in the study. However, the difficulty with this model is the open-ended nature of the concept of high and low levels of risk, and the fact that the model mentions social and environmental factors and does not reference political and economic risk. At the least, the Robinson model is useful in debating the notions of risk and complexity and highlighting questions as to whether the kommun has the motivation, resources and skills to provide a commensurate mechanism. Walters’ purposes-issues matrix (Table 2-2) only fitted sporadically with the case descriptions, and that model’s matching of mechanisms with the nature of issues appears more compartmentalised and artificial than the case descriptions and themes suggest of the practice.

## **Participants**

The cases reveal a range of opportunities and roles for participants, but these were rarely articulated in a clear and explicit manner by the interviewees. Key insights concerning participants that emerged in the study are summarised in Table 9-4 and further discussed.

**Table 9-4 Key learnings about the participants in engagement**

Attribute	Commentary
Recipes for inclusion	Different catchments provide different sorts of impetus
Users versus citizens	The distinction between a user and a citizen role
Needing a thirst	Political champions and public officials as commissioners and receivers
Political party dogma	The role and influence of political parties can cause tensions
Explicit roles	Make roles more explicit through a clear and graduated taxonomy

**Developed** from the case study data

The cases demonstrate a number of approaches to participant catchments including: targeted participants in the first tranche of visioning meeting activities, bounded eligibility for voting in the radslags, and the untargeted and open invitation to join the citizen panel. The visioning meetings case suggests that in contexts of low citizen connectivity with local government, commencing with an invited and select cohort can provide the momentum to carry the engagement forward to a point where an opportunity space can be provided for more open entrance.

The cases demonstrate possibilities to incorporate different roles for citizens that fit along the users-to-citizen continuum, with ‘users and choosers’ of services at one end and ‘makers and shapers’ of services at the other (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001). The citizen panel sought participation in a ‘clean citizenship’ guise in which inhabitants expressed their own ideas on areas of interest, and this approach exemplifies a clear and consistent ‘makers and shapers’ role. However, the case studies demonstrate that approaches can vary back and forth along the users-to-citizen continuum in a planned or rather unexpected manner. For example, the walks and talks project initially started out with a service ‘users and choosers’ orientation, but this expanded into the realms of a citizen perspective when people on walkabouts started to hear each others problems and priorities, and began to compromise their own wants as a consequence. The possibilities for multiple alternative roles for inhabitants from the outset are indicated by the radslags, which have afforded inhabitants alternate roles that range from being a local user who merely ticks a box on a ballot paper, to being a co-learner and co-finder who joins in on the debate with community members and public officials. And the way the participatory budgeting sessions were conducted has allowed participants to take a more creative role or just be interested observers and commentators. Robert’s (2004) idea of people as co-learners and co-finders of issues and solutions is evident in all of the cases, and the vision

meetings and radslag initiatives provided opportunities for citizens and groups to contribute as framers of agendas and visions (Epstein et al. 2005). Although cases like the radslags and citizen panels brought more transparency and related forms of horizontal accountability, there was no sense that participants operated like ‘watchdogs’ (Box 1998). And the walks and talks initiative reflected a determination to deflect citizens from acting as ‘free riders’ (Box 1998).

The cases highlight the importance of adding the notions of ‘commissioner’ and information ‘recipient’ to existing taxonomies for the roles of public officials in community engagement – and in distinguishing between where civil servants and politicians stand in this regard. The participatory budgeting initiative encountered some difficulty, due to disinterest or full in-trays and diaries, in getting civil servants to play an active role unless the engagement initiative came under the protectorate and patronage of influential politicians acting as champions of community engagement. In the visioning meetings case the rather blunt message was that a considerable number of staff were simply not equipped or prepared to work effectively in close unison with citizens, and these were perceived as needing to be replaced by civil servants who could. Most cases saw a facilitation role for civil servants, but the vision meetings case emphasised that in practice the necessary competencies cannot be assumed and external consultants may be needed to supply the skills and spread the workload.

The nature of the Swedish system has local government politicians walking in the shadow of their political party and its policies, and the cases indicated that politicians were not necessarily playing a role in community engagement on their own terms. The radslag case indicated that tensions could arise where the voice of the people differed from existing policy, and then it can be up to politicians to represent and discuss those views and challenge their party to consider whether or not the political body had divined their policy for the common good in the right way. A major, interesting and unresolved consideration broached in the visioning boards case is the matter of whether politicians should act in engagement activities as a representative of the kommun, or their political party.

The roles for citizens and other stakeholders in the preceding discussion have been induced from the case descriptions rather than resulting from a clear taxonomy-like description by the interviewees. There is little evidence that the interviewees in general held clear taxonomies of roles in mind beyond a general distinction between users and citizens, and there is not much of a sense that nuances in possible roles were clearly delineated or able to be articulated or communicated. In practice it may become problematic to set the right structures and processes

for participation if the intricacies of roles are not clearly understood, agreed, mapped out, and tracked. Enhanced clarity in conceptualisations of alternative roles for inhabitants, politicians, civil servants and other stakeholders could also assist practitioners in considering ways of building in options for people to take less and more demanding roles in particular participatory activities. And so the development, dissemination and application of a more explicit and descriptive role taxonomy than appears thus far in the literature could assist in this regard. Such a taxonomy could be grounded on an amalgamation of the literature discussed in section 2.8 and the descriptive analysis in further empirical studies.

### **9.3.2 The function of a community engagement initiative**

The ultimate test of ‘success’ for any management reform is to degree to which the desired ends are able to be met. This study purposefully sought out examples of success by selecting cases with a reputation for ‘good practice’. As it happens, from the subsequent case description and analysis it would appear that not all initiatives turned out to be unqualified successes when viewed against notions of better decisions, better government and better community. Shortfalls in performance success may indicate that those who referred the researcher to cases of good practice may have based their recommendations more on reputation than reality. But it could also be argued that in such a nascent field, good practice and a degree of success can also be about a willingness to move from the status quo and experiment with substantial or significant engagement projects that are rolled out in ‘baby steps’ or in a grander manner – and this may been the perspective of the referrers.

The following observations about functions to do with *decision making*; an *organisation’s capabilities*; *community capacity*; and the related *learning and adaptation* provide insights for practice.

#### **The decision-making process**

Each case study chapter has provided a descriptive analysis of the interaction between an engagement initiative and decision making processes by focusing on the participation levels - from *inform* to *empower* - and the implicated elements in the management cycle. Key insights concerning the nexus between initiatives and decision-making processes are summarised in Table 9-5 and further discussed.

**Table 9-5 Key learnings about contributions to the decision making process**

Attribute	Commentary
Influence is non-linear	Limitations in applying a linear model of participatory levels since higher level involvement cannot assume lower level influence
'Solution' as an answer	Different conceptualisations of a 'solution' changes what the IAP2 model signals the level of involvement to be
Short and long term effects	Thinking about short or long term influences through 'knock on' effects
Complexity can be tackled	Engagement can handle simple to complex and central questions
Heading-off problems	Potential for early identification and actioning of problems and compromise
New ways of thinking	Breaking autopoeitic tendencies through fresh ideas and perspectives
Acceptability is better	Pinning down what makes for 'better' decision making

**Developed** from the case study data

Generally the IAP2 (2004) spectrum has provided a good vehicle for articulating the level of participation currently in play. But as noted in Figure 6-1, the linear depiction of the graduations in impact level presented by the IAP2 (2004) spectrum does not fit simply with the radslag case because empowerment through the voting was not married to participation in the construction of alternatives. So in practice, consideration needs to be given to whether the spectrum is to be satisfied at each and every level right up to the maximum involvement targeted, or whether discrete incidents of involvement are required.

Different conceptions of what a 'solution' is can alter placement along the involvement level spectrum (IAP2 2004). With the walks and talks initiative, a literal reading of the descriptions given for each level in the IAP2 spectrum indicates that the *involve* stage is reached (refer Figure 7-1). But as noted in Chapter 7, Simons' (1977, p. 43) concept of wheels within wheels sees the notion of 'solution' to be not just about a literal answer to fix a policy or project problem, but solving any sort of question – for example the question of which problem or sub-problem is to be highlighted and prioritised. Taking this less literal approach, the level of engagement in the walks and talks initiative is elevated from *involve* to *collaborate* because of the participant's involvement with problem identification and priority setting. So practitioners need to be clear as to whether they are thinking or communicating about a 'solution' as a

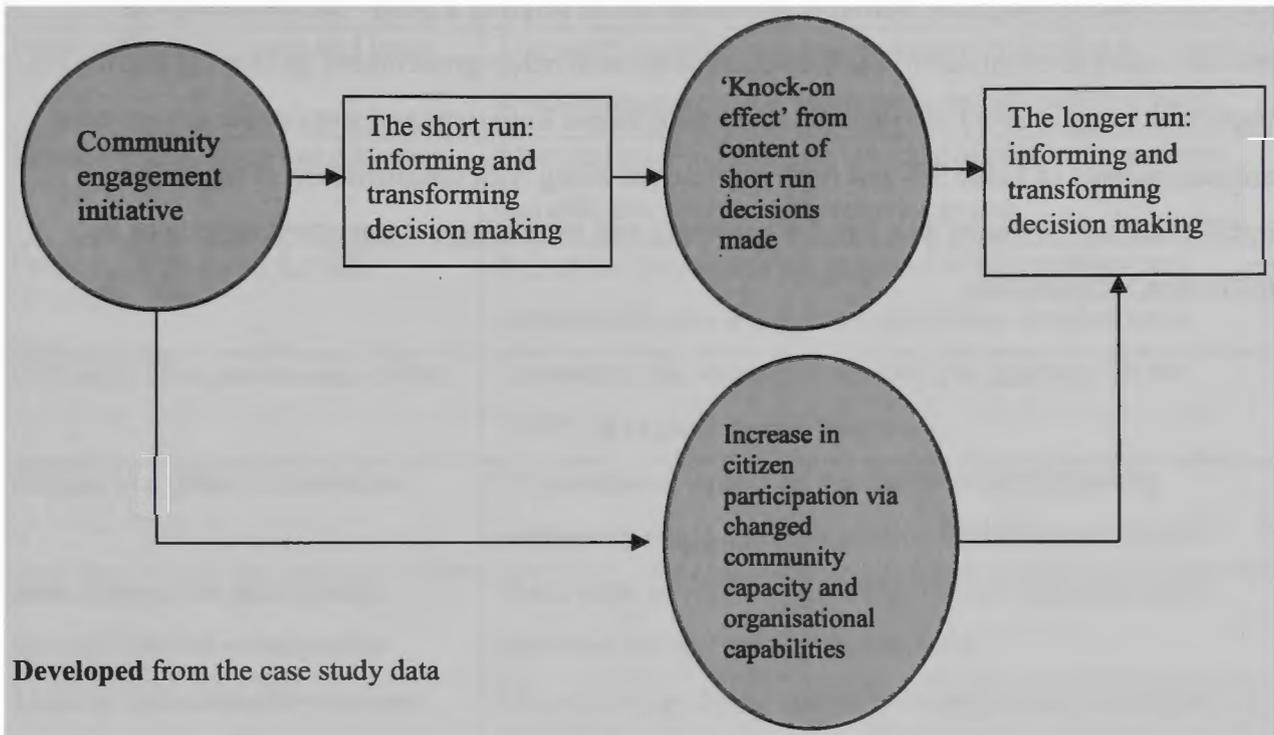
‘problem fix’, or are instead focusing on solving questions around ‘what sub-problems and priorities’.

While the IAP2 (2004) spectrum and the management cycle components of the research framework provide an obvious platform to investigate the current short-term implications for decision making from a community engagement initiative, the findings suggest that important longer term influences need to be considered and captured. The bottom flow in Figure 9-2 represents the finding from the case studies, such as the radslags initiative, that current community engagement initiatives can be expected to have longer run impacts on decision making - since advances in community capacity and government capability produce people, processes and systems that alter the shape of decision making into the future. The top flow in Figure 9-2 acknowledges the finding from the case studies, exemplified in the visioning meetings and the citizen panel initiatives, of a ‘knock-on effect’ of current engagement initiatives. Here current decisions which are influenced by citizen participation live on to shape future downstream decisions on policy and programs - for example where the vision constructed in the short run provides a guiding light for choices made by public officials in the longer term. So practice needs to consider the possibility or desirability of ‘knock-on’ and capacity effects giving engagement initiatives a longer run influence on decision making. While the IAP2 framework and the management cycle components of the research framework provided a good lens to explore shorter-run implications, the study indicates a need to consider and map longer-term effects separately and differently.

The visioning meetings and citizen panel cases illustrate the ability for citizen participation to be used to tackle complex central questions from the outset. The radslag, walks and talks, and participatory budgeting cases exemplify the potential for a community engagement initiative to first tackle practical, less complicated matters, and then be ramped up to a higher realm of questions in the near or longer term once citizens have the taste and experience of participation and dialogue. Each case indicated a different emphasis on the contribution that citizen participation can make to questions in the management cycle about problems, priorities, ends and means. For example the walkabouts targeted problems and priorities; the citizen panel tackled ends and means; and the visioning meetings concentrated on determining ends and left consideration of the means to public officials. Getting or giving clarity about the relative concentration on means and ends is not always easy or obvious. For instance, whereas one radslag looked on the surface to be a choice about means (different building size

configurations), the choice really hung on how inhabitants read and rated the differing ends of each configuration (objectives of visual amenity compared to service delivery ends).

**Figure 9-2 Dual influences on the decision making process**



The walks and talks initiative exemplifies the possibility for engagement to allow for early identification and actioning of problems as highlighted by Klijn (2000), and so decrease remedial costs, hostility and aggravation - and increase the potential for compromise.

The citizen panel and the walks and talks initiatives are examples of where the citizen participation in decision making process was predicated on getting better informed decisions for policy and programs. These cases exemplify a conscious move to break away from any autopoietic tendencies (Luhmann 2005). In the walks and talks case in particular, decision making for the kommun changed as pressure was placed on the community to compromise and decide upon what issues they wanted the kommun to make choices about – and so in a sense that engagement derailed autopoietic tendencies both within the government and within the community and provided new shared understandings that led to more equitable solutions.

The radslag case was conceived as a community capacity building exercise, with no particular expectation that anything but a good decision would emerge since the alternatives were already constructed by the kommun and ‘acceptable’. However it may still be argued that a better decision resulted from the radslag, if ‘better’ is defined as what the majority of inhabitants

prefer, or if the expected better informing of future decision making transpires as expected by way of increased community capacity through current exposure to participatory activities.

### **The government**

With the exception of the notion of maintaining political stability - which was only indicated in the participatory budgeting initiative in relation to the reign of a party - the case chapters provide multiple examples of each function to do with better government as listed in Figure 2-4. Important insights about the interaction of engagement initiatives and sustainable government are summarised in Table 9-6 and further discussed along with consideration of the utility of intellectual capital theory as a lens for capturing and separating out important aspects of an institution's capabilities.

**Table 9-6 Key learnings about contributions to good government**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
Uneven skilling up and motivation	Initiatives can develop officials' competencies and motivation, but some remain implacable or indifferent
Public officials to listen and learn	The need for politicians and managers to develop as listeners to allow learning – and this is not a natural state for many
Experiential learning not education	Much experiential learning but little evidence of concerted and effective internal education programs
Proponents prepared for risks	Influential proponents are prepared to take political and professional risks and operate out of their comfort zone
Criticality of organisational culture	Embedding the ideals of community engagement in the 'DNA' of organisational culture
Culture as a pillar in transitions	Organisational culture as the central pillar supporting community engagement as public officials come and go
New systems for participation through creation or adaptation	Clean sheet or adaptive strategies for new structures and processes for community engagement
Links to complementary systems	Maximise opportunity spaces for engagement by coupling to complementary systems that 'sell' or operationalise
Common stakeholder expectations	Finding and agreeing upon suitable and agreed reference points and benchmarks to align stakeholder expectations
Service and engagement learning	Learnings for both service delivery and participatory activities
Embed and normalise engagement	Institutionalise community engagement in political and management frameworks to normalise and avoid a 'decouple'
Sequencing system change	Incremental or front-end changes to political and managerial structures and processes as enablers of engagement
Bolstering reputation and legitimacy	About improvement not crisis in trust and confidence
Opportunity spaces and networks	Engagement provides 'opportunity spaces' for creating new networks with marginalised groups and mainstream
Efficiency with engagement	Efficiency objectives resolute in the face of citizen participation
Fit with representative democracy	Engagement as a complement to representative democracy

**Developed** from the case study data

Through changes brought to public officials' competencies, motivation and freedom to act, the vision meetings and walks and talks cases exemplify the ability of community engagement initiatives to impact on each dimension of human capital. The radslags provide an example of how different theoretical categories of intellectual capital rub against each other. Here human capital and internal capital meld as the roles and options for politicians and managers changed in obvious ways due to the implementation of the internet chats and other opportunity spaces for meetings and dialogue. However positive changes in human capital were not universal and consistent across all public officials, as exemplified by the indication in a number of cases that some individual politicians were unwilling and unlikely to alter their traditional ways. The visioning meetings, visioning boards, and participatory budgeting cases also noted civil servants whose human capital appears implacable in the face of citizen participation projects. And the participatory budgeting case exemplified a contribution by politicians that seems more a matter of doing one's duty than of taking up opportunities for new ways to think and act. So the official role that a kommun perceives for its public officials in engagement initiatives can collide with the realities of an individual's motivation and skills, and it would be wise for governments to carefully assess its civil servants and politicians for implacability or indifference.

Additionally, the citizen panel, visioning meetings and participatory budgeting initiatives indicate that shifts are both necessary and do-able in one of the most basic elements of human capital – the skill of politicians and managers to actually listen and so be able to learn.

The cases do not appear to indicate robust approaches to the challenges of improving the capabilities, confidence and motivation of public officials (DSE 2005b; Thomas 1995). The internal education campaign in the participatory budgeting case and the training in the walks and talks initiative provide the only examples in the study of formal teaching and learning to expand internal stakeholders' human capital in relation to participatory activities. The participatory budgeting initiative had the most prominent and sophisticated instance of training and development for public officials and the facilitators had also embarked on education programs for the public - but efforts with politicians and civil servants appeared to fall largely on barren ground. Generally, any expansion of people's existing knowledge and skills was left to Mayo's (2008) notion of experiential learning. While the hiring of external facilitators for the vision meetings initiative indicated an alternative measure to address gaps in existing human capital, such interventions do not necessarily remedy the previously discussed issues of incompatible organisational culture and the lack of 'receivers'. Therefore the study indicates

that professional practice should consider options and opportunities for education and its potential to shape organisational culture.

The interviewees were all either the proponents of, or fierce supporters for, the engagement initiatives. Some, such as the Mayor in the visioning meetings initiative and the Mayor in the visioning boards case, had been badly bruised in prior projects, appeared to be operating well out of their comfort zone, but clearly relished the additional challenges and possibilities of the engagement initiative they described. These examples run contrary to Berry's (1993) notion of a reluctance for politicians to risk their political capital in creating new structures or processes for citizen participation in the light of practical failures in prior implementations. In contrast to the preceding examples, the senior politician in the walks and talks case, the Deputy Mayor and CEO in the radslag initiative, and the development manager in the participatory budgeting project, all appeared as comfortable in a participatory environment as with traditional political control and management-centric decision making.

The study emphasises the notion that a key factor in sustainable community engagement is the existence of a complementary culture that immerses and influences politicians (Bäck 2004) and civil servants (Cuthill & Fien 2005). The kommun in the radslag case was the only one that could come close to claiming that the ideal of a participative citizenry was reflected in its organisational culture prior to the development of the engagement initiative studied. The other municipalities had used engagement here and there to different extents and for particular purposes, but engagement had not been a fundamental part of the 'DNA' of their culture or operations. The municipality in the participatory budgeting case appeared to be the most active of all with prior engagement activities, but the interviewee perceived that the ethos of engagement had failed to permeate the organisational culture in any sustained way - and so the study warns that action in citizen participation does not necessarily equate to a culture for community engagement. The cases indicate that engagement initiatives alone are not necessarily able to generate the conditions and momentum to cause a shift in organisational culture, and the walks and talks, visioning meetings, and visioning boards cases illustrate an apparently successful two-stage approach to better orientate organisational culture prior to the introduction of a new major engagement initiative. In these cases things like prior engagement initiatives, new organisational structures and systems, training, staff changes, and visible senior support were used to shift organisational culture to a 'tipping point'. And then the subsequent engagement initiative would provide the momentum to tilt the organisation's values and psyche in the direction of citizen-centric organisational culture and a matching *esprit de corps*. But the

participatory budgeting case serves as a warning that a lack of political support can render an existing organisational culture intractable to change, and so deflate the potential in current projects and damage possibilities for future engagement. In that case, even with a raft of prior engagement experiments and a determined educational program, the individual perceptions of public officials and the overall organisational culture were not predisposed to a meaningful or sustainable change that would embrace citizen participation.

The participatory budgeting case has illustrated the fact that politicians come and go, and this churn means problems for engagement initiatives if a lack of a strong organisational culture orientated towards citizen participation does not exist to influence new players who arrive in the 'changing of the guard'. The visioning meetings case has highlighted the open question about what happens if dynamic champions of community engagement leave, and yet the context is one where a participative culture is only partially formed and no-one has an officially designated duty for the carriage and advancement of community engagement. Thus, the study highlights a need for governments seeking community engagement to manage organisational culture so that it may appropriately influence and inculcate new public officials who might come from contexts with embedded 'managerialist' and 'consumerist cultures' (McAteer & Orr 2006, p. 137).

The citizen panel, walks and talks and visioning meetings cases illustrate how internal capital can also be advanced by new systems for communicating with inhabitants, new processes to report findings, track action, and evaluate performance. The study indicates that structures and processes for the new engagement initiatives may be acquired in different ways, for example: through a 'clean sheet of paper' approach that develops entirely new ways of doing things (for example, the citizen panel initiative); via a close and heavy adaptation of systems already developed and trialled in prior participation projects (for example, the participatory budgeting case); or by following the precept that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts and so join up a new initiative with other projects (for example, front offices in the visioning meetings and walks and talks initiatives).

Each case indicates the creation of a different intangible asset in the 'opportunity space' (Raco & Henderson 2005) developed for engagement. That space may be used quite routinely (for example, the radslags and citizen panel initiatives); be applied irregularly on a needs basis (for example, the walkabouts); or have an uncertain future (for example, the participatory budgeting project). The opportunity space for an engagement initiative can be visualised as incorporating, or being coupled with, a diverse range of other structures and processes within an organisation's

internal capital. For example: a coupling with systems that ‘sell’ the engagement idea to the public and ‘hook’ their participation (such as the innovative displays in the radslags case); or connecting to other engagement initiatives (like the front desk office in the vision meetings case).

The study indicates that stakeholders in the opportunity spaces for engagement may have varying expectations and experiences, and come to different conclusions, because they each hold alternative reference points. For example, while the CEO in the vision meetings case considered their structures and processes to be a nice leap forward but rather episodic and amateurish nonetheless; the Mayor was quite taken aback by that description and disagreed that it represented a rather crude and clumsy start. In such a new field of endeavour and activity there appears to be a necessity, but a potential difficulty, in stakeholders finding, agreeing upon and communicating suitable reference points and milestones to inform planning, implementation or evaluation. The SALAR pilot project noted in the participatory budgeting case has a number of local governments experimenting and learning together, and this sort of approach can provide shared information about perspectives and performance that standardise reference points and offer benchmarks.

