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## Planning Practice & Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cppr20>

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Published online: 23 Jul 2013.

To cite this article: Planning Practice & Research (2013): Assessing the Effectiveness of Public Participation in Neighbourhood Planning, Planning Practice & Research, DOI: 10.1080/02697459.2013.820037

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2013.820037>

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# Assessing the Effectiveness of Public Participation in Neighbourhood Planning

GREG BROWN & SEAN YEONG WEI CHIN

## Abstract

*Public participation is important to local planning outcomes but is seldom systematically evaluated using effectiveness criteria. This study evaluates the effectiveness of public participation using the Sherwood–Graceville Neighbourhood Plan in Brisbane as a case study. Effective participation criteria, both process and outcome, were identified from the planning literature and operationalized in a survey of participants. Results indicate that outcome criteria were most important to participants; the participation process was ineffective and ultimately failed to influence local planning decisions. We discuss the implications of participation effectiveness in a planning context where regional plans potentially conflict with local community aspirations.*

**Keywords:** public participation; neighbourhood planning; community consultation; empowerment

## 1. Introduction

What constitutes effective public participation in neighbourhood planning and how do we evaluate it? Although the potential benefits of public participation are broadly accepted within democratic societies as promoting transparent, inclusive and fair decision-making processes, planners rarely evaluate participation formally while the planning literature has not adequately addressed evaluation in practice (Laurian & Shaw, 2009). The lack of formal evaluation of public participation may be the result of confusion as to the appropriate benchmarks for evaluation (Lowndes *et al.*, 1998). Planning professionals and academics lack definitions and criteria of success as well as methods to assess participatory processes (Laurian & Shaw, 2009, p. 294). This article synthesizes and operationalizes public participation effectiveness criteria from the planning literature to evaluate a public participation process associated with the development of a neighbourhood plan in Brisbane, Australia, as a case study.

The formal evaluation of public participation is historically scarce, as governments are reluctant to spend funds on evaluation (Sewell & Phillips, 1979). Further, there is no universal format for evaluating public participation that can be

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applied widely (Halvorsen, 2001; Rowe & Frewer, 2004; Chess, 2010). Although an evaluation methodology can be designed and tailored to a specific public participation context, without established criteria for evaluation, the replication and generalizability of different case studies is problematic (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). As a consequence, a wide variety of techniques and approaches for evaluating public participation have been utilized, with each evaluation based on potentially different criteria.

In addition to variable evaluation criteria, there are multiple methods for gathering information to evaluate the process. Two common methods for evaluating public participation are interviews with key people who took part in the participation process and surveys of participants (Lauber, 1999; Halvorsen, 2001). A desk review of documents from the participation process is useful for a retrospective investigation (Butterfoss, 2006). Evaluators can also complete an informal evaluation by attending participation events, making observations and speaking with participants (Laurian & Shaw, 2009). The Q method, a process where participants rank evaluative statements, has also been used because it relies on a minimal number of research participants, although it is less generalizable and requires considerable expertise to carry out (Danielson *et al.*, 2009).

### 1.1 Evaluation Criteria and Approach

The choice of evaluation criteria for the public participation process is central to the question of effectiveness. Within the evaluation literature, there are common themes such as representativeness, transparency, influence and information access (Crosby *et al.*, 1986; Blahna & Yonts-Shepard, 1989; Joss, 1995; Petts, 1995; Innes & Booher, 1999; Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005). Rowe and Frewer (2000) suggest that evaluation criteria may be divided into two basic types: *process* criteria which relate to the effective construction and implementation of a procedure and *acceptance* criteria which relate to the potential public acceptance of a procedure. We refer to the *acceptance* criteria as *outcome* criteria to provide for a broader range of results from the public participation process. In Table 1, we summarize *process* and *outcome* criteria (variables) identified from the public participation literature that provide a foundation for this study. We attempted to provide a comprehensive list of potential evaluation variables. We note that many of the evaluation variables were identified early in the literature based on a limited number of ways that one can judge the effectiveness of a participatory process; one would not expect entirely new evaluation criteria to emerge frequently in the literature.