A municipality’s policy, plans and service designs form a key a part of its internal capital, and all of the cases indicate the ability for community engagement initiatives to have an impact on the shape of these important attributes – albeit to different degrees. As illustrated in the participatory budgeting and vision meetings cases, the community engagement initiatives studied also provided additional learnings that increased the municipality’s ability to experiment with, and construct, new systems and opportunity spaces for citizen participation in the work of government. Therefore a community engagement initiative can provide learnings for service delivery matters, and learnings for the future roll-out and exploitation of citizen participation activities. The radslags case emphasises learnings from the use of innovative information campaigns and illustrates the potential for using a repertoire of ICTs structures and systems for the informing, debating and voting phases of engagement. However, many interviewees noted that none of their experiments with different forms of community engagement had yet revealed the formula for creating appropriate opportunity spaces for young people – and ICTs are the great hope for the future here.

Practitioners should be alive to, and remedy, a situation where the ideal and processes of community engagement remain ‘decoupled’ (March & Olsen 1989) from the current political

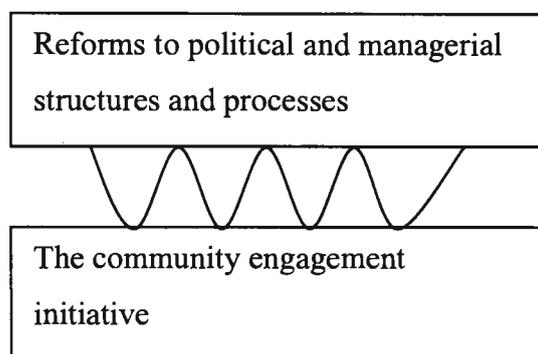
and administrative frameworks. For example, the participatory budget case indicates that while it may be possible for a particular engagement initiative to survive briefly in a hostile or indifferent political and managerial environment, it is likely to be short-lived when its attempts at participation collide with the reality of choices made during parallel processes in different rooms. Hammarlund (2004) notes that reforms like citizen participation can be compromised where they are built around old political structures - and the structural changes implemented in the visioning boards case, and those clearly needed in the participatory budgeting case, strongly suggest that any model developed to help guide considerations of the form and function of community engagement initiatives should pay close attention to the political and administrative frameworks as antecedents to, and not just consequences of, citizen participation activities. Therefore practice requires careful consideration of whether, or how, engagement practice needs to be institutionalised through being brought firmly into compatible or revised political and administrative frameworks.

Two different approaches are discernible in attempts to have compatibility between internal political and administrative frameworks and the engagement initiatives (refer Figure 9-3). An *incremental synchronous* approach of 'adjust the frameworks as you go' was typical of the cases examined in this study. Here, the desire for citizen participation leads to reforms in existing political and managerial structures and processes – but these changes to frameworks occur incrementally as the engagement initiative develops in nature and form. The point of departure in these cases was a desire for more engagement and the benefits it was perceived to bring in improving 'local living' – whether that was to do with better services or reconnecting society and its institutions. And so changes to political and managerial frameworks were generated in an incremental way in the slipstream of the desire to develop and implement community engagement initiatives to facilitate citizen participation. For example, as the citizen panel, walks and talks, and visioning meetings experiments continued, this brought new reporting and response systems and a revised locus of knowledge that added fabric to a new governance approach. Using Miller and Rose's (2008) concepts of governing, in the cases exhibiting an *incremental synchronous* approach the engagement initiative can be seen as the 'rationality' and 'program', and the structures and processes of the political and managerial frameworks were key 'technologies' to render these operable. Only the visioning boards case fell substantially within the alternative *front-end* approach – major adjustments in frameworks 'before you go'. Here the desire for a major overhaul of governance frameworks led to new types of structure and process reforms that in turn required the securing of new methods for citizen participation. With this boards initiative, systemic reforms – not just minor adjustments – to political and

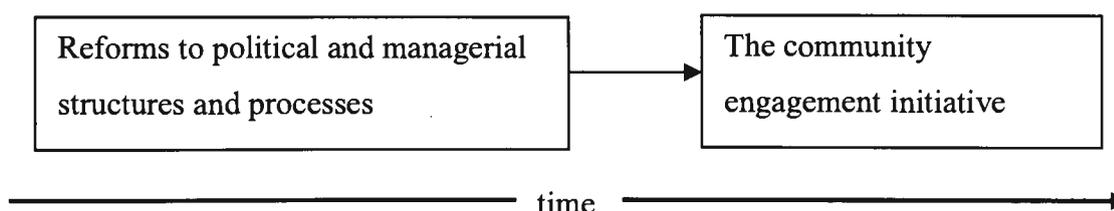
managerial frameworks were the ‘rationality’ and ‘program’, and community engagement initiatives were an important ‘technology’ to achieve that. Clarity about what is the ‘program’ and what is the ‘technology’ would help professional practice sort out the forces at play and inform the prioritisation and sequencing of attempts to reform structures and processes and efforts to apply community engagement. Such clarity is important in order to avoid or avert the situation illustrated in the participatory budgeting case where the political and managerial frameworks had started to become substantially decoupled from community engagement initiatives.

**Figure 9-3 Sequencing the engagement initiative with structure and process reform**

The *incremental synchronous* approach – ‘adjust as you go’



The *front-end* approach – ‘adjust before you go’



**Developed** from the case study data

There is a potential for engagement initiatives to be used as proactive rather than reactive response to a changing context, and therefore act as devices for finding and tackling problems before they become too big or too heated. For example, the walks and talks initiative was a proactive response to a growing population of inhabitants and an undiminished expectation by existing citizens that the kommun would look after most things – all of which meant that resources would not be enough to cover needs and expectations. The walks and talks engagement was useful in identifying issues early, shifting expectations and prioritising action to tackle problems before they escalated.

The social context was a major force with the visioning meetings initiatives, as the combination of an influx of new inhabitants and a 'dormitory suburb' scenario had led to a perceived disconnect and identity crisis. Thus the urgency for a local government to institute community engagement initiatives alters as the social fabric changes – and the question of appropriate initiatives is not uniform or static for local governments.

Only in the radslag case did the technology appear to be a major force for the application of the engagement initiative, and the cost-effective success of on-line discussion presents a powerful insight for practice and concurs with Ranerup's (2000) strategies of increasing discussion and interaction through improving public access to technology and opening up discussions that seriously involve local politicians.

Each case noted the changing political context of small and decreasing political memberships, and this provided an impetus for engagement since politicians recognised the need to remedy the diminution in their direct links and exposure to public opinion. As noted in the radslag case, information from the participatory activities also allowed individual politicians to confront their party and its policies with evidence of strongly held alternative views from society.

A decline in trust was apparent as a precursor to the visioning boards initiative but elsewhere, where trust featured; it was more about enhancing trust than reacting to a failure. The trust and confidence of the citizenry is a key intangible asset for a government and frames its reputation and legitimacy. A need for a revitalisation of trust through the transparency and information provided by citizen participation is a strong theme that resonates from world leaders, government agencies, and academic commentators (see for example Department of Communities 2005a; Gastil 2000; Obama 2009). Words like trust, confidence, reputation and legitimacy were rarely mentioned by interviewees, but different levels of desire to increase these states was induced as an ambition from the interviewees' descriptions in each case. For example the citizen panel case appeared to have little to do with trust and reputation since the kommun has those assets in abundance already, yet the initiative provided a declaration of openness and a new form of horizontal accountability. And, for instance, the visioning boards case appears to partially be a reaction to a widespread souring of trust within that community, whereas the visioning meetings and radslag cases were partly reactions to a lack of trust from particular groups within the community. There were glimpses of the practical implications of increased trust through engagement - such as the new sense of welcome and belonging felt by some

marginalised citizens in their day-to-day interactions with government services and facilities as noted in the radslag case.

The visioning meetings case exemplifies a situation where a new generation of public officials can be a driving force for engagement, but in the main the engagement initiatives in the cases were driven by an earlier generation.

All cases indicate that external capital expands through the opportunity spaces, processes and networks provided by the engagement initiatives, and the linkages and relationships provide access to the community's knowledge resources. The participatory budgeting, walks and talks and radslag cases stress a new connection with marginalised groups in addition to the mainstream. The walks and talks and vision meetings cases indicate that engagement initiatives can provide concrete information about practical needs and priorities that can be used to feed and grow relationships and networks with other agencies, and so facilitate the working of 'joined-up' interests (Kathi & Cooper 2005).

While a visual interpretation of the attributes of local governing presented in Figure 2-2 suggests that moving towards a community governance model requires some diminution in focus on economic efficiency, none of the cases intimated any less concentration on that traditional motif for public sector performance. In the radslag case for instance, economically rational and feasible options were proposed through the usual technocratic means, and so the layer of pluralistic processes and the acknowledgement of the rationality residing in the public domain came as an addition to the status quo efficiency settings, and not a substitution. The participatory budgeting case saw control by public officials over the content of official proposals as providing some insurance on matters of acceptable efficiency, without doggedly trying to maximise economic efficiency. In the walks and talks case, the perception is that the engagement provided better economic efficiency through the identification, understanding and targeting of priority problems, the increased ability of inhabitants to compromise, and the reality check that citizens received about what is do-able by their government. And in the citizen panel case, while there were modest additional costs in running the actual initiatives, there was no evidence about any additional economic costs as a result of the citizens' 'fresh ideas' about policy and programs than would otherwise have been incurred. The actual costs of running the engagement initiatives had not been prohibitive in any of the initiatives, and the interviewees in the radslag case indicated that: unit costs decrease as experience grows and new processes and structures became bedded down; and some reasonable compromises could make a similar

technology-based system viable for lesser-resourced municipalities. So the study indicates that the focus on overall economic efficiency remains steadfast, and rather than compromising efficiency, moving into the realms of local democracy informs the municipality about where the activity and spending will be more effective according to citizen needs and priorities. The notion that participative decision making and efficiency may not mix (Walters, Aydelotte & Miller 2000) is not borne out in the study, and it would be surprising if any of the interviewees would disagree with the notion, to use Susskind and Elliot's (1983) view, that community engagement is not *cost-less*, but it is worth the *price*.

Nylen (2003) argues that citizen participation in government decision-making processes can be complementary to, and enrich, representative democracy – and the cases have indicated ‘pragmatic ways’ – to use Montin's expression (2007, p. 4) - in which this happened. One such obvious interaction between engagement and participatory democracy is the increased election voting rate that was attributed by the interviewees in the radslag case to the effect of the participatory experiences. Another positive interaction is evidenced in the walks and talks case where there were hopes that migrants might find the incentive to become politicians. And in the radslag initiative, political party allegiances were challenged in the process and the exposure of community needs could rejuvenate party thinking and policy positions.

### **The community**

All of the cases studied evoked a story of local governments constructing *opportunity spaces* that give the community new voice, and each initiative demonstrates different ways, and degrees, to which local governments have sought to uncover, harness or develop community capacity; each illustrates different aftermaths. Key insights concerning the interaction of community engagement initiatives and community capacity are summarised in Table 9-7 and further discussed.

The case studies evoke a spectrum of ends (objectives) that run from good ideas to strengthening community capacity. The citizen panel exemplifies one extreme of the spectrum - with the determination to harness fresh ideas from an interested and well-educated citizenry without any perceived need to also enhance the already substantial levels of community capacity and cohesion. Illustrating the other side of the spectrum, the radslags' social interactivity and immersion in decision processes aimed to shift community capacity and cohesion to a zone which can translate into inhabitants being more ready and able to effectively participate in the work of, and democratic choices about, their local government.

**Table 9-7 Key learnings about contributions to good community**

Attribute	Commentary
Community ideas or strength	Objectives range from harnessing fresh ideas from citizens to strengthening community capacity
OK to be clear or 'sketchy'	Less settled desires around community strengthening as a positive trait if a kommun is learning and adapting rather than floundering
Dreaming large	Altering the interest and ability of citizens to think about larger and future orientated questions
Belonging and compromise	Potential in sense of belonging, identity, consensus and compromise
Increasing self reliance	Reducing a 'welfare state' mentality of reliance on governments
Slow build in social capital	Engagement as a long-term iterative process to increase trust and social capital – not a quick remedy via one initiative
Caring for the social fabric	A 'vicious cycle' of damage to the social fabric need not occur when engagement is limited in the level of impact
Openness about the ends	Governments clearly stating intentions about fresh ideas and influence - versus strengthening community capacity

**Developed** from the case study data

The radslag and visioning meetings cases depict a situation where the originators had quite a clear view about what they wanted in terms of community capacity and cohesion building, whereas the walks and talks initiative depicts an instance where objectives about community strengthening appeared relatively less settled. In the walks and talks case, the acknowledged inexperience in the participation field and the lack of a close examination of other governments' engagement initiatives indicated experiments conducted in relative isolation. Some of the uncertainties about desired ends for the community may be reduced in practice through activity in professional networks, or the availability of empirical research, that reveal examples of alternative principles and procedures.

In the radslag case and the walks and talks initiatives, the participatory experiences were perceived to have altered inhabitants' interests and perceptions, and positioned them to think down the track, about larger and future orientated questions.

The radslag initiative provides a poignant, but not to be overstated, example of a positive effect on disadvantaged inhabitants who can now see libraries, community centres and other facilities and resources in a new light as somewhere that they 'belong'. The walks and talks and the radslags initiatives demonstrate new possibilities for an awareness of others' needs and thus consensus and compromise, and indicate the potential for the foundation of new citizen groups and networks and the expansion of relationships between inhabitants, politicians and managers. The vision meetings and participatory budgeting cases demonstrate the potential for a community engagement initiative to remediate the lack of a strong identification that inhabitants may have with each other, their area, and the municipality as an institution. However, the cases in the study widely acknowledge a failure to adequately connect with youth.

The visioning boards, walks and talks, and vision meetings cases all point to the need and possibilities for community engagement to help alter citizen mindsets tuned into both a welfare state mentality, and an overambitious view of what the kommun should do for them.

An undercurrent in the radslag story, and an explicit strand in the participatory budgeting case, is that getting sufficient community trust and interest in participation in order to form a direct connection between citizens and their government is an iterative process that may take years of engagement, and not just single or sporadic initiatives. And this lesson comes from the two kommuns who appear to have been working at the idea of substantial dialogue and citizen participation the longest and have had to deal with the most disadvantaged pockets of the population. In particular, the participatory budgeting case indicates the futility in necessarily expecting short term advances in social capital to accrue from current engagement initiatives.

It was difficult to reconcile any of the cases examined with Hartz-Karp's (2004) notion of a vicious cycle which warns that lower levels of citizen impact can destroy social capital. Indeed, the circumstances in the citizen panel prompted the advancement of the alternative idea of a 'vantage' cycle in which the government retains clear command of decision making without damaging the social fabric.

The good practice criteria of 'integrity' (United Nations 2005) and 'inclusion', 'deliberation', and 'influence' (Carson & Hartz-Karp 2005; United Nations 2005) can be considered for each community engagement initiative. Carson and Hartz-Karp (2005) make the pragmatic observation that sub-optimal practice can still add value because opportunities for active and inclusive dialogue can change people's lives - even if decisions are not so greatly influenced.

Therefore these criteria are useful constructs as they signal ultimate goals yet allow for consideration of incremental progress. The study did not find a lack of integrity from the point of view that citizens got the chance to do what they were offered. However, a major open question is the extent to which integrity can be held in doubt through that which is left unsaid. Except for the citizen panel case, which was clearly all about ideas and service delivery, all other cases had significant objectives of community capacity building - yet there was little indication that the goal of community strengthening was directly communicated to the inhabitants. As far as inclusiveness goes, all cases bar the visioning boards initiative (which is at an embryonic stage) allowed a rather open access for participation in at least a significant section of the engagement initiative - even given some bounding by area, interest or age. For example, while the visioning meetings had an invited element, this was followed by wider participatory opportunities. However, the representative dimension of inclusiveness was neither a goal, nor held out to be achieved, in any of the initiatives – except in the radslag voting component. Deliberation appeared to be strong in a number of cases, but in others the degree of immersion by participants in information less clear. All cases indicated a potential for tangible influence on policy and program choices.

### **Informing and transforming local government and local governance**

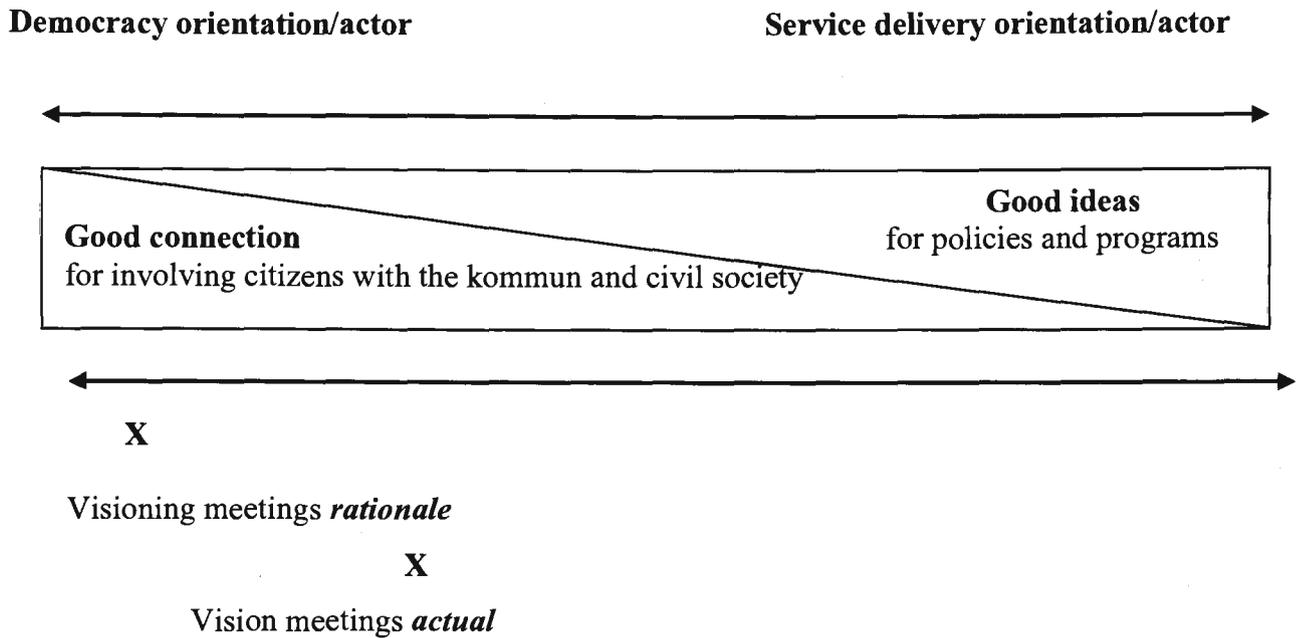
In interrogating the form and function of particular community engagement initiatives in practice, research question two (RQ2: refer section 1.4) considered how these activities ‘inform or transform local government and local governance’. The case study chapters and the preceding discussion of form and function depict instances of governments being better informed about problems and/or solutions through tapping into the community’s resources, and also being transformed as the institution’s human capital, internal capital and external capital evolve through an infusion of knowledge, motivation, new structures and processes and relational networks. Local (or community) governance occurs where arrangements for public decision making embody an authentic role for citizens (Epstein et al. 2005; Stoker 2004). The descriptive analysis of the case studies has shown engagement initiatives to have provided an *opportunity space* where – at least in a layer of a local government’s activities – the public’s role shifts from the ‘users and choosers’ end of a continuum towards a ‘makers and shapers’ orientation. (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001). Each case study in this research has unearthed a community engagement initiative that allowed citizens to authentically contribute, in different degrees, to decision making processes about local government policy and programs. Each initiative has enabled citizenship to be about “governing and being governed” - to use Perczynski’s (1999, p. 5) expression. While the opportunity spaces created by engagement initiatives have enabled episodes of local governance, the transformation from government to governance appears all the

stronger where an engagement initiative also contributes to an increased community capacity that can be leveraged in debate and decision making.

One way of understanding the informing and transforming powers of community engagement on government and governing is to consider how participatory initiatives shape the way a local government acts. In the end no case was all about strengthening society and democracy or entirely about capturing ideas. Each case indicated a mix of government objectives around building connections and getting ideas. Each engagement initiative provided a ‘package deal’ where good performance in one of those things could enhance the other. The notion of a package deal is illustrated in Figure 9-4. Using Langlet’s (2009) metaphors, at one extreme the kommun is a *service delivery actor* and so deploys an engagement initiative as a device for getting good ideas for policies and programs. At the other extreme, the municipality is a *democracy actor* and wields a community engagement initiative as an instrument for getting genuine connections within and between the kommun and civil society, through involving citizens. The package deal concept makes the two ‘actor’ roles and their mixes clear and explicit in a way that can assist an agency’s practitioners in clarifying and communicating the orientation to be taken with a particular engagement initiative. This package deal representation expresses the dichotomy in a simpler and clearer way than was articulated in any single case interview, and yet captures the two fundamental orientations found in the study. In this representation, *democracy* is taken to be a broad concept about relationships between people and government (see for example Held 2006).

The bulk of the cases studied revealed a divergence between intentions and what actually occurred in the democracy and service actor mix, and this is evidenced in the ‘visioning meetings’ illustration provided below the mix continuum in Figure 9-4. Here, the position of the ‘X’ above the ‘vision meetings *rationale*’ label denotes, on an imprecise scale, the idea that this initiative was to be very much focused on the ‘good connection’ end of the continuum and there were rather modest and uncertain hopes on the ‘good ideas’ front. The position of the ‘X’ above the ‘vision meetings *actual*’ label indicates that the initiative subsequently provided a mix of outcomes that contained a heavier dose of good ideas than was envisaged. Indeed, the vision meetings had begun as a connecting exercise in search of identity, but the utility of the ideas generated had surprised the proponents and exceeded any expectations.

**Figure 9-4 Community engagement initiatives as a ‘package deal’**



Developed from the case study data

There are interesting similarities and differences between the ‘attributes of local governing’ presented in Figure 2-2 and the concept of community engagement as a ‘package deal’ that has been derived from the case studies (refer Figure 9-4). While both figures are at a different level of abstraction - with Figure 2-2 being about a governance system as a whole and Figure 9-4 being about a community engagement initiative - the latter can be seen as a microcosm of the former. Both figures are similar at one end of the continuum (the ‘good connection’ end of Figure 9-4 and the ‘community governance’ end of Figure 2-2), in that they each portray a context where ideals of local democracy, the public domain as a source of rationality, and a pluralist approach abound. However the other end of the continuum varies between the models. The ‘NPM’ (New Public Management) end in Figure 2-2 locks onto ideals of economic efficiency and rationality being centred on the political and professional domains - and eschews any pluralism in favour of a technocratic approach. In contrast the ‘ideas’ end of Figure 9-4 envisages a service delivery actor who acknowledges the rationality available in the public domain, has some pluralist processes to do with the decision making, and does not necessarily valorise hard-edged economic decision making over efficiency in meeting the ends that are important to the community. And as the citizen panel indicated, at the ‘good ideas end’ of Figure 9-4 there are technocratic elements to decision making since public officials plan and decide, but there are also pluralistic elements as the net is cast amongst the community to catch good ideas.

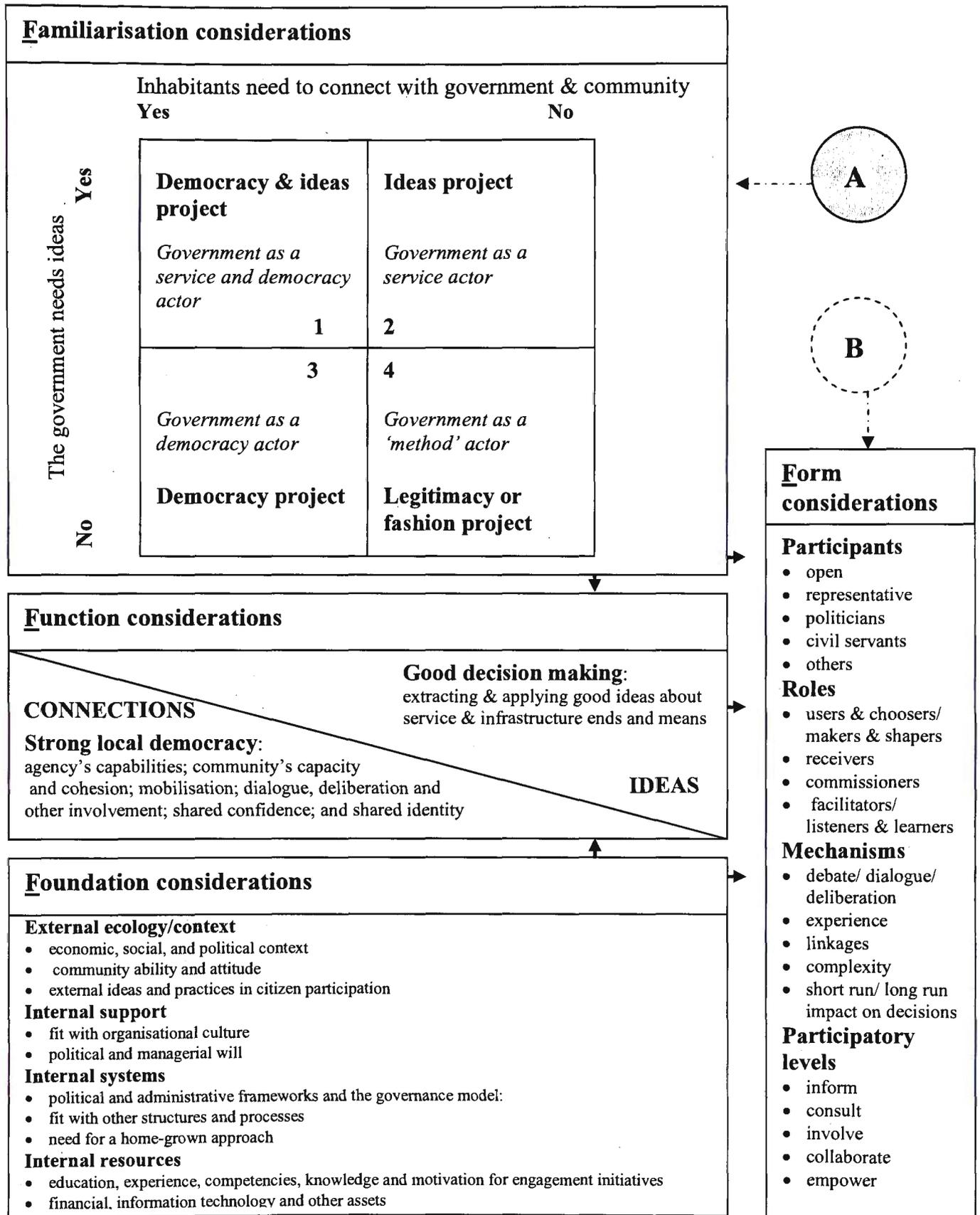
## 9.4 A model to inform practice – RQ3

Rowe and Frewer (2005, p. 252) argue that because of the considerable knowledge gaps in the under-researched citizen participation domain, studies should aim at producing a “ ... model that predicts or describes how to enable effective involvement ... ”. The quest in this study for a model to better inform practice is revealed in research question 3 (refer RQ3: refer section 1.4), which seeks ‘an appropriate model for guiding practice in the management of community engagement initiatives by local governments’. The ‘F-quad’ model (refer Figure 9-5) is a response to this imperative, and has been developed from the case study findings to inform practice in the planning, implementation and evaluation of community engagement initiatives. The *F-quad* model has four main sets of considerations: *familiarisation*; *foundation*; *function*; and *form*. The user would start at point ‘A’ with the *familiarisation considerations* about the orientation the local government wishes to take given its need for ideas and concerns about a community disconnect. Answers would lead the user to *function considerations* in which decisions need to be made about the relative emphasis to be placed on ends to do with getting ideas and building connections – and that choice is informed by the practical realities revealed by the *foundation considerations* about the external and internal context. The linkage between *function* and *foundation considerations* can set up an iterative process where a local government purposefully acts to change its context and so is able to rationally alter the mix of ideas and connections sought. Only after these three considerations have been addressed should the user move to detailed consideration of the *form* of the initiative through which the engagement takes place. By considering community engagement in this structured way, the user has a better prospect of aligning participatory activities with needs, constraints and resources.

### 9.4.1 ‘Familiarisation’ considerations’

‘Farm gate’ questions are the basic, holistic orientating questions that should be asked, considered, answered, understood and communicated before a farmer – or anybody else - rushes into the realms of detail and action. Of all of the case studies, the two initiatives which appear to be most sophisticated, sustainable and confidently employed are the two instances where the farm gate questions appeared to have been well addressed and sufficiently settled from the outset. With the citizen panel and the radslag projects, the overall ends were discerned and made clear from the outset, before minds were turned to the particularities of functional objectives and the form of the engagement to take place. Typically in other cases, proponents appeared to leap at the challenge of getting ‘from here to there’ without being vitally clear about where the ‘there’ really was or ought to be.

Figure 9-5 The *F-quad* model for managing a community engagement initiative



Developed from case data & relevant factors in research framework

For the purposes of the *F-quad* model, these ‘Farm gate’ questions for community engagement are shown in a four sector matrix under the banner of ‘familiarisation considerations’. The model’s flow commences at position ‘A’ to emphasise the need for a local government to address these ‘familiarisation considerations’ upfront in practice, in order to obtain clarity about the essence of the role that it intends to play in instigating particular community engagement initiatives.

Renn et al (1995) caution that goals for citizen participation are rarely clearly articulated or agreed to in theory or practice, and the case studies highlight the notion that any experimentation with citizen participation can be well served if there is clarity from the outset about ends being sought. For example, in the citizen panel case the kommun had thought long and hard and come to a very clear idea that their concern in this instance was not one to do with the strengths and connections that underpin democracy per-se, but to do with mining and exploiting good ideas to drive continual improvement in service delivery and infrastructure. This familiarisation with the basic ends desired appears to have provided the bearings and the confidence that facilitated the successful iterative approach to the development of structures and processes for the citizen panel engagement initiative. Likewise, the radslag project exemplifies a local government that had a clear orientation towards improving democracy and any getting of ideas served as a ‘Trojan horse’ for building connectivities within the community and between citizens and their kommun.

There are hazards when a local government appears not to have had the opportunity or methodology to be particularly clear about what central outcomes they wanted from the outset, and the participatory budgeting case exemplifies the danger where few politicians and managers had a common basic understanding or belief about the engagement to allow them to all ‘sing from the same hymnbook’ as it were. So the first step in the development of a model to inform practice is to pose ‘familiarisation considerations’ that help orientate practitioners to the ‘big picture’ ends that are desired.

The alternative concepts of the local government as a democracy actor interested in good connections, and the local government as a service delivery actor interested in good ideas, were discerned from the cases and represented in Figure 9-4 – and these provide the reference points for the *familiarisation considerations* section of the *F-quad* model. Answers to questions about the need for ideas or the need for connections in the instance of a particular engagement

initiative position a local government in one of four cells, each of which is a two dimensional continuum in its own right. In cell 1 the local government is on a quest for good ideas as well as better connections of inhabitants with their council and community, and so attempts to be both a service delivery actor and a democracy actor – for example the walks and talks initiative. The local government performs as a service actor in cell 2, and sees an engagement initiative mostly as a project for sourcing good ideas for its policy and programs - for example the citizen panel initiative. In cell 3 the local government is mostly concerned about acting in an engagement initiative to bring stronger democracy to fruition – for instance the radslag project. In cell 4 the local government undertakes a community engagement initiative as a performance to do with legitimacy or fashion, rather than one that springs from real desires about the efficacy for good citizen connectivity or sound ideas – and while there were no instances in the study of this absolute orientation, the participative budgeting case indicates that some proponents may be partially fuelled by motives to do with political expediency.

Since the ‘ideas’ and ‘connections’ axes are really continuums, the ideas-connections matrix does not just pose the question of which of the four cells (sectors) the local government is orientating towards, but queries where in each of those sectors it wishes to position itself when considering community engagement. The positioning may be quite specific from the outset, or become more firmly anchored over time. For example in the radslag and citizen panel cases the positioning of the local government in the ideas-connections matrix was rather assured. In contrast, the proponents of the walks and talks initiative did not appear to have settled on a well understood bearing within a sector - cell 1 - from the outset. Indeed, while all of the cases (except the embryonic visioning boards case) can be retrofitted into a position on the ideas-connections matrix, besides radslag and citizen panel, in each other instance it did not appear from the interview data that a clear bearing had been assayed and fixed from the start.

The *familiarisation considerations* part of the model provides a simple orientating structure that invites practitioners to start to settle on, and communicate, the guise in which they are to act in relation to a particular engagement initiative - and this leads to the interconnected considerations in the model about *function* and *foundation* matters. The model does not suggest that the familiarisation bearings should remain fixed, but that at any point in time they should be considered and plotted as points for navigating a local government’s journeys in the relatively unexplored world of citizen participation.

### 9.4.2 'Functional considerations'

The answer to the orientating *familiarisation considerations* part of the model leads to the *function consideration* of the desired relative emphasis on building connections to strengthen democracy compared to getting sound ideas to fuel good decision making, and on the particular objectives that underlie this mix. The case studies indicate that municipalities respond to the functional category of strengthening democracy with differing emphases on objectives to do with:

- developing the agency's capabilities;
- increasing community capacity and cohesiveness;
- mobilising the resources embedded in the community through citizen participation; and
- building confidence and shared identity.

The data indicates that local governments respond to the functional category of good decision making through different emphases on objectives to do with extracting and applying good ideas about:

- policy or program ends; and
- the means to be employed in achieving particular ends.

Municipalities with *familiarisation considerations* that fall into cells 1, 2 or 3 can be expected to target particular *functional considerations* because of a need for efficacy in such matters. In contrast, local governments with responses in cell 4 have settled on a legitimacy or fashion project, and would be expected to make choices about function for reasons like mimicry or coercion rather than for the sake of practical efficacy.

The balancing of functions to do with connections and ideas is a simpler phenomena to consider in the short term than the long term, for while the short term may reveal a clear priority for a community engagement initiative to assist in building a strong local democracy compared to being an ideas machine, in the longer term different community capacity and agency capabilities may be the triggers for fresh ideas.

The descriptive analysis of the cases has uncovered a wide range of contextual factors that have strong implications for the conduct of engagement initiatives. These factors inform the progression from the big picture orientation provided by the familiarisation questions to the choices about particular objectives that make up the functional considerations. These contextual factors not only inform the choice of functional objectives, but also provide intelligence for

choices about the form of engagement initiatives to achieve these ends. These key contextual factors are included in the model as *foundation considerations*.

### **9.4.3 'Foundation considerations'**

The 'foundation considerations' that were highlighted in the case studies are about the external and internal context of the local government, and can be assigned to categories of external ecology, internal support, internal systems and internal resources.

The 'external ecology' considers the economic, social, and political context for community engagement, the community's competencies and motivation, and external ideas or examples of good practice. 'Internal support' is to do with understanding organisational culture and the will of public officials. Internal systems concern the extant governance model and political and managerial frameworks in operation, the fit with other structures and processes, and any need for a home-grown approach. 'Internal resources' are about levels of knowledge, motivation and other resources to support citizen participation.

There is a need to reference backwards and forwards between the *function considerations* and the *foundation considerations* in order to settle on a do-able and cogent position from which the *form considerations*- the really visible activities - can be advanced. For example in the participatory budgeting case, had the foundation considerations been rigorously interrogated before attempts were made to start up a new tranche of participative budgeting, then this would have allowed for a front-end recognition of issues – like poor traction for the educational activities, the contrary political and administrative frameworks, and the rather incompatible organisational culture. In this case, such recognition could have resulted in action to ameliorate such barriers and/or more realistic choices about near-term *function considerations*.

After the familiarisation, foundation and functional considerations, come questions about the form of a community engagement initiative.

### **9.4.4 'Form considerations'**

The model suggests that after ends have been decided upon, attention then shifts to *form considerations* of how these objectives are to be achieved. These *form considerations* are to do with the 'devil is in the detail' questions about participants, stakeholder roles, mechanisms and participatory levels.

Regarding the participants involved, the cases depicted the need for local governments to consider participation by inhabitants, politicians, civil servants, local associations and companies in conditions of open or invited access and with representative or unrepresentative inclusion.

The cases indicate different roles for participants along the users-choosers and makers-shapers continuum (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001, p. 34). A key finding in the case studies, and something that is not so clearly highlighted in the literature on roles of participants, is the hazard where amongst the politicians and civil servants there are not clearly identified and influential:

- ‘receivers’ of the informational or connective fruits of an engagement initiative; and
- ‘commissioners’ with the clout to authoritatively drive the initiative.

The lack of receivers and commissioners in the participatory budgeting case serves as a warning that what may look like a robust and successful community engagement initiative from the outside may be flawed, dysfunctional, or counter-productive to the future of citizen participation projects. The cases in the study generally highlighted roles for public officials – whether acting as facilitators or observers - to shake off tendencies to be at the forefront of debate and action in order to become listeners and learners.

Mechanisms are the devices used to operationalise the citizen participation, and the ones chosen need to be compatible with alternative goals of propagating debate, dialogue or deliberation. In particular the visioning panels case warns against a propensity for too lax an interpretation of the term ‘dialogue’ – which is not the same thing as unstructured piecemeal episodes of debate. Important considerations about mechanisms include the complexity required or warranted by the ends desired, and possibilities of building on prior experience in ‘baby-steps’ or more substantial leaps - and the value in linkages with the structures and processes provided by other mechanisms. Ultimately, mechanisms ought to provide vehicles for the level of impact sought, be those participatory levels to *inform, consult, involve, collaborate* or *empower*.

#### **9.4.5 Model summary**

Whereas the research framework (refer Figure 3-9) proved a useful vehicle for identifying key aspects to do with an engagement initiative, it did not capture the necessary ‘direction of thinking’ to assist professional practice with planning, implementing or evaluating a community engagement initiative. The *F-quad* model provides that ‘direction of thinking’ by encouraging practitioners to consider and balance the ends sought in light of a context that includes resources, administrative ability and political resolve – before pursuing the means. As noted in

the *F-quad* model for managing a community engagement initiative (Figure 9-5), the starting point labelled 'A' indicates that a useful point of approach for practitioners is to firstly orientate themselves as actors, then establish objectives for the engagement that are compatible with the internal and external ecology, before finally moving to consider the 'nuts and bolts' aspects of a suitable form for the citizen participation. The alternative starting point labelled 'B' in Figure 9-5 is reminiscent of the direction of thinking embedded in the research framework - as a lens working from this angle interrogates the form of the engagement initiative before do-able objectives, constraints and resources are clearly established and communicated. Thus, point 'A' rather than point 'B' provides the recommended starting point for practice.

Together, the four sets of considerations that make up the *F-quad* model for managing a community engagement initiative articulate important factors that act as signposts in informing a structured approach to citizen participation in a relatively new and developing field of practice. The model is constructed from findings in non-representative case studies in one country, but is developed as a generic device to inform thinking and debate in any Swedish or international local government setting.

## **9.5 Limitations and reflection on the research methodology**

The case study approach was chosen for its ability to provide rich contextual data about a relatively new and under-researched phenomena, and this methodological approach appears to have been successful in allowing the description of particular participatory projects at local governments, the induction of their key themes, the analysis of the form and function of these community engagement initiatives, and the development of a model to inform practice. In particular, heeding Patton's (2001) idea of including quotations to highlight mood and meaning and avoiding a decontextualisation of the case studies has allowed for findings that can 'speak' to practitioners.

While the study has added to the existing professional knowledge, as recognised in Chapter 4 the research results about the form and function of community engagement initiatives have limitations for generalisation as they are based on:

- interviewees' perceptions
- a non-representative sample in one country about a global phenomenon
- an engagement initiative that comprised only a thin layer of a local government's activities and decision making processes.

However the methodology has been fruitful in this exploratory research because the resultant model and supporting data provide a fresh basis to inform debate and practice around individual community engagement initiatives.

## **9.6 Further avenues of research**

The literature and the interviewees indicate that community engagement is slowly and surely becoming an integral feature of local government reforms. Important issues for further research that are advanced by this study include an examination of issues around the internal context of a local government such as:

- the fit between organisational culture and the ideals of citizen participation
- the constraints of existing political and managerial frameworks
- the will of public officials
- strategies for educating internal and external stakeholders
- the taxonomy of roles played by inhabitants, public officials and other stakeholders
- the drivers, costs and benefits of home-grown solutions to engagement design and implementation
- the use of ICTs or other devices to enable engagement with youth
- the nexus between nearer-term democratic strengthening through improved community and government attributes, and longer-term decision making.

A longitudinal study at the case sites or in other local governments in Sweden and internationally could improve our understanding of the dynamics and outcomes of community engagement initiatives.

## **9.7 Concluding comment**

As the research component of a professional doctorate, this exploratory study set out to inform practice by investigating the form and function of community engagement initiatives through six Swedish local government case studies. The study posed research questions which sought a framework that articulates attributes of form and function; a descriptive analysis of engagement initiatives by local governments; and a model to inform professional practice. By responding to these three research questions this study provides an original contribution to practice and extends knowledge in the profession through insights from:

- a review and summation of the literature;
- the development of a research framework that deconstructs the large idea of community engagement;

- the provision of holistic individual case studies of engagement initiatives where each tells an important and interesting story in its own right about specific contexts and action;
- a cross-case analysis of key issues; and
- the creation of a structured model to guide thinking, debate and action around citizen participation.

The *F-quad* management model (refer Figure 9-5) and associated findings do not provide a recipe for community engagement, but inform a structured way of thinking whereby local governments can determine suitable ends for citizen participation and consider appropriate means to get there. The holistic exploration in this study and research results can assist practitioners to ‘think big’ even in small projects.

From the interview data outlined in chapters 6 to 8 and further discussed in this chapter, there are sufficient grounds to suggest that the community engagement initiatives studied were not artefacts of public officials playing reputational games or copying perceived good practice. Rather, the initiatives were born from an ideal about making a difference, finding solutions and engaging internal and external stakeholders in determining, informing and owning the participatory process and outcomes. The ideal in these cases centres on citizens and public officials having genuine dialogue, working together, understanding each other, reconciling to the fact that each individual stakeholder cannot always get what they want, having decision making processes in the municipality that respond to ends which equate to the public good, and having as many people as possible connecting with each other and their local government.

While the reality has not necessarily met the ideals, and even collided with it in cases like the participatory budgeting exercise, all interviewees were resolute about their future commitment to the principles and practice of citizen participation. In all cases the community engagement initiatives were home-grown projects organically forged by enthusiasm, experimentation, and sometimes from bitter experience. In each case the interviewees exhibited enthusiasm for community engagement initiatives as devices to enrich their own role while benefiting the organisation and community. But each interviewee was cautious about the scale of transformative effects and little was claimed in the way of expertise or definitive methodologies. All saw themselves more or less as novices and all appeared to be ‘muddling through’ to some degree. The newness of the practice, and the experimentation with home-grown approaches encountered in this study suggests that consideration of the *F-quad* model and supporting

findings would be valuable for local governments and other public sector organisations journeying on the citizen participation pathway.

Each engagement initiative studied provided an *opportunity space* for the realisation of a different mix of emphasis on ends to do with getting good ideas, strengthening and connecting the community, and building a more responsive and sustainable government. The thesis is that these three ideals distil into two basic, holistic orientating questions. Thus in the end, the form and function of community engagement initiatives is argued as hinging on two central aspects: the local government as a democracy actor or a service delivery actor. And this simple yet profound dichotomy can provide a guiding light for a journey in which public officials seek good ideas and attempt to get as many people as possible across stakeholder groups to stand together behind these ideas.

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## **Appendix 1 – The visioning meetings**

The in-depth interview was conducted in December 2007 with the Mayor and the CEO

### **Background**

The Kommun is in the south-west of Sweden and was founded in the 1950's via amalgamation of around 10 smaller municipalities. It presently has a population of about 20,000 inhabitants and this is expected to grow by 35% in 15 years due to its proximity to major Danish cities and to Swedish hubs of industry, commerce and education situated in neighbouring areas. The Kommun acts very much as a 'dormitory', with inhabitants typically going outside the municipality for work; upper-high school or University studies; and for theatre and other entertainment. The municipality has several small and larger villages, and these have rural surroundings yet can access major rail and road links. By-and-large the citizenry is well-educated, articulate, and comfortably off, and there are relatively few pockets of disadvantaged groups.

### **Community engagement initiative – visioning meetings**

A mix of focus group and open meetings had comprised the 'visioning meetings' initiative; the Kommun's most ambitious project to involve citizens with their local government. Focus groups are useful for bringing together invited participants into a dynamic environment (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2000) where insights and ideas can emerge from the group (MDH 2008). Open meetings are forums that provide the opportunity for anybody in the community to comment on the ideas of others and to express their own views (Department of Communities 2005b).

The initiative involved the community in setting up a vision for the municipality as a whole, and for important separate parts of its work. In a two-tier approach, seven focus groups of invited participants were used to generate ideas which were then considered and debated in four open meetings. Politicians, managers, business people, members of sports clubs and voluntary organisations and inhabitants were involved in processes of the initiative – which took two years to complete.

The themes induced are discussed in the following section.

## **Themes**

### **Filling up the vision and creating an identity**

The visioning initiative has been about finding aspirations, rather than looking at operational problems and solutions. A perceived lack of identity drove the idea to involve the community in the vision planning process. By Swedish measures the municipality is relatively young; many of its icons such as a large sugar factory and major food companies had disappeared; seventy-five percent of people worked outside the municipality; there were many new inhabitants; and societal expectations were fluid. Many in the political and managerial circles felt that consequently many people and public officials did not have a clear idea of what was important for the municipality; the Kommun had lost its identity or at least gained the wrong one.

There is no real identity; we are a sleeping town [CEO].

The acting-CEO at the time proposed using community engagement to find out what the inhabitants cared about and to explore the identity they wanted for the Kommun. The engagement was conceived as a way to make the things that are important to people into the 'guiding light' for the municipality, and so provide a way to

Fill up the vision [CEO].

In terms of the forces for community engagement (refer Figure 2-3), this case reflects beliefs both in the 'necessity' to engage with the community and the potential 'effectiveness' of citizen participation as a means of alleviating a 'disconnect' that people have with their government, but equally importantly, with their own community. So the disconnect had been perceived as reflected in a failure of people to feel a shared identity with their community and with their municipality. This disconnect was with the municipality as an area and an entity rather than with the Kommun as a service delivery machine. This failure to connect at an area and entity level appears to be an extension above the citizen-to-politician gap noted in Swedish society - refer SALAR (2007c) in section 4.3.6.

### **Central things can be transacted through engagement**

Who we are, what we are, what we want to be and do, and the place for ourselves and our institutions in the world are big questions for any individual or organisation. Choosing to focus the Kommun's first truly significant foray into community engagement (outside statutory

planning matters) on the very core questions of vision and identity can be seen as a rather bold move. But this choice of topic rests on a perception that very central things can be transacted through community engagement and a feeling that these initiatives can become a crucible in which key reference points can be established and major change is formed. So the proposition for a major engagement initiative gained traction from politicians and senior management alike, because of a belief that the aspirations of people could and should be made evident to others in the community and those elected or employed to serve them.

Why are we a municipality? [Mayor];

What should we say to new employees in the municipality? [CEO].