There are multiple approaches to the formal evaluation of public participation in planning. Researchers should be explicit as to the type of evaluation and its descriptors. Table 2 identifies various evaluation descriptors adapted from Chess (2010) and Rowe and Frewer (2004), stated in the form of questions. The methodological descriptors are combined to form an evaluation approach. Our evaluation approach in this study represents an *outside, summative* evaluation of *theory-based process* and *outcome* variables that is *localized* to a specific neighbourhood process from the *viewpoint of participants* in the process.

*Assessing the Effectiveness of Public Participation*

TABLE 1. Evaluation criteria (variables) for public participation identified from the literature

Criterion	Description	Sources
Process criteria		
Representativeness	'The public participants should comprise a broadly representative sample of the population of the affected public'.	(Crosby <i>et al.</i> , 1986; Blahna & Yonts-Shepard, 1989; Petts, 1995; Carnes <i>et al.</i> , 1998; Lauber, 1999; Rowe & Frewer, 2000, p. 12)
Independence	'The participation process should be conducted in an independent, unbiased way'.	(Crosby <i>et al.</i> , 1986; Lauber, 1999; Rowe & Frewer, 2000, p. 13)
Early involvement	'The public should be involved as early as possible in the process as soon as value judgments become salient'.	(Blahna & Yonts-Shepard, 1989; Rowe & Frewer, 2000, p. 14)
Transparency	'The process should be transparent so that the public can see what is going on and how decisions are being made'.	(Lauber, 1999; Rowe & Frewer, 2000, p. 15)
Resource accessibility	'Public participants should have access to the appropriate resources to enable them to successfully fulfil their brief'.	(Rowe & Frewer, 2000, p. 15)
Seeking out and involving those affected by decisions	'Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by interested in a decision'.	(IAP2, 2007b, p. 1; Godschalk & Stiftel, 1981; Blahna & Yonts-Shepard, 1989)
Comfort and convenience	'The timing and place of meeting should be convenient to the participants' schedule. They should also feel comfortable during consultation sessions'.	(Halvorsen, 2001)
Deliberative quality	All participants should be given the chance to speak and provide their opinions.	(Lauber, 1999; Halvorsen, 2001)
Level of conflict	Public participation process should avoid or mitigate conflict (Laurian & Shaw, 2009)	
Seek input from participants in how they participate	'Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate'.	(IAP2, 2007b, p. 1)
Task definition	The nature and scope of the participation task should be clearly defined.	(Rowe & Frewer, 2000, p. 16)
Non-technical information	The information provided to participants must be easy to understand and contain minimal technical language to prevent confusion.	(Chakraborty & Stratton, 1993)
Communicates influence on decision	'Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision'.	(IAP2, 2007b, p. 1)
Outcome criteria		
Influence	'The output of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy'.	(Petts, 1995; Carnes <i>et al.</i> , 1998; Lauber, 1999; Rowe & Frewer, 2000, p. 14; Butterfoss, 2006)

TABLE 1. (Continued)

Criterion	Description	Sources
Increased understanding	Public participation should build mutual understanding between stakeholders and commit to the public good identified.	(Petts, 1995; Carnes <i>et al.</i> , 1998; Laurian & Shaw, 2009)
Consensus reached	Decisions made as a result of public participation were based on consensus and mutual understanding.	(Twight & Carroll, 1983; Innes & Booher, 1999)
Increased trust	Public participation should build trust and lasting relationships.	(Laurian & Shaw, 2009)
Workable solutions	Public participation should create a compromise and acceptable solution.	(Laurian & Shaw, 2009)
Satisfaction	Good public participation should result in high satisfaction amongst participants.	(Halvorsen, 2001; Butterfoss, 2006; Laurian & Shaw, 2009)