### **Breaking a reliance on the Kommun**

While the main thrust of the engagement initiative was on constructing vision and seeking identity, another important driver has been a desire to wean citizens off the idea that the Kommun has the necessary resources to find the bulk of citizens' problems and deploy solutions. According to the interviewees, Sweden is the second highest taxing country after Denmark, and so citizens typically think

it's the municipality's problem, and even if I don't commit myself to do something about it you should something about it ... I pay you to do this ... I have paid myself freedom [CEO].

### **Getting back on the horse**

The previous major engagement initiative was to with a planning proposal to expand the development in one of the Kommun's towns to significantly increase the stock of housing. The engagement had been an unmitigated disaster from start to finish, with negativity, hostility and shouting occurring at the open meetings.

Never in my life as a politician there has been such involvement from the citizens and most of them say not here; they don't want anything at all [Mayor].

There was strong support for the ideal of community engagement at the highest political and managerial levels, and the serious 'fall' taken in this planning engagement initiative strengthened the resolve of these proponents to try again with a new initiative as soon as possible. A considerable factor in this resolve was a concern by senior managers and politicians

that approaches such as ‘not in my backyard’ and ‘what is in it for me’ had been all too strongly evident in the community during some recent controversies.

They want so much service ... but they don't want anyone else to move there [CEO].

### **Approach with open arms, not a shield**

The problem in the failed open-meetings on planning issues was that politicians and staff ended up on a defensive footing from the very first meeting - as they appeared to the public to be delivering the Kommun's rather fully-formed plans with an attitude of

our suggestion is good; you shouldn't complain [Mayor].

The lesson from the planning episode for the later visioning initiative had been twofold; engagement can be fraught when proposals or ideas put to the inhabitants appear too-fully formed or where the Kommun and its actors are holding up a ‘shield’ that says we are professional, expert, organised and on top of the situation. Anything put to the community as a *fait accompli*, or fully-formed with limited options, or in too much detail, or with much bravado runs the risk of alienating the citizens who expect more input options. ‘Open arms’ means approaching engagement before

that proposal was already finished [Mayor].

### **Listen and learn in two stages**

The conduct of the visioning meetings was influenced by the lessons learnt in the failed planning engagement. This prompted a new strategy for engagement where open meetings would be preceded by smaller discussions wherever possible, in which public officials sit around a table with people and communicate in a much more personable and reflective way. In essence the idea is that politicians and staff should hardly act in initial meetings; they should fundamentally be there to listen.

When we do that to the first meeting we don't have a ready proposal [Mayor].

The front-end listening means the proposals that are subsequently taken to open-meetings already have a history of community input and are not seen as a *fait accompli*. These now somewhat negotiated and informed propositions by the municipality are perceived to face a

greater prospect of commencing with goodwill and sparking diplomatic, targeted, structured and productive discussion.

### **Concrete ideas from selected people to fuel open debate**

The approach adopted in visioning meetings initiative was to use smaller discussions to create interest and goodwill, and to produce some concrete ideas and alternatives that could fuel subsequent open meetings. That way, initial discussions started with a fairly 'clean sheet' and proposals and ideas put before large meetings have some citizen participation provenance.

For this initial tranche of focus group-type meetings, special invitations were extended to 'known' identities from interest groups, sports clubs, local businesses, and the general community. These participants were in turn divided into different groups and asked to come up with ideas and proposals that could be discussed in subsequent open public meetings. The Kommun devised seven areas of interest - such as 'schools of the future' - and people chose which of the seven focus groups they wanted to be in by topic. Each group was facilitated by experienced staff and external consultants. For their particular area of interest, and for the Kommun as a whole, each group was asked for

important words, important issues for the future [Mayor].

The ideas from the groups and later feedback from the public meetings were documented, and then a political process took place where alternatives were discussed, and words in the vision documents were finally decided on by the council. This capture and reporting of new ideas and perspectives made it feasible for the Kommun to defuse autopoietic tendencies (Luhmann 2005) (refer section 2.8).

Robinson (2002) suggest that a 'search conference' is an appropriate mechanism where there is complexity and a relatively high risk in the situation if the right path is not taken. While the Kommun does not use that particular descriptive label for the visioning initiative, its two-stage approach is fundamentally a search exercise and fits well with that 'search' positioning on the complexity-risk matrix (refer Figure 2-8). The purpose-issue model developed by Walters (2000) (refer Table 2-2) indicates that focus groups and neighbourhood meetings are appropriate mechanisms where discovery is the purpose of engagement – and that aligns with the Kommun's approach and objective.

## **Big influences to small effects – but no promises**

No guarantees were given about the extent to which the engagement would influence the final shape of the politically approved visioning documents, but the Kommun was alive to the need for participants in both the focus group and the open public meetings to see some impacts of their ideas on the final product if future community engagement initiatives were to gain traction. So that,

even maybe if it's not a very big influence, they could see some small effects of the meeting in the proposal [Mayor].

The idea of high-level double loop learning in the direction taken by the local government (Argyris & Schon 1978) (refer section 3.4) is relevant here, since the engagement is not about restoring an existing course in municipal policy and implementation, but centres on attempts at charting a whole new one. But the idea of single and double loop learning also applies to the processes of community engagement as evidenced by the incremental and major adjustments (such as the two-stage process) the Kommun made over time in how it conducted engagement initiatives.

## **Linking the Kommun's future to people's future**

After the focus groups' findings had been received and studied, the Kommun advertised widely in the local media for people to attend open public meetings to discuss ensuing ideas. Many in the community found the challenge of considering identity and articulating a vision important and relevant because the project was able to be described to people in way that linked the Kommun's future to people's lives. So much so that three of the four open meetings in different areas drew in excess of 100 people - although only 10 showed up in that part of the municipality that had the disastrous experience with planning engagement. This turnout defied the norm of previous public meetings which tended to attract a small number of people most of whom were 65 years or older. In this case

there was very many people around 40, the new inhabitants, they will have small children ... they want to do something. Very many, much younger people than we are used to, so I think it was important [CEO].

The role of the citizen participants (refer section 2.8) is to inform the vision for the Kommun as a whole, and for major activities like education and recreation in particular, and so participants

act as co-learners ((Roberts 2004) or framers of agendas (Epstein et al. 2005; Marshall et al. 2004). And public officials listen and so ‘co-learn’ also.

### **Our own way**

The interviewees articulated an acute awareness of innovative and successful community engagement initiatives that were taking place in municipalities in the region, especially in a neighbouring kommun and national initiatives by the peak local government body SALAR. The interviewees appeared not to have studied these external initiatives in any detailed operational sense; in fact the CEO and mayor disagreed over aspects of each other’s descriptions about things like the timing and representativeness of a particular initiative ‘next door’. However, what the interviewees knew of external initiatives had given them a clear sense that there was increasing activity and much potential in this arena. While the external activity piqued the interest of senior public officials into incorporating more citizen participation in the work of the Kommun, the interviewees noted that there was little interest in appropriating someone else’s model or joining SALAR pilot programs.

We can find our own way [CEO].

It is clear that the Kommun has noticed that others are making strides in community engagement in a significant way. So to that extent, the general idea about enhancing citizen participation has ‘travelled’ (Czarniawska 1996) to the Kommun, but the structures and processes appear to be very much home-grown and appear to be aligned to notions of and effectiveness rather than responses to other pressures. Indeed the Kommun had declined to replicate the particular engagement initiatives of its very successful neighbour or other Scandinavian peers.

### **Engagement is not a default setting for the actors**

In contrast to the visioning engagement, previous non-statutory attempts to discuss future plans had struggled to attract public interest; the perception being that these prior initiatives were less focused, less structured, less-well communicated, and poorly ‘sold’ to the inhabitants compared to the visioning meetings concept.

Despite the relative success of the visioning exercise, the idea of community members acting in concert with the Kommun is not something the interviewees believe the Swedish population is, in general, attuned to. The ‘default setting’ of the public appears to be disinterest in engaging

with issues that seem less tangible – and a lot of front-end work needs to be put in to shift this predisposition.

They are not used to this kind of conversation, its not in their mind or heart ... they think if you are not good I will not elect you next time but in between these times I don't want to know [CEO].

Nor is it the case that all politicians and civil servants accept the idea of community engagement to explore future scenarios or even more concrete contemporary issues. To align the public and public officials with community engagement requires somehow imparting beliefs and good experiences, or put another way,

We will have to train them [Mayor].

### **Failure to leverage less-formal engagement processes**

The Kommun does not have something that looks like a community engagement plan; nor is there anyone especially designated to drive community engagement. The interviewees perceive that politicians and staff engage with the community all day to give and receive information; teachers with parents and pupils, and aged care staff with clients and relatives. The problem is that there is no system or process to assemble this less-formal information and do something with it.

We don't put it together and use it in a structured way ... what's your opinion? what do they say in your school? [CEO].

The future for citizen participation appears to be shaping up into two levels; constructing formal engagement initiatives like the focus groups and open meetings, and trying to find better ways of capturing and applying knowledge from less-formal exercises. However there is apparently no such thing on the horizon as an office, or officer, for engagement.

### **Culture - new times are coming**

By coincidence the local politicians and senior management by-and-large changed over to a new generation at around the same time about six years ago, and there was not so much a lack of personal will to engage with the community as a lack of an organisational culture to predispose many towards such initiatives. The key to more citizen participation in the future was seen, and is still perceived to be, about getting the right organisational culture - rather than the technology

solution (White, N 2001) or some other remedy. The feeling is that the culture which politicians and staff identify with dictates how engagement will be manifest in their work.

That would require a new culture to commit to these kind of things. New times are coming, new ideas are coming – we have to change the thought. It's how you look at the inhabitants - it is how I look at them and my staff look at them. What are we here for? [CEO].

A new culture is not seen as something that is transferable to all existing public officials, and the interviewees warn that municipalities which are serious about engagement practice may need to turn-over a significant proportion of existing staff to obtain those who can be imbued with the right motivation and disposition. And such retrenchments are intimated to be a serious and difficult business in Sweden.

### **Constructive engagement requires building blocks**

The interviewees expressed a strong view that community engagement initiatives cannot operate in isolation, and require essential building-blocks in terms of organisational structures, routines and processes that provide the instruments for engagement, and also engender an atmosphere and expectation for citizen participation, amongst public officials and community members.

we can solve it for you - it's a dialogue every day [CEO].

One such building-block that was put in place to support the visioning and other engagement initiatives has been the creation of what the Kommun describes in English as its 'citizens' office'. The office acts as a reception area that is designed, resourced, and staffed so that around eighty percent of all enquiries can be handled at the first point of contact. The physical space has changed and now it is a very open area, where citizens can see staff at work, sit down in a comfortable area, and use free Internet and telephone. Office reception staff have found it more interesting and more challenging to work that way, and the arrangement allows specialists outside the citizens' office to concentrate on their central tasks. The new skills, resources and ethos means that staff are willing to help with sorting out issues with bureaucracies such as the insurance and taxation offices, and will help citizens with forms and suchlike. The Office incorporates new reporting and follow-up processes; so important information can be disseminated to the appropriate public officials and the effectiveness of staff responses can be tracked, gauged and followed-up by supervisory management.

The creation of the citizens' office is a building block for community engagement because it provides a system for capturing and registering important issues and is emblematic for the beginnings of a citizen-centric focus.

I think will lead to more citizen involvement in the future because we have created an area that people - municipality staff and the citizens - can speak to each other, will speak to each other in a more community way than before [Mayor].

Due to a new staff ethos, the perception is that the office has had a gradual positive effect on organisational culture and inhabitants' mindsets in a manner that allows for a better fit of the visioning meetings or other subsequent engagement initiatives.

### **A meeting of minds**

The public officials involved were very surprised when every one of the focus groups came up with the same ideal at the top of their list – 'safety'.

I thought it would be on the top 10 list but not the first one, I think [CEO].

But from the descriptions 'safety' embodied every kind of safety. Safety is about assurance that the Kommun would treat its citizens in the right manner on an interpersonal-level and supply good services and infrastructure. Safety is about inhabitants growing old, and knowing that someone is there to look after them even if their family has shifted away. And safety is about physical safety of people and property. The large public meetings were happy to confirm this broad 'safety' ideal as an emblematic part of the Kommun's vision and the community's desired identity.

The second ideal to emerge from the engagement initiative was 'commitment' by the Kommun to people and voluntary groups. This signals the public's desire for a high level of involvement by public officials in establishing and responding to the community's wants and needs

The third ideal to emanate from the engagement process was the concept of 'courage' for the Kommun to do new things and makes changes. In aggregate,

these three together I think is - what shall we say - is the way of saying you can do things in other ways, you don't have to do everything the traditional way [CEO].

The interviewees stressed that the ideas from the community, and their influence on the Kommun's ultimate vision document, had created a vision quite unlike what had been imagined by internal actors. This divergence highlighted a wider phenomena where

the difference between the opinion of the experts and the inhabitants is quite different [Mayor].

People were directly informed, consulted and involved by the Kommun in order to ensure that their concerns had been understood and considered, and that their views were directly reflected in the vision alternatives developed. So in terms of the IAP2 (2004) framework (refer Figure 2-5), this initiative meets the *involve* hurdle. The engagement appears to extend partially into the *collaborate* level of public participation due to the work of the groups around development of alternatives. However, since the identification of the preferred solution was in the hands of public officials, it would be appropriate to visualise this initiative as being situated at a *involve-collaborate* intersect (Creighton 2005) (refer Figure 2-6), rather than a fully-fledged collaborative impact. Nonetheless, from the interviewees' descriptions of expectations versus reality, the impact level of the citizen participation was considerably stronger than had been envisaged – largely through the meeting of minds. The experience in this case reflects the notion in the literature that focus groups and open meetings are held to be suitable mechanisms where an *involve* level of participation is sought (refer Figure 2-7).

### **Power in a clear, concise and agreed output**

The words in the Kommun's vision were felt to have resonated with politicians, staff and the public because they were simple and genuine reflection of what people thought. This meant that the municipality ended up with a vision which they felt to be quite different and less like a slogan than many other municipalities.

We are not there to be flashy, we are here to work for the inhabitants of the municipality, so the vision should be a picture of what we think we are here for [CEO].

Overall the new vision is perceived to have made a real difference to the work of managers and politicians. Concerns by some public officials that a vision expressed as three quite simple themes might be too abstract and general to make a real difference have proved unfounded because people focused on the words with a view that

You have to do something with them, you have to take them to your heart in some way

and make your own decision how to realize - but you have to do something [CEO].

### **Leeway in expressing ideas**

There appears to be some merit in the outputs of community engagement being communicated in ways that provides a core message but also allows some leeway for interpretation by different stakeholders as some flexibility can increase the chances for a degree of consensus or acceptance. With the exception of the very few politicians who were deemed never likely to warm to the idea of community engagement, initial differences amongst the vast majority were sorted out because people with alternative political views have been able to read different things into words to suit their beliefs or their own-party's preferences.

the social democratic politicians have other ideas in the word safety than I do and so on [Mayor].

### **Connections between citizen inputs and Kommun operations**

The perception is that the vision (summarised by 'safety', 'commitment' and 'courage') must be expressed through what the Kommun does, for it to have any real credibility and potency. So the vision has been heavily inculcated into areas and processes of planning and implementation, and managers have to rationalise what they're going to do and have done in terms of those three words and what they represent. For example, the vision appears in the Kommun's financial documents and the three key words must be addressed by public officials in any budget submission and any strategic or operational plan. So strongly are the themes of safety, commitment and courage built into what public officials plan for and do, and so pervasive are they in the internal and external communications of the Kommun, that

Today if you take some of my staff in this house and you wake him up in the middle of the night they will say these three words [CEO].

The relatively high level of public impact on the Kommun's vision, objectives and downstream projects appears to be exemplify Cornwall and Gaventa's (2001) proposition of citizens becoming 'makers and shapers' rather than just 'user and choosers' of services. But the making and shaping occurs due to moulding effect of the vision that citizens were involved with, rather than direct public input into plans for particular projects or programs.

The public and public officials can therefore see that the engagement produced ideas, and those ideas have been put to significant effect.

## **Keep the momentum**

The interviewees consider it important to keep the momentum for community engagement going given the success of this initiative (in stark contrast to the planning debacle) and the need to 'train' internal and external stakeholders. The idea is to follow on from this engagement initiative with open public meetings on particular themes, and these are to be treated as 'early discussions'. A guest speaker will preface the meetings with a short presentation. Then an open discussion is to take place before facilitators (consultants, the CEO or other staff -but not politicians) work at separate tables of participants to promote small group discussion and ascertain their points of view in a very open way.

okay, at this moment we are thinking about what should our library look like in the future, and we want to ask you, what do you think about this? [CEO].

## **Expanding groups of stakeholders**

The visioning engagement initiative has spawned other engagement activities that have drawn new stakeholder groups into the participation orbit. While any municipality might be assumed to be routinely considering 'safety' in its programs and processes, the highlighting of the safety theme at the Kommun has led to a range of proactive measures - such as meetings between Kommun officials and local police officers once a month over problems and practical solutions. And now the highlighting of safety and other themes has prompted tentative steps forward in engagement with leaders of the companies.

Before they didn't even come when we called - so it's changed [Mayor].

So companies and other organisations join inhabitants and public officials as co-learners ((Roberts 2004) and have some role in the framing of agendas (Epstein et al. 2005; Marshall et al. 2004).

## **Emerging categories**

The preceding themes can be aggregated into seven emerging categories to do with: tackling central issues; using 'hooks' to gain interest; learning from experience; linking devices; culture, multiplier effects; and the Kommun finding its own way.

## **Central things can be transacted**

This emerging category indicates that community engagement initiatives can be a device for shaping deep and complex issues – as evidenced by the contribution that citizen participation

has made in identifying the values that are central to the functioning of the community and its local government. The way that values are articulated can allow ‘buy-in’ from people with diverse perspectives and experiences. Relevant themes are:

- Central things can be transacted through engagement – citizens can participate in big picture ideas
- Filling up the vision and creating an identity – a starting point for gaining identity is a clear vision
- Leeway in expressing ideas – allowing room for differences in interpretational emphasis.

### **A hook for participants**

In a context where engagement has not been a norm, it appears important that the engagement initiative has processes and outcomes that provide the ‘hook’ to capture the interest participation of citizens. The Kommun has put significant emphasis on outcomes: ‘selling’ the idea that a clear and agreed vision will have ramifications for the future of the institution and the lives of community members; and in making sure that there is some evidence in practice to support such assertions. There is also an attempt to demonstrate, through the processes of engagement, that inhabitants’ views will be noticed and that these should gain a degree of traction; be the influence quite modest or significant. Themes surrounding this hook are:

- Linking the Kommun’s future to people’s future – selling relevance to people’s lived-lives
- Big influences to small effects: but no promises – impacts of ideas spur-on future public interest
- Picking up those who don’t say anything - expertise in involving reticent people
- A meeting of minds – wide input can supply consistent ideas
- Power in a clear, concise and agreed output – simple themes can be understood and effective
- Connections between citizen inputs and Kommun operations – linking vision words to action.

### **Learning from the past**

The past can be a powerful teacher and provide sage guidance as to what practices may or may not work and the context in which particular engagement initiatives should operate. A message in this case is about learning from mistakes and making changes to strategies and implementation for engagement, rather than shying away from some degree of political and

reputational risk by letting bad experiences curtail future attempts. The ‘learnings’ to be had about practices and context are highlighted in the themes of:

- Getting back on the horse – momentum and learning from good and bad engagement experiences
- Engagement is not a default setting for the actors – stakeholders do not naturally participate
- Failure to leverage less-formal engagement processes –knowledge loss in informal participation.

### **Linked devices**

Engagement is enhanced where a municipality is genuinely open to ideas and perspectives, rather than having a detailed and strongly-held proposal at the beginning. There appears to be improved prospects for success where any highly-developed proposals that are put to the citizens do carry the hallmark of community input having been taken-up to some degree along the way. Linkages can be facilitated where engagement initiatives are not treated as unitary stand-alone devices, but are broken into parts and also supported through other mechanisms – as indicated by the themes of:

- Constructive engagement requires building blocks – citizen office as a pillar for engagement
- Approach with open arms not a shield – rather fully-formed plans can alienate participants
- Listen and learn in two stages – a staged process where public officials listen and learn
- Concrete ideas from selected people to fuel open debate – ideas to fuel wider discussion.

### **New internal and external culture**

The traditional cultures that frame the way in which public officials and inhabitants see the world may be reflected in attitudes and behaviours that are at odds with community engagement; as observed in the themes of:

- Culture: new times are coming – culture must shift but not all officials can change in response
- Breaking a reliance on the *Kommun* – paying high taxes does not mean that all can be taken care of.

## **Multiplier effect**

A wider pattern of engagement between stakeholders can grow from a particular initiative, and an array of subsequent projects may provide the necessary momentum to expand citizen participation in the work of governments beyond experiments towards embedded practice and the inclusion of business and other external stakeholders as participants. The multiplier effect indicates that from small things big things grow, and is illustrated through the themes of:

- Keep the momentum – propelling future engagement activity through action and experiences
- Expanding the stakeholder groups – inclusion of companies and other stakeholder groups.

## **An independent pathway to engagement**

While notice may be taken about what the neighbouring kommuns are doing in regards to community engagement initiatives, this appears to more about recognising that they are doing something rather than a desire for replication – as reflected in the theme of:

- Our own way – developing engagement process and structures locally and organically.

## **Informing the research framework**

This section presents a brief summary of how the visioning meetings engagement initiative and its focus groups and open meetings relate to the ideals from the literature (refer Chapter 2) of better decision making, better government, better communities – as well as honouring democratic ideals. Then Figure 1/Appendix 1 indicates how thematic content from the case study informs the research framework (refer Figure 3-9).

## **Better decision making**

The case description and themes indicate that the engagement initiative has influenced decision making at the Kommun in two major ways.

Firstly, the output of the focus groups and open meetings impacted on the political decision making about what the Kommun's official vision should be – as evidenced by the identification and prioritisation of issues in the vision (like safety), and their incorporation into formal Kommun policy. The level of influence was described in the 'meeting of minds' theme as being at the *involve-collaborate* intersect in terms of the IAP2 (2004) framework (refer Figure 2-5), because a significant amount of participants' ideas and preferences were ultimately taken on board but there was a limited formal sharing of responsibility for the vision with the community.

Secondly, since the vision statement is being used in a robust manner within the Kommun as a 'guiding light' for determining service and infrastructure policy and implementation responses, then the engagement initiative can be seen to have had an on-going and far reaching effect on decision making about the vision and a myriad of downstream Kommun work. The case indicates that an engagement initiative should be considered for: any direct influence on a particular decision at a macro level (for example, the vision for the Kommun) or at a lower level (for example, the vision for better schools); and for subsequent interaction with other short-run and long-run decision making (for example, the vision as a reference point for other activities).

The case reveals vestiges of all of the elements in the function of better decision making that were discerned from the literature and listed in Figure 2-4. A two-stage device, focus groups then open meetings, is employed to capture the diverse knowledge in business and society, and the object is a simple exposition of a most complex topic: identity and vision. The interviewees believed that the engagement engendered a better solution, and the open-armed approach appears to have decreased the risks in citizen participation - relative to fateful urban planning experience. In particular, the citizens' office and new ways of logging and tracking emerging issues, problems and solutions are seen as linked devices which alter and enhance the decision processes. The engagement was perceived by the interviewees as having directly led to better policy and implementation as reflected in the setting of the vision and its downstream application.

### **Better government**

The focus groups and open meetings appear to have impacted on the resources of the Kommun which are highlighted by intellectual capital theory (refer section 3.3.2).

The engagement initiative is held up as having influenced the knowledge base of politicians and civil servants, had discernable positive personal motivational effects, and given public officials more scope and freedom to use their imagination and competencies. The initiative also reframed attitudes of public officials as to where the expertise lay. That said, the ideal of community engagement is one that a significant number of staff were perceived as being unable to effectively cope and work with, and some attrition was seen as necessary.

Internal capital was enhanced through: cultural changes; the recognition of the benefits of a certain 'diplomacy' within the Kommun; new sources of external information; improved structures and processes for capturing and distributing knowledge within the institution; and

superior routines for action and follow up. Such improvements were seen to flow from the visioning initiative and its interaction with the citizen office linked device. The new citizens' office and the visioning initiative had a symbiotic relationship - the office provided a vehicle for an effective engagement initiative, and the initiative exercised the potential within the office structure and processes. The Kommun had strong confidence in the relevance and authenticity of the visioning initiative output, and this set of ideas was installed and used as mould and filter for program and project proposals.

External capital has expanded with the new relationships and channels of communication. The ability of the Kommun to 'hook' participants and the visible effect that the citizen participation had on decision making strengthened the networks and relationships that external capital is built on, and thus gave the Kommun readier access to the capacity in the community.

This engagement initiative addresses all of the functions to do with the sustainability of government that are noted in the literature (refer Figure 2-4) to some extent, except for political stability. However not even the function of 'mobilises and integrates resources of government and community' quite captures the essence for sustainable government here, since the engagement critically is about an integration of identity rather than just an integration of physical, financial or intellectual resources.

The rationality that appears in the Kommun's vision plans is chosen by public officials but heavily informed and influenced by the rationality advanced by citizens in the focus groups and meetings. So in terms of the attributes of local governing presented in Figure 2-2, there is some shift away from a technocratic approach towards more voice and choice – at least in matters of vision. From the interviewees' descriptions of this initiative, there is a semblance of community governance operating in at least one sphere of the Kommun's work.

### **Better community**

One way of discerning functions to do with community capacity is to explore issues of citizen ability, community group ability, and collaborative community culture (Cuthill & Fien 2005) (refer section 3.3.3). Through the engagement, the potential for participants to break a mindset of reliance on the Kommun can be viewed an enhancement of citizen ability. Certainly the meetings and focus groups provide a platform for participants to leverage their abilities. Community group ability is about groups reflecting, learning and acting in a concerted fashion, and the engagement initiative affords an opportunity for community values to be articulated, explored, negotiated, and ultimately mirrored to some degree in the Kommun's guiding vision.

A collaborative community culture is strengthened by the open and constructive dialogue, and there is a strong sense that efforts to foster engagement have gone some way towards giving people a common bond as members of a particular community – rather than fundamentally being seen as fellow residents of dormitory suburb. The opportunity space provided for people to engage together in a cooperative manner in order find shared meanings appears to be a good counter to Putman's (2000) fear of diminution of social capital through isolation as exemplified in the concept of 'bowling alone'.

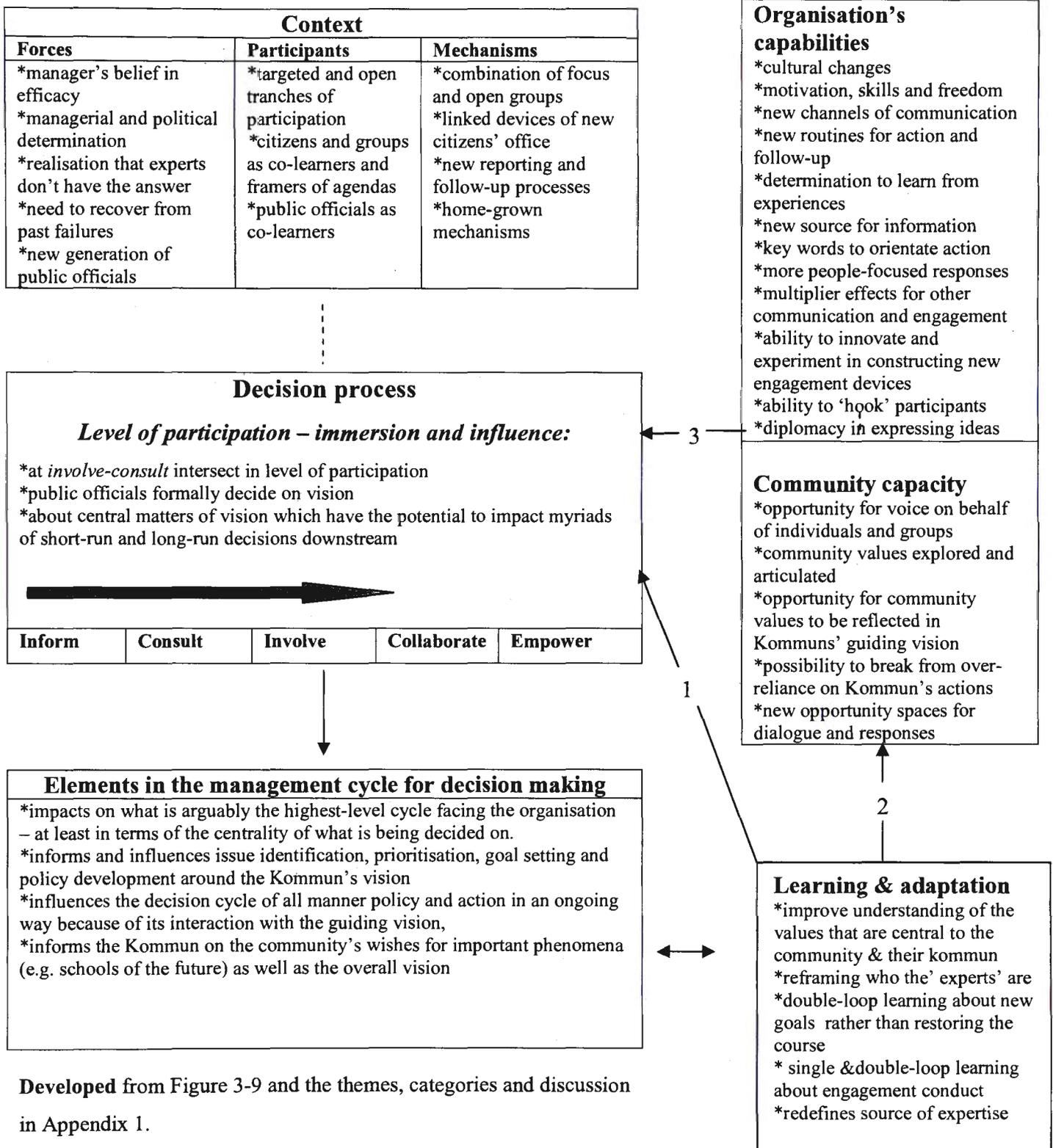
Many of the functions to do with strengthening cohesion and capacity in the community that are noted in the literature (refer Figure 2-4) are to be glimpsed in the examples and arguments provided by the interviewees. The 'meeting of minds' theme is a strong example of the functioning of cohesive groups, and linkages occurring on a level of personal contact and amongst a feeling of belonging. The case strongly indicates a general empowerment and advancement of civil society compared to the status quo. There is no way to gauge any increase in the community's skills and knowledge, but there was a major opportunity space for participants to leverage and build on what competencies they had. But function of 'active compromise' is not explicit – nor is a diminution of the 'NIMBY' (not in my backyard) syndrome. Participation in this initiative has been rather enthusiastic, but the question of the future appetite for other civic activity by those involved is an open question.

Comparing the interviewees' accounts to Hartz-Karp's (2004) model of different cycles affecting social capital, a virtuous cycle of sorts appears to have occurred due to an increase in social capital; a fortunate circumstance since that was a central reason for the engagement exercise in the first place. The cycle at the Kommun is not exactly what Hartz-Carp has in mind however, because internal experts are the ones that shape and choose the final solutions. Of Hartz-Karp's five building blocks to maximise opportunities for a good outcome for the community – a focus on understanding issues and implications, considering different views and values, a search for common ground, the capacity for influence, and participants who are representative – the first four at least appear reasonably satisfied.

### **Honouring democratic ideals**

Citizen participation was not spoken of as being undertaken as a right or a duty, but for the ends it might achieve.

**Figure 1/Appendix 1 Research framework - the form and function of the visioning meetings**



Developed from Figure 3-9 and the themes, categories and discussion in Appendix 1.

## **Appendix 2 – The visioning boards**

The in-depth interview was conducted in December 2007 with the Mayor - who was the sole full-time municipal councillor. A senior administrative officer was at the last minute indisposed for a planned joint interview.

### **Background**

The Kommun has a population of around 40,000 inhabitants whose incomes average amongst the top ten for Swedish municipalities. Education levels are high, with around 80% having completed gymnasium or higher education. The Kommun has about 2,500 employees, a turnover in the vicinity of 170 million euros, and has achieved a positive financial result for nine years in a row. The level of recycling is very high on a comparative national scale. The municipality is characterised by attractive countryside and lakes and has good transport to the big city, and this facilitates the daily commute elsewhere for work or study by about a quarter of the population.

### **Community engagement initiative – engagement through ‘visioning boards’**

This case study unveils an interviewee who takes a systems perspective (the new ‘visioning’ political boards), rather than a participatory project orientation (things like citizen panels, public meetings and so on), as the point of departure in describing a key community engagement initiative by the municipality.

The creation of what can be translated into English as ‘visioning boards’, is seen as a community engagement initiative with two related dimensions. Firstly, the initiative provides a system change which then acts as a platform for citizen participation activities. Secondly, the systemic change to political decision making in turn allows any new knowledge from the related engagement projects to be more purposefully and powerfully used.

As it transpires, the shape and form of the engagement projects that are to be run on top of the platform created by the visioning boards is in a state of flux and definitely a case of work-in-progress. Strong engagement experiences are weighing heavily on the construction of detailed plans for citizen participation, and the interviewee provided a big tumbling story which centred on lessons from the past that inform the shape of the engagement projects which will emerge over time within the new political decision-making system.

## Themes

### A mission for change

The municipality traditionally had very many boards whose numerous and sometimes overlapping and conflicting decisions had somehow to coalesce and provide effective outcomes through the Executive Board's ability to

put it together [Mayor].

On the surface the boards appeared to be efficient and vital operations that would typically take quite fast decisions on the basis of work done by groups of four or five people on a particular issue. The sheer volume and mix of short and longer-term political and administrative-type decisions that emanated from the boards had made the system unwieldy and tangled, and swamped the Executive Board with the imperative to sort out, balance and marshal these choices together into a coherent whole-of-kommun approach.

The Mayor perceives the Kommun as a place with: weak political discussion; initiatives arising more from day to day activities and imperatives rather than from the elected council; politicians not being representative strongly enough for the citizenry; a low profile for community engagement; a long complicated process for moving from idea to political decision to administrative implementation; poor clarity around the respective roles of politicians and civil servants; a lack of evaluation and follow-up around policy and action; and a society disconnected with politicians and the municipality's work (unless they felt poorly-done by with infrastructure and services). As a reaction to this context, a discussion ensued amongst influential politicians about how to change the political system, and there was ready agreement that

we have to do something new [Mayor].

The search for a better way started with reducing the number of boards and changing the way they operate and interface with the Kommun's work. So a group of politicians went on a mission to find examples of systemic alternatives.

In terms of the forces for community engagement (refer Figure 2-3), 'a performance failure' of the traditional political system (and the administrative interface) is apparent, with a consequent need to realign politicians' activities and municipal work. There is also a feeling of 'necessity' for 'a more inclusive overarching governance system' to break in the relative 'disconnect'

between citizens and the Kommun. The contemporary issue for Swedish local government of a widening gap between citizens and politicians- refer SALAR (2007c) in section 4.3.6 - is in evidence here.

### **Seeing the light –systemic change**

Much travelling ensued around Sweden to discuss possibilities with other kommunns. In the end, after one trip by seven politicians to a particular municipality (this time without the Mayor),

they came back: we have seen the light. Now we know how we want it. Okay, I said. I started to be a little bit scared and understood I shouldn't have left them alone [Mayor].

The visiting politicians had found a system where the Executive Board made the decisions on a daily basis, or in the short-term, in order to make the council an effective producer of services. Other boards had the task of visioning, and had two key characteristics. Firstly their visioning process was heavy with community engagement and they were meeting with very many people using a wide variety of mechanisms. Secondly, such boards formulated ideas for the future which would then be put directly the council for advice to indicate

this is the way we are going to do it, then the Executive Board was to do those things [Mayor].

So the Kommun adopted its own form of visioning and development boards early in 2007, each having no employees bar a secretary to help with organising and reporting. Boards have been created to cover education, culture and recreation, building society, security, care for the elderly and social welfare. Whereas in the past individual boards were pressured for specific action, now they concentrated on questions around needs that were central for the community and could leave the Executive Board free to concentrate on the task of leading and coordinating the administration of the municipality's affairs and taking the action. The vision board's role is to pose and answer big questions with significant public input, and then feed important ideas and priorities to the assembly (the council).

Now they are meeting at a board and they say: okay, this is white (blank) paper, what do you want to do? And what is the goal for our politics in this municipality? The discussion is now how do we get to know what the people want? [Mayor].

The process of whittling down the number of boards had to proceed slowly at first because member of extant ones resisted and resented the loss of their role.

The concept of ideas travelling (Czarniawska 1996) resonates here, but choices in adapting another kommun's orientation for the board-executive committee-administration roles and interface appear to be made for matters of fit and effectiveness rather than for other purposes.

### **The real political issues**

The four visioning boards now handle a raft of important issues that previously had been bypassed or had swamped the Executive Board. Visioning board members had started to find their own way in going out to meet people and ascertaining the real political issues; the central questions underpinning what the community wants in the next few years. So more traditional debates, like where a school should be situated or the right teacher-pupil ratio or expenditure per student, give way to crucial central political questions that underpin most other matters. For instance,

(what) per cent more every year should be able to go to university or the higher education - so that we have goals [Mayor].

With the old way of thinking there was a perception that it was too easy to put more money into the system without understanding or obtaining what is really wanted by the community.

The big new thing is how to be able to listen to the people in the municipality and turn that into visions and goals for this administration [Mayor].

### **Cutting up the issues**

The Kommun is grappling with how to apportion issues between the visioning boards, the executive board and other political and administrative actors, and the extent to which different stakeholders are debating means and/or ends. How this allocation is done will determine what decisions people will be involved in through engagement projects instituted by the visioning boards.

where do we cut the issues, who gets to do what, and that is not so easy because it's very easy to start thinking: oh, we should do this ... [Mayor].

The issues can be tackled by looking at means or ends. There is a concern that if visioning boards focus too much on activities, the means rather than the ends, then this would

compromise the likelihood of the engagement challenging and refreshing conventional overriding objectives. But without balancing consideration of ends with sufficient attention to the means, ends that are chosen may be compromised or unrealistic through a failure to factor-in the practicalities of real-life activity.

They have to know how it works [Mayor].

### **People who are steering at meetings**

Past experiences have led to an incremental shift of perceptions about whom the ‘spotlight’ should shine on in community engagement initiatives. In the previous era of many boards, where public meetings took place the focus was inevitably on politicians and administrators who showed up to present their ideas about what was going on and talk about potential solutions. In more recent engagement activities there has been some progress in giving people the space to contribute to ideas about objectives and practical solutions - for example objectives for how children should be treated as well as ideas around how to solve situations where they get bullied.

we (public officials) don't talk that much ... so we are trying to change the focus that the people that are steering, not the other way around [Mayor].

The mayor is most keen for the vision boards, in the engagement projects they institute in the future, to facilitate a situation where public opinion is sought out and can then be balanced against administrative advice and political views.

### **Visioning - the future and post-audits**

The vision boards have a mandate to report on the future while following-up and reflecting upon decisions made before. This is to counter a perceived shortcoming in the administration's ability to adequately reflect on the outcomes of policy decisions (for example, the prevalence of teen-drinking) as opposed to outputs (for example , the number of courses run) - the latter being well reported to the Executive Board and others.

When we say that we want the kids to drink less alcohol, they should actually report: how is the follow-up on that? Is it actually more? Is it less? Is it due to something we have done? Or has it actually just become all of Sweden has turned the same way? [Mayor].

Community engagement is considered to be critical to the ability of the vision boards to carry out their charter of looking forward with a perspective framed by looking back.

## **Extending depth and reach of community-based visioning through vision boards**

Prior to the establishment of the new boards, the Kommun used community-based visioning and the last iteration informed the Kommun's current 2010 plan. In that engagement process, fifty key persons from various boards and the administration constructed a draft vision which was then publicised via newspapers and brochures as being open for public comment. The draft examined the past, provided some thoughts and projections about the coming years, and flagged some possibilities - and then the question was turned over to the citizens by asking

And what do you want for the future? [Mayor].

A couple of hundred responses were received. The positive aspect was that a lot of ideas emerged along constructive lines like 'how can we make it even more nice to live here' rather than complaints. And so for example, suggestions about building anti-sound walls that had not at all been discussed in the draft plan were added as one of the ten key points.

As well as inviting written responses, open meetings were held for the general community and special groups like organisations for the elderly, companies and schoolchildren – and these also informed significant changes to the draft. There were profound difficulties, however, in getting many people, especially schoolchildren, to work at a vision level, as conversations and thoughts tended to drift off to more immediate practical matters. And so there is a perception that getting a deep contribution by citizens in future visioning activities will require the new boards to educate participants, access adequate resources, and expand their engagement competencies as they build up and leverage their networks across different age groups and interest groups in the community. But the detail of how, where and when the boards should engage with citizens is not settled.

Now we are starting a new process and now we're trying to say that now it's those four vision boards that are going out and they should have this discussion in every area [Mayor].

The Kommun's engagement with business stakeholders has centred on the Kommun's desire to increase the employability and employment of its inhabitants and attract industry to the area. The employers have been very keen to talk about ways to obtain a well-educated workforce and have contributed to informing students about occupational demands and career paths. So having a reach beyond inhabitants to business is anticipated to be a cornerstone in engagement projects that will be rolled out in conjunction with the new boards.

## **Presenting challenges and fuelling the debate**

Nearly ninety per cent of all staff and politicians have taken the opportunity presented by the Kommun to see Al Gore's movie on the environment, 'An Inconvenient Truth', and its showing has been facilitated more widely in the community. The whole council also had a four-hour discussion about the environment that wasn't connected to an issue that was on the agenda, and covered the agenda items in thirty minutes. Public officials have gone to groups in the community to discuss what they all can do for the future in terms of the environment, and have also challenged the new vision boards for their thoughts.

Could we do this, could we do that? So we focused on the big issues. This is quite a new way of thinking [Mayor].

## **A risky business**

A particular part of the Kommun's engagement history weighs very heavily with the interviewee and appears to moderate the extent to which future engagement projects will offer participants a measure of direct decision-making power. This incident has left the Mayor in no mood to rush to a settlement on the nature and form of the community engagement projects needed to feed into the new political structure exemplified by the vision boards. The incident concerns a rather disastrous attempt by the Kommun to develop a 'landmark' building that is emblematic for the municipality and community; albeit in a somewhat more modest fashion than controversial Malmo 'turning torso' tower for which the public at first

they said: terrible. And then when it was there: oh, this has put Malmo on the map, this is nice. It has made them proud of something ... it costs many times more than it should but in the long run it will fix itself. A lot of people have to leave their job because of that [Mayor].

The Mayor perceives that the high profile community engagement initiative which the Kommun launched over the plans for its own showpiece had backfired, and ultimately caused a retraction of the necessary political support which had been garnered before the citizen participation took place. The Kommun's engagement with the community over the proposal was a major project. For example, by day and evening politicians manned tents in the city square as open informal meeting spaces in which models and architect's impressions were displayed and matters discussed with the public.

The development was contingent on the approved plan being large enough to justify investment in costly new access roads and a major bridge. The plan was attacked on many fronts by different groups. Some were concerned about additional traffic in their area, others objected to the visual bulk of the building, and rather ironically some objected on the basis of environmental messages reflected in the Al Gore film which the Kommun had promoted. Few in the community objected to every element in the project, but since the building, roads and bridges were contingent on each other, loss of support in any one was sufficient to defeat the project.

we say we will make it possible, then it all falls to pieces [Mayor].

The political and reputational fallout and the assault on trust were strongly felt by the interviewee and other proposal supporters from political and administrative ranks. Many inhabitants from the 'silent majority' were perceived to be unhappy about the proposal's demise, as high hopes had been raised in the general community about a new centre, more shops, additional apartments, and improved road access to the city centre. The Mayor feared a slow decline in the city centre without the redevelopment, and saw this as being to the detriment of the common good and the result of a concerted campaign by different self-interested groups to influence the stance of the political parties.

The Mayor considers that the engagement has effectively killed this proposal as it stands. And while the venom and outfall from the participation had taken him by surprise, the Mayor still appeared positive about the momentum and the future for community engagement.

I don't think you can say: okay, we won't do it because there are wrong people coming. We won't do it that way because we must find a better way [Mayor].

Despite some frustration by politicians and managers who believed their stance on the tower proposal was very good, prior experience has shown that sometimes adverse public reaction can end up having a positive influence in retrospect, and sometimes

has changed the decision to the better [Mayor].

### **Deaf ears to closed minds or self-interest**

While the momentum for engagement is strong, the Mayor does not subscribe to a notion that any engagement is a positive thing. The perception is that if people are engaged just to be

against something, and are not for something, then they are not interested in getting the whole picture and so

they cannot think that we are going to listen to them fully, because we have to make other priorities [Mayor].

Closed minds are perceived as sometimes attributable to people misunderstanding the difficult role that politicians have in needing to make tough choices and having to prioritise goals and resources, or holding a misguided belief that the nature of politics is concentrated on fixing-up people's particular problems in the short term.

And there is a perception that even people who understand and acknowledge the hardship of being a politician and the difficulties inherent in having to make tough choices, generally lose sight of this when their own interests are challenged.

But then we take money from somewhere else and those are screaming [Mayor].

### **Creating an uproar**

The Mayor argues that engagement initiatives make it even more difficult for individual politicians to turn a deaf ear towards narrow interests and maintain their ground. The perception is that such groups have simple but effective strategies to make their issues or opinions appear more important or pervasive than is justified.

I would put together a group with ten persons, I would let those ten persons call three or four persons in each party, and I could guarantee you I could change the agenda on that issue quite easily because people will think: so many. Because there isn't that many people that come and say: we want to do this, we want to do that ... and you try to make it look like it's not from the same group ... then there is an uproar [Mayor].

An example of such an uproar is found in the community engagement initiative about a proposal to site a home for 'troubled' girls in a central location. Vehement opposition from some local residents was founded on accusations that the facility would be a home for undesirable people and a magnet for their equally reviled 'friends', and so it was argued to be detrimental to local residents' lives. Such was the pressure on politicians that the plan had to be scrapped. And when the home was ultimately built in an outlying area, the residents there encountered no problems and in fact many did not know, or forgot, that the home existed.

In giving negative examples of citizen participation in decision-making processes and yet pressing on in practice with ideas like incorporating more engagement through the visioning boards, the Mayor indicates a stance on community engagement that is comfortable with the potential wins, losses, and tradeoffs. A net benefit is still perceived from trying to engage, even with a risk, as experienced in the past, of vocal vested interests succeeding with an agenda that collides with what the Kommun perceives as rational decision making. Taking the descriptions of past experiences and the future plans for engagement in aggregate, the perception appears to be that as more and more engagement experiments that are conducted, over time a wider group of citizens will become more attuned and prepared to participate, and the Kommun's politicians and staff will develop greater skills, motivation, processes and resources to entice wider and more reflective participation. Engagement projects run through the visioning boards are to be a major component of this ramping up of experience through experimentation.

we start to think about the things and they say: you can do this, you can do that, and a lot of those things actually comes to life [Mayor].