### 1.2 Neighbourhood Planning in Brisbane, Australia

Brisbane City Council (BCC) Neighbourhood Plans are statutory plans with development codes, growth management and redevelopment strategies tailored for a specific neighbourhood/district for a 10-year time frame. Since 2006, the BCC has commenced 36 neighbourhood plans with about 80% of Brisbane's urban area included in a neighbourhood plan (BCC, 2013). These neighbourhood plans were previously called 'Local Plans' in the Brisbane City Plan 2000 document and covered older suburbs, post-war suburbs, outer suburbs and specific localities. The Local Plans were derived from previous planning documents including *Development Control Plans* and *Local Area Outline Plans*.

The local and neighbourhood planning process predates BCC's adoption of a formal Community Engagement Policy in 2008 which predates the state legislative requirement to have a community engagement policy. The *City of Brisbane Act 2010*

TABLE 2. Methodological descriptors for evaluation (Rowe & Frewer, 2004; Chess, 2010)

Question	Description
Summative or formative?	Is the evaluation a retrospective study of a completed programme (summative) or carried out throughout the programme's progress (formative)?
Process or outcome?	Is the evaluation studying the results from participation or the participation process?
User-based or theory-based?	Will participants' goals be the focus of evaluation or will evaluation use theory to assess participation?
Outsider evaluations versus participatory evaluations?	Will the evaluation be designed and carried out by an independent evaluator or by stakeholders and participants?
Universal or local?	Will the criteria being established be specific to a certain area only or can be generalized on other practices?
Effective according to whom?	From whose viewpoint will effectiveness be defined from?

(Queensland) and associated regulations require that the BCC have a community engagement policy wherein the BCC is to be guided by several principles including ‘transparent and effective processes, and decision-making in the public interest’, as well as ‘democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement’ (Brisbane City Act 2010, n.d., Section 4(2)). The engagement policy further states that ‘Council’s most comprehensive example of meaningful community engagement is Neighbourhood Planning’ (BCC, 2011, p. 4).

In developing neighbourhood plans, BCC embeds a public participation process where they organize meetings, inform and consult with the community for their input. Since the neighbourhood planning programme began, there has not been any formal attempt to evaluate public participation effectiveness. This study is the first to systematically evaluate Brisbane’s Neighbourhood Planning Program to identify factors that contribute to participation effectiveness.

### *1.3 Research Questions*

The primary aim of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of public participation in Brisbane’s Neighbourhood Planning Program. The research also sought to identify problematic areas in the current process and framework to identify future planning implications using the case study of the Sherwood–Graceville Neighbourhood Plan. Because public participation effectiveness is multidimensional, simplistic conclusions about effectiveness may limit opportunities for both local government agencies and participants to learn from, and improve future public participation processes. Therefore, we developed a set of research questions that provide a more critical account of the public participation process and its outcomes:

- What are the factors that most contribute to the perceived effectiveness of public participation in neighbourhood planning?
- What variables/factors are related to participants’ satisfaction with their participation experience?
- How do participants’ perceptions of empowerment in the public participation process (based on the *International Association of Public Participation* [IAP2] spectrum) differ from their preferred level of empowerment? Is the presence of an empowerment gap an indicator of ineffective public participation?
- What is the relationship between the depth of participants’ engagement with the planning process and their perceptions of effectiveness?
- Do participants’ perceptions of their own influence in the process (self-efficacy) differ from their perceptions of community influence?
- Do participants’ experiences with participation affect their propensity to participate in future community consultation?