### **A jury on the horizon**

A big problem in the past when seeking community views has been the propensity of middle-aged men and opponents of a particular idea to be the main ones show up to invited hearings. As one antidote to this scenario, a proposition is to form a citizen jury to feed-in to the visioning boards. The jury would comprise about ten persons who would be prepared to answer pre-prepared and very-open questions in a lot of different areas as members of the community. The thinking is to get people who would not normally engage to commit to eleven days of tasks on full pay as

a very interesting way of getting other inputs than those normally we would get [Mayor].

Regardless of whether a jury or some other mechanism under consideration (like the public meetings and written submissions of the old visioning process) is chosen by a vision board to facilitate its community engagement, from the Mayor's descriptions the Kommun's desire is for the citizenry to act as 'co-learners' and the public officials as 'co-learners' and 'facilitators' (Roberts 2004). Whether participants actually become 'framers' of agendas, issues, and visions (Epstein et al. 2005; Marshall et al. 2004) or something less forceful, is an open question. The involvement of inhabitants in a visioning process that considers post-audits as well as the future suggests that citizens may also have a role as 'evaluators' of government services (Epstein et al. 2005; Marshall et al. 2004).

## **Posing the right questions**

Putting questions and related information to participants in vision board engagement projects in a form that people understand, is perceived to be to be a major element that will determine the success of citizen participation. This involves how the question is framed and the background provided to support it. Some questions in past engagement exercises appear to have been very hard to ask and very hard to answer. For example it appears that in the engagement about the 'landmark' building, the municipality was unable to get across complex information in a simple enough way for people to fully realise how integral one part of the proposal was to others. So there will be a strong emphasis in the vision board engagement projects on

how to put the questions that you ask (and) understand what the result is [Mayor].

## **Need to blend community engagement with strong political agendas**

The Mayor suggests that if members of municipal boards are altruistic people without firm politics or lack the will to make strong political choices, then they will tend to see things in a very short term fashion, miss the bigger picture, and acquiesce when some people act expediently or in their own narrow interests. The Mayor's strong advocacy for more community engagement, especially to do with higher-level issues of vision, along with his wariness about capture by narrow or uninformed interests (a reaction formed by experience and emphasised by a prominent professor in political science who had recently visited the municipality), suggests that room for proponents of engagement to acknowledge the dangers or shortcomings in participatory activities without having a crisis of faith in the concept is necessary.

Much more passion now ... that we should communicate with people of this community more [Mayor].

## **Separating and connecting practical and vision matters**

An understanding has developed that practical and vision matters need to be considered separately but are at the same time connected, and the contribution that the public can make to these higher ideas can easily be underestimated or underutilised. For example, the Kommun conducts area meetings in the different parts of the municipality four or five times a year. Previously, where community engagement was expected to centre on fixing things (for example, more sand or less snow), staff from administration were the ones who attended, provided a brief outline of relevant council initiatives, and then the focus shifted onto allowing inhabitants to discuss things. The administrators arranged for the practical fixes and then politicians typically followed-up a week or so later.

In later iterations of neighbourhood or single issue meetings it seemed more useful to try to get some matters discussed to a higher level, and so Kommun sent out politicians and administrators who generally asked some strategic questions (for example, ideas about how to develop the Kommun) as well as answering more practical day-to-day concerns (some of which had already been asked in advance and responses formulated in writing). Sometimes twenty persons show up and are matched by ten or so politicians, or for major single issues it is not uncommon to get one hundred participants. There is perceived to be a tension between politicians acting in engagement situations as advocates for their party's policies, or acting as representatives of the municipality as a whole. The desire is to design engagement projects for the visioning boards in away to encourage the latter stance and to listen and learn about the practical things and higher level issues.

If you are not careful you could be very easily: okay, we think this, we think that, and then people won't come there again [Mayor].

There appears to be a strong desire for the community engagement for the visioning boards to mix dialogue about higher level matters with discourse about things that are experienced in peoples' everyday lives.

### **Visibility and the Kommun's reporting as a hook**

The idea of community engagement has altered how the Kommun reports to people, who are reported to, how much they discuss alternative perceptions and the meaning of reports.

A special report to citizens is published as an annual supplement in a local commercial newspaper and is reputedly read by over ninety-five per cent of the inhabitants. Feedback from the range of the Kommun's engagement projects indicates that citizens want to know where their money goes, and so new charts summarise where each one hundred crowns in taxes is spent. Traditional reporting of the last year's events and achievements from a council perspective is now counterposed against citizens' comments.

We have a little bit like a newspaper: what do you think? What was most important for you last year? What are the goals for the administration? [Mayor].

In the future, with inputs from the engagement by the vision boards, the Mayor expects this report to become much more forward looking document than an achievement summary and further increase engagement, voting, and people being interested in becoming politicians.

That is actually one of the objectives or goals: if you go to what the hopes for the future is then we make the citizens want to take active part in the decision making [Mayor].

### **Press reporting as a drawcard for engagement**

The Mayor argues that the high quality and incisiveness of journalists who do the local reporting scrutinises, publicises and challenges the work of local government in a way that adds to the interest in the municipality and should provide a drawcard for people to engage with the visioning boards.

they don't write: oh, now they have done this catastrophe and now they have done this, they are really trying to understand [Mayor].

The journalists are actively fed through the Mayor's newsletter every Friday to all Kommun employees and the press that discusses events and issues – in which:

for every bad news you have you have to have ten good news to balance [Mayor].

But the journalist don't simply just take all they are 'fed', and the Mayor believes that their toughness and insightfulness adds interest for inhabitants and businesspeople in municipal affairs in a way that the major regional newspaper can't and won't.

when I discuss the budget: we have this one hundred million extra and it's very good. (The reporter responds) Okay, the pays have gone up, and the index has gone up, and that means that actually you have less money. Then you realise, okay, you can't do the normal (indistinct) with the numbers so she is very well read, she knows about the system [Mayor].

### **Self-interest limits the impact level**

On one hand the Mayor believes that engagement by the visioning boards will inform, and lead to, good and defensible policy.

I think you can get it [Mayor].

But the spectre of self-interest and a perception that most people cannot or will not grasp the bigger picture leaves the Kommun firmly resolved that council will make the final choice in all matters under discussion. In terms of the IAP2 (2004) framework (refer Figure 2-5), *consult* is the intended level of participation and the ideal is no more than to explore options and preferences with citizen and business stakeholders. There is no firm commitment for the visioning boards to take ideas and preferences on board in a way that would elevate the citizen participation to the *involve* level; even if a citizen panel were instituted. Indeed, the matching of mechanisms to levels of participation noted in Figure 2-7 indicates that panels are suited for work at a *consult* level. At this level of impact it is hard to characterise the community acting as ‘makers and shapers’ (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001) rather than ‘users and choosers’ of services, and the actuality is likely to lie somewhere in between those two poles. The Kommun had found visioning to a complex and difficult challenge in the past, and while Robinson’s (2002) matrix (refer Figure 2-8) for public participation suggests a higher level of participation than *consult* is preferable with relatively high levels of complexity and risk, past experiences have the Kommun shying away from this option.

The Mayor argues that when the council is accused of making the wrong decision it is usually the right one as most boards are adequately mindful of peoples needs and the greater good, and asserts that if citizens had been in the room and heard the same information they would likely have come to the same conclusions.

### **Democracy is the main game**

As with past engagement exercises to do with vision-setting, the rationale of citizen participation in the new visioning boards is to allow people’s needs and priorities to be better reflected in the Kommun’s objectives and plans. The boards are meant to provide a vehicle for embedding citizen participation as a genuine and well-functioning norm. And so high-level double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon 1978) (refer section 3.4) is sought as the engagement process tackles the ‘real political issues’ in order to question the underlying assumptions behind objectives and strategies. The experimentation with community engagement projects within the larger visioning board initiative that is planned, and the construction of the boards themselves as changes to previous political structures indicate another phase of double-loop learning to do with structures and processes.

But while citizens are seen as being able to contribute to the emergence of the objectives in a new vision, the Mayor argues that the dialogue enabled by the new visioning initiative is more

about democratic connection and trust-building, than politicians expecting better plans and action as a result,

It's more of a democracy because I don't think anyone thinks that it (plans and action) actually will change that much in the real world. I can be very frank. A lot of people think that it will be a revolution, but I don't think so [Mayor].

Democracy and trust are seen to be well served through community engagement because regardless of which way the Kommun's decision goes, most inhabitants are perceived as likely to be satisfied if they are met by public officials and have an opportunity to be heard.

Even if we do it another way, they feel, okay, they made another decision but they were listening so a lot of the thing is to actually meet people [Mayor].

### **Real dialogue**

The Kommun has a tradition of citizens taking up matters at the political level on an ad-hoc basis.

they call, or they just knock on the window and they come in, and then we look at it [Mayor].

However the Mayor considers that there has not been a tradition of sustained engagement by politicians with their citizens which can be said to have really created substantial levels of 'dialogue', and believes that word is used too freely. The perception is that dialogue of the type and scale that can give the community a sense of purpose and place and advance good ideas can emerge through systematic engagement initiatives like the vision boards. There is a belief that a real revolution could take place in municipal affairs if politicians operated in a more open and proactive way by

spending just one tenth of the time that we spend in meetings we are spending out with people on the streets ... I think we have to be more proud of the profession as a politician [Mayor].

### **Natural recipients and users of information**

In the past, the scale of information received from various engagement exercises like area meetings can be a problem – those with the interest, responsibility and authority to use the feedback have to be found, and fed effectively with the ideas. There is a perception that much

valuable information falls into the proverbial black hole because of the sheer quantity, and an inability to distil and communicate the essential, rather than peripheral, matters.

they have a tendency they don't want to write two sides summary, what was the question, and what was the answer - because that is what I want [Mayor].

Information is also lost by a failure to know and find who the right recipients are, and it is fraught with danger to assume that the public officials who logically should be interested will seek the findings out.

they don't ask after what happened, so I don't know [Mayor].

The vision boards are seen as helping to ameliorate the problem of information overload. Firstly, part of the brief to the boards is to look at ways to record, sort, use and disseminate the information they obtain through their engagement and other activities. Secondly, because the politicians on the boards are asking for particular information, a rationale for its collection exists along with a natural recipient and user. Hence there should be a reduction in information looking for a home and an application, or as Cohen (1972) puts it, less of solutions looking for issues.

### **Emerging categories**

The preceding themes can be aggregated into emerging categories to do with: a new way of structuring politics; looking forward and back at a higher level; discipline by ghosts of the past; roles of public officials; reporting as a hook; and democracy and trust.

### **A new way of structuring politics**

There are contexts where the point of departure for new levels of community engagement needs to be an overhaul of the system for political decision making and subsequent action, rather than an immediate foray into applying engagement mechanisms, as indicated by the themes of:

- A mission for change – citizen disconnect in a context of an inefficient political system
- Seeing the light: systemic change – adopting and adapting initiatives for effectiveness
- Cutting up the issues – deciding who determines and follows-up what balance of means and ends.

## **Looking forward and back at a higher level**

Discussing important central issues for the future in the light of past performance provides a useful focus for harnessing the potential of participation by citizens and companies to inform the work of government. Themes informing this concept are:

- People who are steering at meetings– allow the fresh ideas and practical solutions to emerge
- Extending the depth and reach of community-based visioning through vision boards – new structures and processes
- The real political issues – central objectives must be determined before subsidiary matters
- Visioning: the future and post-audits – necessity to look back whilst charting a forward course
- Presenting challenges and fuelling the debate – using big issues and current high-profile media
- Separating and connecting practical and vision matters – combining higher objectives and lived lives
- Posing the right questions – criticality of how questions are framed and background is provided
- Natural recipients and users of information – managing, condensing and targeting information.

## **Ghosts of the past**

The ghosts of past engagement experiences provide salutary lessons to discipline, or direct, future strategies and the levels of public impact - as illustrated by the themes of:

- A risky business – past experiences of narrow self-interest, and better and worse decisions
- Deaf ears to closed minds or self-interest – hardships for politicians to make tough choices
- Creating an uproar – capture by narrow interests can make way over time to reflective engagement
- Self-interest limits the impact level – narrow perspectives limiting level of participation allowed
- A jury on the horizon – a paid jury for the visioning board as an ideas machine
- Need to blend community engagement with strong political agendas – strong political will.

## **Reporting as a hook**

Innovative reporting by the Kommun about past and future performance can couple with strong reporting by the press to improve levels of interest and concern about the work of government and political life - as indicated by the themes of:

- Visibility and the Kommun's reporting as a hook – reporting in and out advances engagement
- Press reporting as a drawcard for engagement – benefits of critical and incisive media reporting.

## **Dialogue for democracy**

It is possible that community engagement may be looked at to provide a reasonable contribution to higher-level ideas, and yet the main game the proponents have in mind is not an ideas machine but a device to build on people's connection and satisfaction with democratic processes (regardless of which way decisions go). Consequently citizen-to-government trust and a feeling by people that it is 'their kommun' may emerge, and the themes that inform these imperatives are:

- Democracy is the main game – democracy outranks efficiency and effectiveness as goals
- Real dialogue – more effective dialogue through systematic initiatives and proactive politicians.

## **Informing the research framework**

This section presents a brief summary of how the vision boards engagement initiative relates to the ideals from the literature (refer Chapter 2) of better decision making, better government, better communities – as well as honouring democratic ideals. Then Figure 1/Appendix 2 indicates how thematic content from the case study informs the research framework (refer Figure 3-9). Given that this case study centres on a systemic change in which the engagement processes are in an embryonic stage, evidence for a number of elements in the research framework are limited to intentions - since ideas about how to engage are still swirling around and continue to look for options and opportunities.

## **Better decision making**

The initiative to construct vision boards that utilise community engagement to inform their debate and choices indicates an intent to use citizen participation to assist in shaping the first four elements for decision making in the management cycle (refer Figure 3-9) – problem

identification, prioritisation, goal setting and policy development. In addition, the element of monitoring and evaluation is implicated, as illustrated by the theme of ‘visioning - the future and post-audits’. The vision board initiative is part of a wider concern to make changes to streamline and improve decision making through increased clarity and effectiveness of internal political and administrative tasks, roles and processes. The vision boards are seen as the device by which community engagement can be harnessed and applied to good effect. But while subsequent citizen participation is expected to contribute to better decision making on the substantive issues that are tackled in a vision, the theme of ‘a matter of democracy rather than efficiency and effectiveness’ indicates an expectation for engagement to provide additive rather than transformative inputs into decision making – especially since the choices are to rest entirely with politicians. So the input of the community will be restricted to a consultative role – regardless of the actual engagement mechanism(s) applied to the projects initiated by each Board for listening to ideas, concerns and priorities.

The case themes suggest that of the functions to do with better decision making that were discerned in the literature (refer Figure 2-4), better decision processes are envisaged. These processes include evaluations of past performance along with the capture of dispersed stakeholder knowledge (including from businesses), and increased understandings about complex issues that matter most and which underpin the big policy questions.

### **Better government**

The visioning boards are predicated on systemic change and community engagement, and have significant potential to impact on intellectual capital (refer section 3.3.2).

The vision boards initiative is part of a bigger plan to improve internal capital through enhanced political decision-making processes and a clearer interface with civil servants’ responsibilities. Internal capital would also be improved if the actual application of citizen participation improves the critical fields of visions and evaluation – since the former is the compass for the Kommun’s work and the latter is an important information process for accountability and future decision making. Prior innovations and experimentation with engagement projects along with new citizen participation in visioning have the potential to add to organisational structures, routines and processes. However, the category ‘the ghost of the past’ indicates that the Kommun is, and will be, extremely wary about processes for engagement since it is alive to the dangers in capture by vested interests or in dealing with people with a narrow view or understanding. The organisational culture has not been steeped in engagement that typically provides what the

Mayor considers to be real dialogue, and there is a potential for that aspect of internal capital to improve as more engagement projects permeate the Kommun's activities and consciousness.

The need for the vision boards and associated community engagement can also be viewed as a response to shortcomings in the capacities within the human capital that is tied up with politicians (such as failure to communicate with and adequately represent the citizens) and administrators (for example deficits in follow-ups and evaluation). There is evidence that politicians especially need more skill and motivation in engaging with inhabitants. So the application of engagement projects by the vision boards can be expected to at least put on the pressure for specific improvement in human capital; although how such progressions might happen is an open question.

While the Kommun has had a potpourri of engagement initiatives in the past, especially some rather dramatic episodes to do with the infrastructure proposals, the connection between the municipality and the community was perceived as less than it ought to be. And so the application of vision boards that use community engagement projects has the potential to expand external capital by providing a regular structured platform for interchange of ideas.

The vision boards and their future projects in citizen participation, along with related initiatives like improved reporting by the Kommun that is designed to generate public interest in politics and the work of the municipality, all stand to provide a number of functions to do with improving the sustainability of government that are noted in the literature (refer Figure 2-4). The Mayor was resolute about the importance of community engagement in generating trust and providing public confidence that the government listens to its community. Notions of apathy and political stability are expected to be addressed as increased public interest is generated in what the government does. In turn new networks, relationships and government learning are anticipated by the Mayor.

In terms of the attributes of local governing presented in Figure 2-2, the vision boards initiative indicates a shift towards more pluralistic processes, a stronger belief in the knowledge contained in the public domain, and an eye to local democratic values. However any propensity for a shift in these levers to nudge to model of governing towards community governance is limited by a reluctance of the public officials to consider any more than a *consult* level of participation, and so risks of a rather technocratic approach (United Nations 2004) remain.

## **Better community**

The community has already shown itself to be articulate, forceful and resourceful in recent forays in community engagement; groups with common interests have demonstrated an ability to work in a concerted fashion. There were no particular claims in the interview in community capacity matters of ‘enhanced citizen ability’ or ‘community group ability’ (Cuthill & Fien 2005) (refer 3.3.3), except for a hope that more engagement experiments will, over time, lure a wider cross-section of the community to improve the group ability through a more united approach to issues. There is also a desire for future engagement projects to shape a more ‘collaborative community culture’ through open dialogue and trusting relationships between the municipality and citizens.

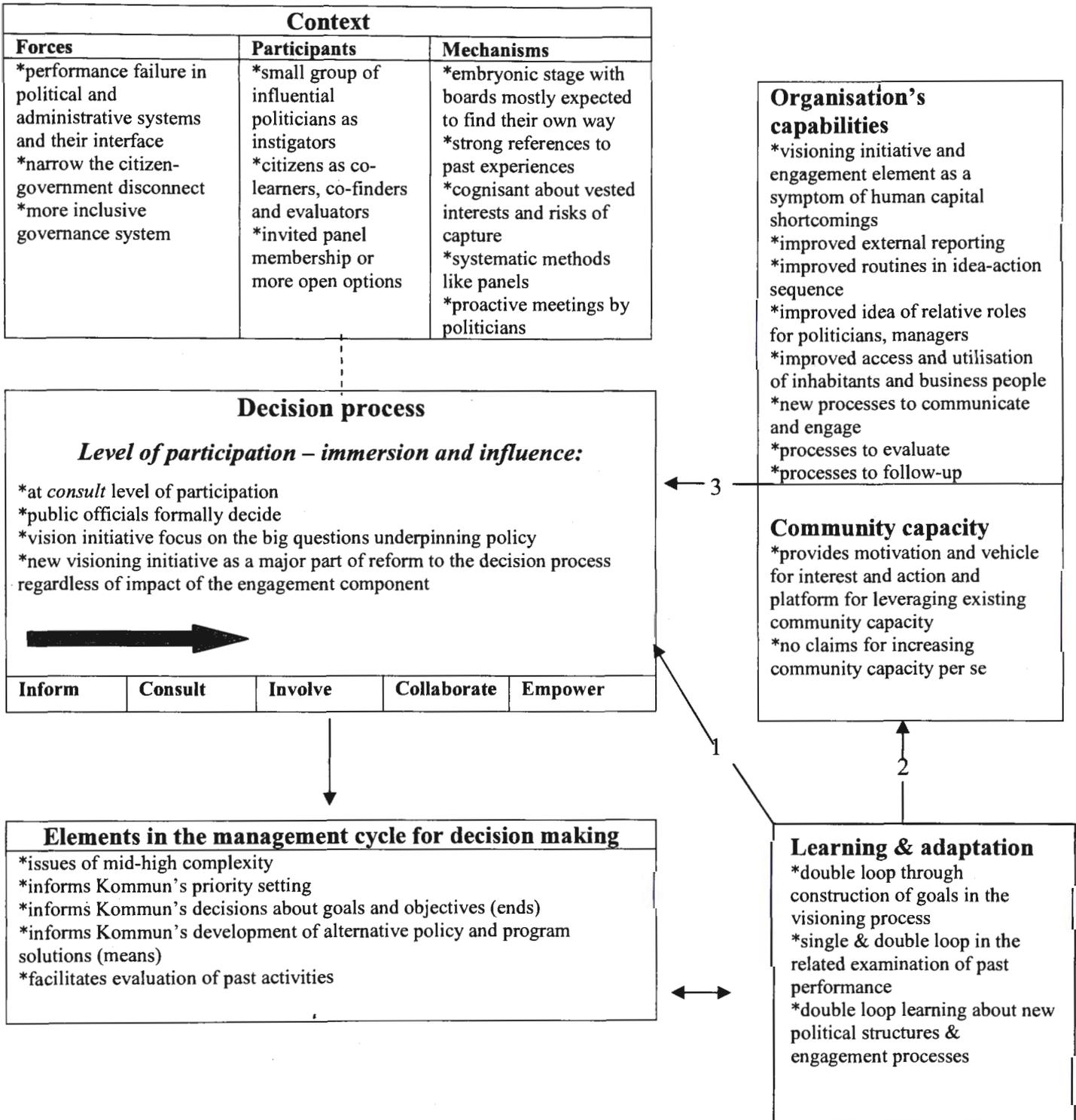
The functions to do with strengthening cohesion and capacity in the community that are noted in the literature (refer Figure 2-4) remain largely open questions. For example, while in theory a function of community engagement can be to reduce NIMBY (not in my back yard) syndrome, the Mayor was quite resigned to the view that self-interest is a fact of life, and had to be managed in a sanguine manner through how engagement inputs from the engagement process were understood and treated.

Hartz-Karp (2004, p. 15) warns of a situation where community engagement “... implemented is full of people with special interests. Participants are keen to express their own views, but largely uninterested in learning from one another”; a situation reflected in the Mayor’s view of the on-going reality of things. Hartz-Karp’s model of a resultant vicious cycle (2004, p. 15) cautions that social capital can be damaged rather than bolstered in such a context. While what eventuates at the Kommun will depend on how the engagement projects to inform the vision boards are managed and who participates with what agenda, Hartz-Karp suggests that a higher level of participation than is proposed by the municipality is conducive to solidifying social capital.

## **Honouring democratic ideals**

Engagement was tied to pragmatic objectives of reform rather than notions of a right or a duty.

**Figure 3/Appendix 2 Research framework - the form and function of the visioning boards initiative**



Developed from Figure 3-9 and the themes, categories and discussion in Appendix 2.

## **Appendix 3 – The participatory budgeting**

An in-depth interview was conducted on site in November 2007 with the Development Manager who has responsibility for the carriage of community engagement matters. And on the same day, an interview was undertaken in a nearby major city with a Project Manager from the Kommun who had worked integrally with the municipality's community engagement projects.

### **Background**

With close to 100,000 inhabitants, the Kommun is a large municipality at the fringe of a greater metropolitan area. The population is characterised as relatively young and multicultural; around one in five inhabitants are born outside Sweden. There are neighbourhood areas with relative disadvantage in terms of employment levels, wealth and education. The ideal of citizen participation, co-operation, and open dialogue between politicians, employees and inhabitants features heavily in the Kommun's published vision and other literature.

### **Community engagement initiative – participatory budgeting**

The Kommun's 'participatory budgeting' program is the boldest amongst a number of projects that have been developed in recent years to have citizens participate in the work of the municipality. Budgets are the 'bottom-line' of government policy and action, and provide the platform for how policies will be implemented (Learner 2004). Participatory budgeting brings local communities into the decision-making process around formal resource allocation plans (Hall 2005), and so enables citizens to have a direct say in service and infrastructure expenditure (Learner 2004).

Three main dimensions of the Kommun's participatory budgeting initiative are examined in the case. One is the 'future workshops' engagement initiative that acted as the springboard and template for many of the participatory budgeting structures and processes. Another is the 'participatory budget' for infrastructure, which is the first and only such initiative to be operationalised. And there is the 'participatory budget proposal', which is a movement to have a second project in the future.

The nature and key themes of the engagement initiative are discussed in the following section.

## Themes

### **Demonstrating better political contact**

Over recent years the Kommun has backed up its vision for more citizen participation with a number of experiments in different community engagement projects.

we are really trying to implement in our entire organisation now, it's this way of thinking, to really increase the quality of our work [Development Manager].

The participatory budgeting engagement initiative for infrastructure was a '2006 election-year' community engagement initiative by the party that had, but subsequently lost, the majority. One key purpose behind the then governing party's push for the development of what is perceived as the first substantial participatory budgeting initiative for local government in Sweden, was a desire to increase the interaction between people and their municipality. A more immediate reason was perceptions that the political proponents saw the potential for participatory budgeting to improve their election support by indicating that they were in good contact with people, they valued their ideas and opinions, and they were inclusive and innovative in the way things were done.

for politicians to want something like this they must have a real need for it ... different people do different things. I think the purpose was to increase the voting and local democratic development [Development Manager].

In terms of the forces for community engagement in the literature (refer Figure 2-3), this initiative was part of a continuing concern by ruling politicians about a 'disconnect' of the community with matters of democracy and government. This disconnect had manifested in a relatively poor and declining voter turnout, which mirrors the situation faced by other Swedish local governments - refer SALAR (2007c) in section 4.3.6. The profile given to community engagement in general within the Kommun's recent literature, together with the political support and resources committed to the participatory budgeting program by the ruling party of the day, indicates forces of 'necessity' combined with a belief in the 'efficacy' of the project as a harbinger of public trust and ballot-box support.

### **Competencies and experience for the 'next step'**

Prior to the participatory budget for infrastructure, nobody in the Kommun had any direct experience or great knowledge of participatory budgeting as a concept or practice. Indeed, the

interviewees note that it was, and is, a rather foreign concept to Swedish local government. However once confronted, the ideal did not require a completely ‘cold start’ since the municipality had been experimenting with a number of engagement activities over the years that had elements of structure and practice that matched the ‘DNA’ required by a participatory budgeting project. A clear message resonates about the importance of building up a significant bank of internally developed experience, and developing locally appropriate responses, if more ambitious engagement projects are to reach their full potential.

Many people want to bring things (engagement initiatives) in very quick now but processes have to have some organic growth ... better to learn and change the system yourself or then it becomes dangerous [Project Manager].

The Kommun’s prior experience and successes in substantial community engagement projects were perceived as an essential springboard for tackling subsequent larger or more complex initiatives, and in making the prospect attractive to internal and external participants and practically do-able. The Kommun had extensive structures, competencies and processes which it then leveraged in the election-year participatory budget for infrastructure.

For the infrastructure project, most of the participatory budgeting methodology was constructed without particularly strong references to overseas practice, and was essentially developed from first principles; ideas from governing politicians and a few civil servants; and especially via practical experiences gained in running prior engagement initiatives. So while ‘ideas travel’ (Czarniawska 1996), and the key actors came to know of participative budgeting projects by local governments in South America and parts of Europe, the shape and form of this local program evolved from understandings of the local political, social and economic context and learnings from their own prior engagement projects. The ‘first mover’ nature of this project, and the emphasis on practical outcomes of attracting increased interest in local government and more votes, indicates that the proponents looked to a performance-related rationality rather than for other reasons.

So the Kommun’s continual experimentation with different forms of citizen engagement and the ramping up in the sophistication of engagement initiatives over time, calls attention to the value in incrementally building competencies and experiences before each ‘next step’ towards a more ambitious engagement project is taken. The idea with the participatory budget was to leverage existing engagement skills in developing a methodology and expanded competencies to suit the

local political, administrative and societal context, and then expand from that first budgeting experiment.

it could be something that we do on a regular basis that each area [Development Manager].

### **Future workshops as a springboard**

‘Future workshops’ have been a pivotal input into the participatory budgeting process in two main ways. Firstly, many of the crucial operational skills that enabled the budgeting project to be undertaken were developed through activities in the future workshops project. These competencies included internal negotiations, publicity and reaching out to inhabitants, conducting and facilitating, public meetings, reporting, and disseminating findings. Secondly, those workshops had been seen as relative successes by the ruling politicians, and so attracted stakeholders to the ideal and viability of community engagement.

These future workshops have been held yearly in different neighbourhood areas. The initial workshop started by way of funding through a federal initiative to cut back on segregation in larger cities, and then this medium for citizen participation was continued under the Kommun’s own funding. This initiative was, and is, fundamentally

a community strengthening exercise, yes, you could say that [Development Manager].

Each future workshop involves a big meeting of civil servants, politicians and local citizens to discuss the situation in the neighbourhood and talk about possible improvements. People get to say whatever they want, ideas are put onto posters and then a vote on the various alternatives is taken using stickers. Most of the voting is for alternative solutions to already well known problems, and up to one hundred thousand Swedish crowns is made available to associations of people, that already exist or are newly formed, to pursue particular ideas or purposes that are identified and prioritised in the meetings. So nothing concrete will happen as a result of the workshops unless the people who attend really want to go ahead with something, but there can be support.

Sometimes it happens that someone from the municipality, the administration, say we have this room that you can use and we have maybe a bit of money, we can support you with someone who can help you ten hours a week or something. And another association says: okay, we have the people who can do this and so on, so it's really the purpose is to

make co-operation possible [Development Manager].

The future workshops gave the civil servants in charge of implementing the participatory budgeting initiative valuable experience in running large open meetings, and developing ways for participants to feel comfortable speaking, interacting and making their preferences known. The experience also highlighted possibilities of cooperation within and between community groups and the municipality.

### **Knowing how to engage from the citizens' viewpoint**

Valuable lessons for the conduct of the participatory budgeting project have also been learnt from trialling a citizen jury that advised on removing obstacles to inhabitants engaging with their municipality. The jury provided valuable suggestions in terms of how the Kommun might go about publicity, documentation, feedback, reporting and other practicalities.

Is it to have interpreters or is it to have someone watching their kids, for example?  
[Development Manager].

From a random selection and invitation to over one thousand inhabitants, about forty people ended up accepting the offer of three hundred Swedish Crowns to be involved in the panel, and a good mix of participants was perceived to have eventuated as a result of this process.

The 'usual suspects'. None of them were there, it was all new faces and the majority of them, I think almost everyone except one or two, said: I've never been to something like this before [Development Manager].

### **Attendance by politicians and managers is crucial**

There is perceived to be no way to report on the ideas and preferences that citizens are expressing during engagement activities in a way that can be a substitute for the understandings that can be gained when public officials attend participatory events in person.

It's also really crucial that we have people in high positions in the public administration and that we have politicians [Development Manager].

The internal staff responsible for engagement projects like the future workshops and the participatory budget have pushed hard for the attendance of public officials. While the politicians have been pretty good at being there the civil servants in higher positions have not.

## **Keeping the scope for contribution broad**

The participatory budgeting project for infrastructure had three main external dimensions: securing alternative proposals from the community and discussion and prioritisation of these; having the community's priority proposals professionally 'worked-up' as officially sanctioned alternative solutions; and citizen voting to make the final choice. Two key internal dimensions of the project centred around deciding on the area of council work where participatory budgeting resource allocation would be applied and finding an amount of money to work with.

The participation process was designed so that people could send in ideas and proposals on a wide range of possibilities. Around one hundred and seventy suggestions or proposals were received for a broad question about 'what infrastructure for the area would make the Kommun a better place for local inhabitants to live in'.

people could send in written proposals: we would like to do this [Development Manager].

These ideas were then advanced and debated in a public meeting where people got to discuss, add to, and prioritise the different proposals put forward. Around seventy people showed up, and after some open discussion, proposals were firmed up, consolidated to some degree, and displayed in poster form on the walls.

The success of this phase appears attributable to two factors. Firstly, the broad scope that people were given in thinking about what should be done had enthused participation and encouraged a good level of submissions and meeting turnout, especially given the disadvantage and turnover in the area. Secondly, the processes for the publicity, the meeting facilitation and the proposal posters had worked well, and this was largely because they had been developed and honed through the future workshops and other engagement experiences. Then there was what is perceived as the bid drawcard of the event.

and then people got to vote [Development Manager].

## **Easy, informal and influential non-binding decision making**

The processes used in the participatory budgeting project for handling and prioritising the proposals for voting had been derived from the future workshop experiences. Voting to prioritise the proposals was done through the simple medium of each inhabitant allocating their coloured stick-on dots. Then top ten proposals were sorted and resorted into compatible groups, and three different options for the physical environment emerged - to do with a city centre, a

beach, and a green area. This surge of externally generated ideas proved a foil to autopoietic tendencies (Luhmann 2005) (refer section 2.8), since architects were commissioned to act on these external cues and structure alternative solutions around them.

take a lot of those proposals and put them together in a package ... and then there was something about each [Development Manager].

Up to this stage of rather informal voting for the community to prioritise proposals, the participatory budgeting exercise appears somewhat like the future workshops, except that that the proposals were invited in advance of the public meeting. The key difference lies in what happens after the prioritisation process. With the future workshops initiatives, for something further to happen with those priority ideas requires them to be taken up and supported actively by community associations and particular politicians and civil servants. The participatory budget promised a more certain end to the citizen participation story since the stage after the prioritisation of ideas was not left to the whim of associations or public officials to make something happen, but was programmed to feed directly into the construction of 'official' alternative plans to be prepared by consultants.

### **Co-operation and co-determination rather than empowerment is the message**

The architect's three draft plans for alternative solutions were then programmed to be put up for further public scrutiny and comment so that refinements could be made before final options were subjected to a citizen ballot by mail or electronic means.

The participatory budgeting process empowered citizens in two ways: through their ability to vote for their preferred proposals destined for the architects brief; and then again with their ability to choose between the three design alternatives. So in terms of the IAP2 (2004) participation spectrum (refer Figure 2-5), the *collaborate* level was clearly reached since ideas and preferences were taken on board as direct advice in the first tranche of voting, and the level of participation rose to empowerment on the second tranche of voting because of the public's ability to make a final choice. However the empowerment is not of an unbridled nature, because choices are confined to the politically approved alternative proposals that were crafted by external consultants; albeit that participant comments and later feedback were the genesis of these alternatives. While the introduction of a ballot into an engagement process is compatible with an empowerment of participation (refer Figure 2-7), the participative budget is clearly much more than a referendum in depth and breadth.

The Swedish word the Kommun uses for this top category of public influence is 'medbestämmande'. The Development Manager asserts that this term gives a clearer message of what the municipality's objective is than the English word *empower*, which is perceived as having an insufficient connection to the ideal of co-operation and working together to be either a very good description of what is wanted or politically acceptable. This objection appears to centre on the fact that the prime objective is not a handing over of power, though that happens to an unprecedented degree, but rather to decrease disconnect between citizens through the stakeholders working together on making decisions.

I think this might be translated into co-determination. This is what we've done, kind of our own version ... to take part in decision-making ... really the purpose is to make co-operation possible [Development Manager].

Relatively high levels of risk in social and environmental outcomes might reasonably be assumed if poor decisions are made in quite major expenditure on infrastructure. Also, the complexity of information that citizens had to deal with appeared to alter according to the position in the participatory budgeting process cycle. In the meetings where alternative problems and solutions were found and prioritised, or official proposals critiqued, information of more complexity was handled, whereas the final alternative solutions were presented and publicised in the simplest form possible when put to a vote. So aligning the risk and complexity in the case against levels of participation and appropriate engagement mechanisms advocated in Robinson's (2002) matrix of participation (refer Figure 2-8), a good fit appears when the initiative is considered two parts: the meetings and the final voting. The voting occurs at the intersection of reasonably simple information and relatively high risk in outcomes, is akin to a 'referendum' of sorts, and fits with a 'partnering' level of participation (which is analogous to the term 'co-determination' used in the case). The meetings dimension of the engagement is more in line with the level of activity indicated in the model for a 'deliberative forum'.

### **Easier with new 'pots' of money**

The ruling party had decided on the idea of doing a participatory budgeting experiment before being sure of where the money was going to come from, and to what area of council business it was to be applied. Fortuitously, what were anticipated to be two very difficult internal questions, the activity and the funds, fairly well resolved themselves when the Kommun sold some property in a relatively disadvantaged neighbourhood for the significant sum of fifteen million Swedish Crowns. Being outside the normal yearly Kommun funds, the windfall nature of the transaction made a pool of money obvious. The object and place for spending these funds,

the infrastructure in the disadvantaged neighbourhood, was also easy to settle because that area was its source and the facilities there needed upgrading. The confluence of the money showing up and a political desire to trial a participatory budget appears to have kept the funds intact for concentrated local spending, and deflected pressures for spreading them across different municipal projects.

### **Direct contact**

Involvement of citizens in the three key dimensions of the participatory budgeting - securing proposals, discussion and prioritisation of proposals; and voting for the final choice – was fostered by an information campaign through newspapers, local newspapers, the Kommun website, radio broadcasts, pamphlets and posters which cost around one hundred and thirty thousand Swedish Crowns. But past experience from other engagement initiatives had shown that if the Kommun wants to reach people who don't normally participate, outreach efforts would be required to supplement traditional or electronic means of informing. And so the information campaign included direct contact by facilitating staff with corporations, schools, and attempts to meet particular groups like youth, migrants and the elderly on their 'home ground'. The organisers were determined to avoid a situation where people who usually come will be the ones who appear again, and so

a lot of things were done to inform about this (but) the best way, one good way at least, is to go to the places where they are, meet them and tell them about this [Development Manager].

The Development Manager indicated that the Kommun was planning to use technologies of connection (White, N 2001) more in the future (such as a Internet chat site and social networking sites possibilities like Facebook) for direct contact, but so far there was no real substitute for the facilitation staff going out to meet prospective participants. In addition to the physical meeting of people, personally addressed letters to residents were also used wherever possible and were found to be effective.

impersonality can be an expense without a result – I got a letter to me – that's why I came [Development Manager].

Attracting public interest was made especially difficult due to the transitory nature of the population in the targeted disadvantaged area, and a consequent lack of identification by inhabitants with the neighbourhood and its future.

A big proportion of the population moves in while they are quite poor and then moves out when things are better [Development Manager].

### **Money and object as the hook**

With the participatory budget in particular, and with other engagement initiatives, money has provided a strong lure for participation. Making choices about money is perceived as a practical symbol of the government opening up in relation to some real influence by citizens and power-sharing, and the significant spending amount and spending object – better infrastructure – provided a strong motivator for the budget participation.

A subject to get you off the couch [Development Manager].

### **Educating the public about what is really being offered**

As the civil servant charged with running the community engagement initiatives, the Development Manager felt that short-term success in the participatory budget and other projects, and the longer-term sustainability of citizen participation in the work of the Kommun, depended very much on a front end education program for politicians, fellow managers and community members. The education program appears to have been designed as much to impact on stakeholders' motivation to engage, as provide them with knowledge and skills to assist in its planning and implementation of engagement projects.

A booklet that was a 'primer' on community engagement was produced in two versions- a longer version described as a 'handbook' for internal use, and an abbreviated 'guide book' version of that manual for external use. The handbook is an example of a strategy to produce examples and guidelines that illustrate and enable good practice (see Carson & Gelber 2001). Professionally printed and shaped by a graphic designer, the guide explained different levels of participation and alternative mechanisms so that internal and external parties are

actually to be more clear about what we are really offering people in different situations [Development Manager].

Again and again throughout the interviews the emphasis falls on the notion that a kommun must be explicit in exactly what the public are being offered, and the citizens must have the background to understand what is proffered. The perception is that is a disaster for trust,

relationships and future dialogue if inhabitants think they have the possibility to take part in decision making and it's really an information meeting or lesser consultation.

because there are experiences when you are not clear about that it only creates frustrations, disappointments and people feel like they've been tricked into something [Development Manager].

So the guidebook provides categories of participation levels, keywords, descriptions and examples of methods that have been used in the municipality to forewarn participants about what they can expect

like you get to know, you get to express opinions, discuss, implement, decide [Development Manager].

### **Educating the internal stakeholders - differently**

As well as describing different forms and levels of participation, the 'handbook' on community engagement includes a lot of other topics for the education of politicians and civil servants

good to think of topics kind of, how to evaluate, how to document and blah, blah, blah [Development Manager].

In addition to the handbook, briefing sessions and face-to-face meetings were used by the operationalising staff to explain the concept of citizen participation. As well, a DVD was produced which featured citizens talking about their community, the Kommun, and their thoughts about inclusion.

A central idea in the case is that an education program was necessary to develop an organisational culture aligned to community engagement. To inculcate the right culture, education was perceived as needing to work in two distinct but interrelated ways. Firstly, education had a role in giving key public officials sufficient knowledge so they could appreciate the nature and effect of citizen participation and develop competencies around it. Secondly, education had a motivational role in inculcating a belief by politicians and civil servants in community engagement initiatives as effective instruments. But it appears that the education for these interrelated notions of knowledge and motivation were fashioned with different emphases for politicians compared to civil servants.

When briefing civil servants, the emphasis by the proponents appears to be on engagement as an effective instrument for good service delivery, because that is where managers' performance assessments and major concerns lay. So included were stories of how citizen participation can make performance better and managerial tasks more interesting,

comparing to 'rubber stamp' work [Development Manager].

For politicians, societal and democratic implications were emphasised in the education campaign, along with the sorts of stories given to managers about service delivery improvements.

While acknowledging risks like capture by vested interests, the education campaigns to politicians and civil servants tried to demonstrate, using examples of national and international practice, that in the end community engagement could make public officials' jobs better and pay off the initial investment in time and effort.

I think it takes a lot of energy until you get the routine and you have to learn and you have to try out the method and everything. But in the long run that's what I think, you get more information, more knowledge ... I think it makes it easier when you are going to make good decisions - but there's a lot of different opinions about that [Development Manager].

The core group of civil servants who have carriage of community engagement are described as enthusiasts who act advocates, proponents and facilitators of community engagement, and there is no evidence provided to suggest that public officials would not also view them in this way. While at one juncture the Development Manager speaks of their role as "presenting an alternative" to traditional ways of managing and organising, at another stage the description became blunter

Maybe I wouldn't say to everyone that I'm selling the concept, that's what I do. That's what I have to do because otherwise I can sit in the corner and have really great thoughts but never get anything [Development Manager].

The question arises as to how compatible these dual facets of selling and educating are, and the degree to which activities in one role may colour perceptions by other public officials about the integrity of the other role.

## **Outcomes for processes and service design**

In the final voting in the participatory budget, about one thousand five hundred inhabitants from that area who were aged over fifteen made a choice between the three plans on paper ballots or via the Internet.

30 per cent of the population, which is pretty good I think [Development Manager].

The perception was of an excellent turnout of voters, considering around fifty per cent of eligible people in that area voted in the municipal elections. Especially given that it was the first time that the Kommun (or others in Sweden) had done something like this, a good outcome was considered to have occurred with the ideas obtained; in the final winning plan; and in the connections and relationships made between people, their municipality, and its civil servants.

Double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon 1978) (refer section 3.4) at a high level appears to be an appropriate label, given that new ways of thinking and acting in government decision making have emerged at the design-level of service and infrastructure, and at the decision process-level.

### **More time to discuss and reflect**

The politicians who had proposed the participatory budgeting initiative had been in a large part concerned by the level of individualism and isolation in society.

not so many ties between different people you might say [Development Manager].

The Development Manager presented a strong view that the means of an engagement initiative should match the ends, and so if the objective is to act against a lack of social ties, then there is a danger of sub-optimal results if the participatory budgeting project jumps from a consultation part to a choice part (the vote) without opportunities for enough real dialogue in-between. If social fabric is an issue, the process

needs time for support and debate, not just one says one thing someone else says another [Development Manager].

The perception was that in the participatory budgeting initiative for infrastructure, the stages were too linear and too rushed. Opportunity spaces had been created that drew people and in which they could feel at ease to speak, but an opportunity was lost by not allowing sufficient

time for people to reflect, digest the information, and rethink their own priorities and really use and grow a base of collective intelligence.

between ideas and voting (there) needs to be a way of working at questions like 'does this make it a better city for youth': look at questions like these [Development Manager].

But other comments suggest that building more opportunities for discussion and reflection into the engagement should be done in a way that leaves a structure and processes that citizen participants feel are not too daunting and onerous.

something light, not too much complexity [Development Manager].

The community members who contributed ideas about suitable infrastructure projects and then discussed alternatives and voted upon them appear to be acting as: 'issue framers' (Epstein et al. 2005) in that they helped set the agenda and identify shortcomings and solutions; or 'co-learners' (Roberts 2004) since they were co-finders of issues and solutions. In contributing ideas to the extent they did, citizens acted well beyond the realm of customers or clients of government services and became 'makers and shapers' (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001, p. 34) who voluntarily took up 'shared responsibilities' (Gaventa 2004, p. 17) for decision making about the pot of money and the priority infrastructure project. Gale's (2008) idea of 'horizontal accountability' fits with this scenario because the options and final choice are all attributable in large part to the performance, contribution and choice of citizens.

### **Understandable documentation**

A key lesson for improving the first iteration of participatory budgeting is to give people access to documents and information in a form that is readable and understandable for those

with Swedish sounding names and other names [Development Manager].

### **Low commitment by senior civil servants**

With the participatory budgeting for infrastructure, and other on-going community engagement projects like the future workshops, the politicians – especially those from the ruling party - had been seen as relatively good at attending meetings and being supportive and involved. But the reluctance or indifference of senior civil servants, the service delivery and infrastructure managers, had disappointed staff trying to make this and other engagement processes work.

There is a perception that senior managers often see community engagement as a threat to some of their discretionary powers, as well as entailing increased workloads and weekend and evening commitments. There is also a perception that senior bureaucrats typically view community engagement as being about a lot of talk in a way that is

a bit unorganised. Without a clear purpose, clear goals [Development Manager].

While politicians by-and-large could see a purpose in meeting the people they represent through initiatives like the future forums and the infrastructure participatory budget, senior managers were perceived as often not wanting to be there; a situation that was seen to threaten the sustainability of community engagement outcomes in the longer run.

My understanding is that they (senior civil servants) don't quite understand what is this, what does this have to do with me and my job? ... but I think it varies [Development Manager].

The participatory budgeting initiative transcended debate and dialogue to mirror many essential features of deliberation – such as a participants focus, identifying and prioritising shared ideas, and making choices (Hodge, Bone & Crockett 2005; Lukensmeyer & Torres 2006). However Carson (2005) injects a note of caution in choosing deliberative designs where little staff support exists – as was the situation here. The citizen participants in this case can be aligned against Robert's (2004) description of 'co-learners' but the matching role as 'liaison' and 'co-producer' for administrators is contestable due to patchy support.

### **Action does not imply a culture and tradition**

Numerous community engagement projects have been run in the municipality over time and the flag of engagement flies high in the Kommun's literature. But the case suggests that activity itself does not necessarily signify that there is a real culture or tradition that is aligned with the ideal of citizen participation. A strong indication of a cultural shortfall is that the managers charged with steering community engagement have usually had to look for opportunities of where to apply engagement or the information that emanates from it, rather than needing to field requests for help from managers.

I don't have civil servants coming up to me ... I am the head of this or that, I need to speak to people. Help me. It is not something we do systematically or continuously in the whole municipality [Development Manager].

So despite the strong element of citizen participation in the Kommun's vision, within the most senior management levels there were appear to be no real champions for having substantial and systematic community engagement on the agenda. And so 'a past' in community engagement action does not necessarily indicate 'a future'.

there were seen to be not someone with power and mandate to kind of speak for those kinds of questions ... and no one really understood what we were doing [Development Manager].

### **Political 'receivers' and political structure**

Both interviewees emphasised that significant and complex engagement initiatives like participatory budgeting need political support to enable them in the first place, and they are not sustainable if such support drops off. Reasonable political support by the majority meant that those running the participatory budgeting experiment could pressure other civil servants to contribute to the exercise. However, in other engagement projects which were driven with less active political support it has been difficult to get line and function managers involved.

you can't go to another civil servant and say you have to put some hours and commitments into this [Development Manager].

All too often in the past community engagement projects at the Kommun had been started up at the initiative of staff who were involved with community development, and who had a professional interest in citizen participation. In these instances engagement would happen, there would be dialogue and information produced. But then these facilitating development managers have had to go to politicians and say

We have found something, wouldn't you like to know? And so find a receiver – a politician who is interested in results of dialogue [Development Manager].

There is a perception that pressure for community engagement initiatives ought to come from politicians or political boards to senior bureaucrats, and then onto the managers facilitating community engagement - and not the other way around.

because they want to know [Development Manager].

While the Development Manager is enthusiastic and effusive about community engagement, and would like to see the full spectrum of involvement levels firmly embedded in the culture and routines, a note of caution is sounded about the current situation where a very small group of civil servants are basically what keeps citizen participation initiatives and experiments going.

I am pro trying new things, but with care, as its democracy we are messing around with. If we have to do this all alone, it is a disaster ... politicians should be there of course. There shouldn't be a lot of civil servants with their own agenda running things [Development Manager].

The perception is that if citizen participation is to be effective and sustainable, the ideal of community engagement must be meshed into a revision of the political and managerial frameworks and the associated structures and processes for decision making.

### **Political ownership – it's not our project**

During and after the 2006 election campaign, the new Mayor and the changed political majority had signalled an initial backing for community engagement. So regardless of the election outcome, the Development Manager had hoped for further political decisions in favour of a continuation and expansion of participatory budgeting and other engagement initiatives and was proactive in suggesting that another participatory budgeting exercise be considered

to come under construction [Development Manager].

But the Development Manager now perceived that any enthusiasm or support was waning because the ideal of robust citizen participation was an artefact of the previous political majority, and did not belong to the new majority.

it is not our project [Development Manager].

Nobody in authority had yet said a definitive 'no' to the pursuit of a participatory budget proposal or more future workshops. But there is a perception that for those politicians from the majority who had indicated in-principle support for the idea, and for the most senior of managers, substantive citizen participation

is not a priority any more. After a while they let it go, and it came more into the background. Its not like 'close this thing' ... it is just that people don't do anything, no one

says 'no', not really 'yes lets do this', just passive right now ... it just became evident I don't have the support I need [Development Manager].

The Development Manager wondered aloud as to whether it would take swing back to the opposite party for community engagement to regain traction for any new major engagement initiatives. As a general observation, the Project Manager argued that two pieces of evidence indicate that support for participatory budgeting is not necessarily determined by political leanings. Firstly, there were some conservative local governments in Europe that had instituted participatory budgeting. Secondly, there were cases (notably in South America) where conservative governments followed on from social-democrat style parties who had instigated participatory budgeting, and yet the successors

accepted the principle and just wanted to change some of the matters ... the principle is not politically controversial [Project Manager].

White's (1996) model of participation indicates that engagement can be seen as transformative when it changes motivation, competencies and opportunities in a context where those at the top understand the agenda of others and those below get to decide things. These criteria appear to be met, but there is a further thought in the model that the ends of one experience should provide the means of another. Here in the Kommun, loss of momentum for citizen participation in general, and doubts about the lifespan of participative budgeting in particular, conspires against calling it truly transformative at this stage.

Not much progress ... doing the same usual things [Development Manager].

### **Momentum through peer networks**

Based on the Kommun's profile in engagement and its participatory budgeting experiment for neighbourhood infrastructure, the Development Manager has been approached by the peak local government body to become involved in a multi-kommun pilot project for participatory budgeting. This is to involve networking and information sharing opportunities along with mentorship by an overseas expert consultant who was experienced and conversant with European, South American and other global initiatives. The Development Manager saw such a project as helping to regain momentum engagement – and help revive political support from the majority for another participative budget. The idea of second participatory budgeting initiative to be conducted with network support was put to the Mayor and the manager responsible for a significant proportion of infrastructure spending. And in response, support was gained for the

Kommun to join the pilot study group – but without a political commitment to a particular participatory budgeting project in size, scope or timeline. So the existence of pilot projects and joined up approaches in the new frontiers of community engagement initiatives may be a turning point in gaining institutional support.

That changed the attitudes, they can see that we can get something more complete [Development Manager].

### **Colliding with parallel processes**

There is a perception that the participatory budget for infrastructure had an advantage that may be hard to replicate, in that it accessed a separate and not so easily contestable pool of money. A suitable target area and some funds had appeared in sight for a new participatory budgeting proposal, but the prospect had disappeared from reach due to decisions made elsewhere by groups of politicians and managers with various agendas. Those targeted funds were quickly ‘recaptured’ for application to on-going projects.

Parallel processes in different rooms decided that [Development Manager].

### **Danger in making it hard to say no**

In attempting to sustain and expand community engagement at the Kommun, the Development Manager and some colleagues have determinedly ramped-up the educational campaigns and efforts to shift apathy or disinclination amongst politicians and civil servants. There is a suggestion that aggressively promoting the concept of robust citizen participation to public officials who are not ready or especially amenable to the principles, can be counter productive or bring false hope – and can account for a diminution in initial support by influential stakeholders.

I'm not sure though, I had lots of good arguments and facts ... perhaps that is why they could not say no from the beginning ... (and) they said yes without really wanting it or actually understood what they have said yes to [Development Manager].

### **Lessen time from final choice to action**

There is an indication that thought and effort needs to be put into tightening-up the linkages between the decision cycle and the implementation cycle during the process of the participatory budget or other engagement initiatives.

if doing things is delayed you are not going get good discuss next time around

[Development Manager].

Despite the good levels of involvement in the participatory budgeting process, no discernable pressure had come from the inhabitants in that particular area for more rounds of participatory budgeting, or other high-level participation. A perceived reason for this lack of dynamism is the long delay that occurred between the voting on the alternative architect's plans and the implementation of the infrastructure. This had meant that people lost sight of any tangible contribution.

They could not see that the men doing something over there has something to do with what they experienced a year ago [Development Manager].

### **The disadvantaged don't demand engagement**

There is a belief that the lack of any real pressure for more participation from the area where it had appeared to be some sort of success – the neighbourhood for the infrastructure participatory budget - is in part a reflection of disadvantage rather than indifference to an engagement instrument.

Sadly this is also a neighbourhood where they don't put pressure on much ... its our poorest area ... yeah, they don't demand [Development Manager].

But there is a peril in judging an engagement initiative through reasonably short-term positive or negative stories and assessments, because despite the range of engagement initiatives undertaken over the past few years, there is a perception that the average citizen is yet to see the Kommun as an institution that really talks to them. The indication is that such a change takes significant time.

We have been doing a lot of good things, we have taken a step forward, but not yet ... people need time to get used to it, to understand it ... we need a couple of years more for people really to get to know us [Development Manager].

### **Imbalance of power within the community**

Politicians from the new majority were also seen as reluctant to give people power in the way required by further participatory budgeting. This was because of real concerns about potential capture by powerful but narrow local interests within the community to the detriment of the

many, although this phenomenon had not been substantially evident in previous engagement initiatives within the Kommun.

more resourceful (citizens) will participate, and say how, and actually increase imbalance [Development Manager].

### **Good practices attract good staff**

The type of projects and processes at work in a local government can influence the decision by talented potential staff as to whether that place in particular, or any municipal setting, is a good and progressive place to work or not. These are people who

want to develop, not just do it they way we have always done it. You might discover that this wasn't good, then let's leave it and try something else [Development Manager].

### **Emerging categories**

The preceding themes can be aggregated into four emerging categories to do with: political desirers and receivers; management pitfalls; experience and education; and public contribution.

#### **Political desirers and receivers**

Above all, the sustainability of substantial and systematic community engagement initiatives relies on the desire of politicians to have citizen participation fitted into the political structure, and for politicians to become active commissioners and receivers of the fruits of engagement – as well as showing up to meetings. Relevant themes are:

- Demonstrating better political contact – remedy a disconnect but shore-up election support
- Political ‘receivers’ and political structure – someone needs to be a ready recipient of what is found
- Political ownership: its not our project – ownership may not be accepted by new incumbents
- Attendance by politicians and managers is crucial – reporting is no substitute for being there.

#### **Management pitfalls**

A lack of management commitment to the principles and practice of community engagement can derail attempts to commence substantial engagement initiatives and hinders the viability of good outcomes from citizen participation. This low commitment is reflected in the culture and

tradition of administrative work in the Kommun, but can be masked by action instigated by a limited coterie of facilitating managers, and may have eventually have consequences for recruitment and retention of staff. The themes which indicate this situation are:

- Low commitment by senior civil servants – management having a patchy interest in engagement
- Colliding with parallel processes – separate management and political deals as a barrier
- Easier with new ‘pots’ of money – extra money over the usual pool provides a good target
- Action does not imply a culture and tradition – activity does not apply a tradition or culture
- Lessen time from final choice to action – decrease lead times to make the action recognisable
- Good practices attract good staff – the way work proceeds can affect who wants to employed.

### **Experience and education**

A foundation of experience ameliorates the risks in designing and implementing more complex or substantial engagement initiatives like participatory budgeting, while a differentiated education program aims at garnering support from the various stakeholder groups. At the same time, people need to understand what is on offer in community engagement, and keen proponents may ‘sell’ the ideal of citizen participation harder than is viable given entrenched beliefs or disinterest by key stakeholders. Relevant themes are:

- Educating the public about what is really being offered – being clear about the level of influence
- Competencies and experience for the ‘next step’ – need to develop experience in organic ways
- Future workshops as a springboard – gaining specific transferable skills
- Momentum through peer networks – network groups may improve acceptance and practice
- Educating internal stakeholders differently – politicians attuned to arguments of democracy
- Danger in making it hard to say no – an idea can be sold too hard to hesitant recipients
- Knowing how to engage from the citizens’ viewpoint – citizen perspectives on practices.

## **Public contribution**

A real ongoing public contribution and commitment can come through the possibilities given for citizen input and influence and practical matters like personal approaches and clear information, and providing timely visibility of tangible outcomes – as indicated by the themes of:

- Co-operation and co-determination rather than empowerment – ends should describe the initiative
- Outcomes for processes and service design – learning about engagement processes and work designs
- Direct contact – meet people on their own ground
- Understandable documentation – information that people can read and understand
- Money and object as the hook – spending signifies a municipality's seriousness and attracts interest
- Keeping the scope for contribution broad – broad issues and publicity attract involvement
- Easy, informal and influential non-binding decision making – planning for influence
- More time to discuss and reflect – longer periods for discourse and consideration
- Imbalance of power within the community – threat of increasing differentials in influence
- The disadvantaged don't demand engagement – public perceptions and levels of indifference.

## **Informing the research framework**

This section presents a brief summary of how the participatory budgeting initiative relates to the ideals from the literature (refer Chapter 2) of better decision making, better government, better communities – as well as honouring democratic ideals. Then Figure 1/Appendix 3 indicates how thematic content from the case study informs the research framework (refer).

## **Better decision making**

In the single but significant instance of participatory budgeting in one neighbourhood area, citizens were able to identify issues and opportunities and come up with alternative proposals around a particular budgetary sum and broad object of spending. Participants were also able to debate and short-list the proposals by a rather informal vote taken in the meetings. Then detailed alternative solutions built by consultants and public officials around these citizen choices were then referred back to public meetings for comment before a final formal vote was taken by a

ballot. So in terms of the management cycle (refer Figure 3-9), this engagement initiative incorporates decision making about the first four elements - from problem identification through to the policy or program choice. All of the final voting options were approved by the council as reasonable alternatives, and the case theme of 'co-determination' indicates that the *empower* level of participation (IAP2 (2004) (refer Figure 2-5) was reached through inhabitants making the final choice, but subject to formal ratification by council. And because the preferred ideas from the community meetings were translated into proposals by third parties, it can be argued that the best presented-solution option, rather than the best underlying idea, is what was under scrutiny in the final vote. It must be said that no information was obtained in the interviews about the important question of how far each of the architect's solutions moved from its originating proposal, because the greater the difference, the less emphatic is the empowerment.

The case description and themes indicate that most of the characteristics of better decision making noted in Figure 2-4 are alive in this initiative. What is especially significant is that the participatory budgeting processes tapped dispersed knowledge and identified issues and solutions by connecting with inhabitants who were unlikely to have communicated their ideas and preferences by alternative means – given the transitory nature of the population and their relative disinclination to engage with their municipality. There were no clues in the case description that the engagement had improved risk or risk management, and to the contrary some public officials viewed participatory budgeting as unnecessary if not risky business due to potential capture by vested interests and the diversion of their limited time and resources. The theme 'keeping the scope for contribution broad' indicates the potential for the participatory budgeting experiment to provide early warning of issues in a similar way to the alert offered in the future workshops.

Certainly, the Development Manager believed that a good decision was made through the final vote but that it was the best decision in the light of the original alternatives, the worked-up proposals, or different ideas that may have resided elsewhere. But the theme of 'easier with new pots of money' supports a claim that participatory budgeting got a better decision making process and a better decision outcome for that community; without an engagement initiative that focused the spending of the windfall gain locally, a substantial part of the resources were perceived as likely to have been diverted to different projects in other neighbourhoods.

However observations that the budgeting initiative has served numerous functions related to 'better decision making' must be balanced against the reality that almost everyone has take a

‘deep breath’, and neither the politicians from the new majority, nor influential civil servants, nor the inhabitants involved, subsequently pushed for more such participatory engagement.

### **Better government**

Relatively few indicators emerged about changes to the Kommun’s human capital and internal capital dimension of intellectual capital theory (refer section 3.3.2). While the engagement exercise both used and strengthened the skills and knowledge of the facilitating team, there is no particular evidence of significantly altered competencies or motivation amongst politicians and other civil servants - despite themes indicating the existence of structured and determined education campaigns. As for internal capital, while public meetings have impacted on the formal knowledge resources of the Kommun through the ideas embedded in the original priority proposals and the formal solution options, neither the culture within the institution nor regular processes appears to have been transformed in any ongoing sense; certainly participative budgeting and associated activities have not become organisational routines. But new structures and processes have entered organisational memory and could come out of hibernation if political priorities change; and the proposal for a new phase of participatory budgeting, while struggling, is alive and heralds possibilities of further breaks in autopoietic tendencies as noted in the theme of ‘keeping the scope for alternatives broad’. However transitory or long-lasting, external capital expanded through the municipality’s substantial contact with a section of the community that was typically isolated from its local government.

Some functions to do with improving the sustainability of government (refer Figure 2-4) are in evidence and embody key hopes of the original political proponents and the facilitating staff. The initiative was especially designed to increase trust and confidence in the political majority of the day and counter apathy and disconnect with democracy of a relatively disadvantaged group of inhabitants. While not held out as an explicit objective of the initiative, the nature of the participatory processes appears to have temporarily reshaped the directions of accountability to include a horizontal plane – at least for one significant exercise. New networks, relationships and cooperation are also in evidence given the significant interest and activity by inhabitants at the public meetings. The publics’ attendance and the voting rates for the alternative options, signal some degree of trust and confidence in government, as inhabitants have been willing to invest their time and energy into the exercise. But there are questions about the longevity of these functions since the ideal and processes of community engagement appears to be ‘decoupled’ (March & Olsen 1989) from the political framework of the new administration and the managerial frameworks past and present.

With reference to the attributes of local governing presented in Figure 2-2, a small section of the Kommun's budget now adds pluralistic processes to what is typically a technocratic domain. Technocratic processes see public officials selecting the broad area for resourcing and having the fully formed proposals constructed, whereas pluralist processes capture priority problems and alternative proposals, feedback into government sanctioned options, and vest the final choice with citizens. The proponents emphasised democracy values over efficiency values in their original rationale, and the source of rationality for ideas and preferences at least, lay outside normal input channels for political agendas and management plans. So this initiative provided the municipality and citizens with a taste of community governance. The control by public officials over the content of official proposals provided some insurance on matters of acceptable efficiency without doggedly trying to maximise economic efficiency.

The perceived difficulties in moving forward with the engagement agenda reinforces the view that substantial community engagement initiatives engagement cannot just be about individual managers as proponents; in the long run sustainability in citizen participation is governed by the culture in the organisation. As noted in the theme 'low commitment by civil servants', Carson's (2005) observation about a lack of front-end internal support may explain part of this phenomena if those stakeholders were of a mind 'not to be proven wrong' in their initial assessments.

### **Better community**

Community capacity is moderated by levels of citizen ability, community group ability and collaborative community culture (Cuthill & Fien 2005) - refer section 3.3.3.

The participatory budget initiative has undoubtedly uncovered and tapped citizen ability. The competencies and motivation that form existing levels of citizen ability proved sufficient for a considerable number of citizens to participate and to make a contribution to the work of government. There are no direct indications that this community engagement increased these stocks of human capital in the community, but from philosophical and practical standpoints it can be argued that unleashing citizen ability represents advancement in community capacity, compared to a situation where that ability was largely dormant and neither mined nor exploited.

The Future Workshops had leaned heavily on promoting community group ability through the use and formation of associations to do things alone and together, and there was some evidence that participatory budgeting also had some positive effect in facilitating the interaction of people with different backgrounds and perspectives. Certainly, participants at the meetings were able to

critically learn and reflect as a group, and act in a concerted fashion through the discussion and prioritisation of their proposals.

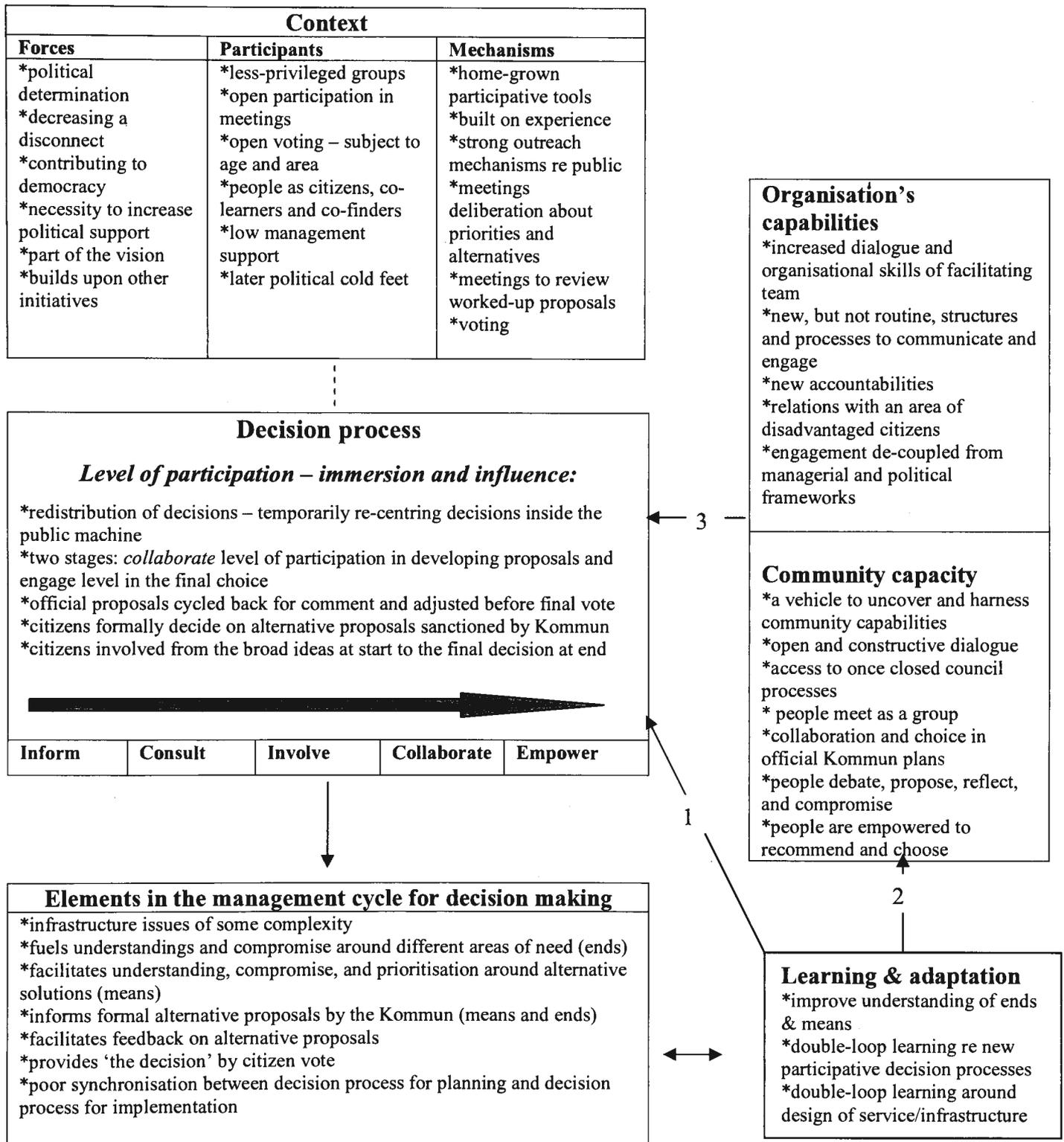
A collaborative community culture is about open and constructive dialogue displacing closed door meetings and privileged information, and the participatory budget was an experiment that added a window of openness between the public officials and community. However the theme of ‘colliding with parallel processes’ emphasises that non-collaborative processes still abound, and threaten the future viability of participatory budgeting or any other engagement practice which has not been made routine or institutionalised through being brought firmly into political and managerial frameworks.

Of the functions to do with strengthening cohesion and capacity in the community (refer Figure 2-4), the most obvious contribution of the participative budgeting initiative is its empowerment of civil society. Social capital was tapped and leveraged, and in doing so perhaps ‘developed’ through the community engagement. But the interviews provide little information to substantially confirm or deny the remaining functions. An interesting portrait emerges if Hartz-Karp’s (2004) models of vicious and virtuous cycles of engagement are applied here. The virtuous cycle is mirrored at first, since the community is engaged in an inclusive, deliberative and influential way – leading to mutually acceptable decisions about the prioritised alternative solutions. But then there is a deviation from virtuous cycle model as alternative solutions recommended by participants are adjusted by a third party under the behest and guidance of the Kommun to form the official proposals. The virtuous cycle is then revisited as the official proposals are tested in meetings and by public vote. The case data is insufficient to allow tightly-held conclusion as to whether social capital (Putnam 2000) is actually strengthened by the experience and feeds back into further engagement. The observation that people from the neighbourhood in question have not since agitated for more voice in decision making, questions an ending that matches that of the virtuous cycle. But then again, the theme of ‘the disadvantaged don’t demand engagement’ notes that gaining public trust and response is an iterative process that may take years of engagement, and not just single or sporadic initiatives.

### **Honouring democratic ideals**

The interviewees did not speak of the engagement in terms of a right or a duty.

**Figure 1/Appendix 3 Research framework - form and function of the participatory budgeting**



1

2

3

Developed from Figure 3-9 and the themes, categories and discussion in Appendix 3.