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1 Case Study Background*

The case study selected for evaluation was the Sherwood–Graceville Neighbourhood Plan, a planning district located southwest of Brisbane’s central

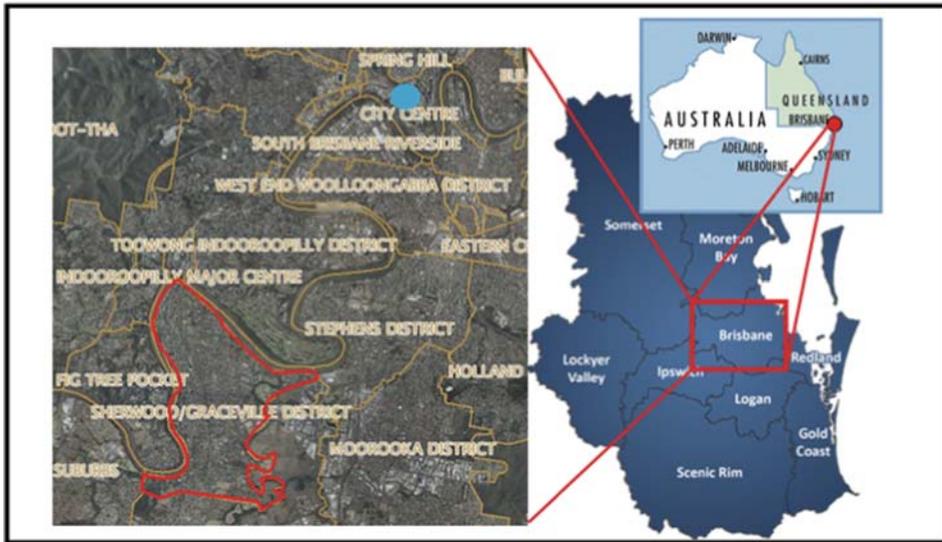


FIGURE 1. Location of Sherwood–Graceville District in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

business district as shown in Figure 1. The study area is part of the South East Queensland region. This district encompasses several suburbs including Sherwood, Graceville, Corinda and parts of Tennyson. According to the 2006 Census, the district had a population of approximately 16,500 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

For context, the BCC is unique within Australia as the only council with jurisdiction over an entire metropolitan region. While this situation is not unique globally, this urban governance arrangement may serve to heighten tensions that naturally exist between ‘regional’ and ‘local’ public interests in land use.

The case study was chosen due to past media coverage that highlighted community opposition towards increased densities in certain areas of the neighbourhood (Davis, 2010, 2011; Hilton, 2010). The controversy mobilized community groups such as the Walter Taylor South Action Group (WTSAG) to coordinate and encourage residents to speak out against the plan. The local councillor for Tennyson, Councillor Nicole Johnston, joined residents to oppose certain outcomes of the plan (Johnston, 2008) and as a result of her actions, she was suspended from the Liberal National Party for disloyalty to the party’s interests (Moore, 2010). The controversy and media coverage of community opposition raised questions about the legitimacy, transparency and ultimately, the effectiveness of the public participation process. As such, this particular case study may be atypical of neighbourhood planning in Brisbane, but given the relatively high public visibility, it provides an important opportunity to deconstruct the effectiveness of the public participation process.

Work on the Sherwood–Graceville Neighbourhood Plan began in 2007. It was introduced as part of Brisbane’s Neighbourhood Planning Program and featured public participation as one of the important components (BCC, 2010).

A neighbourhood plan is a 10-year statutory plan for the district. The plan's structure consisted of a set of development principles which describe the vision and principles for the area, followed by a description of the different precincts within the district and their envisioned future. The plan provides levels of assessment for codes that apply to different types of development in each precinct. The final part of the plan specifies design guidelines and development codes for the area (BCC, 2010). The plan was finalized in 2011.

## *2.2 Case Study Public Participation Process*

The BCC neighbourhood planning process provides for a range of public participation techniques that were utilized for the Sherwood–Graceville Neighbourhood Plan (see Table 3). One of the formal public participation components was a Community Planning Team (CPT) consisting of a diverse range of stakeholders with approximately 30 members. The Sherwood–Graceville CPT members were nominated by the local residents and met with the Council's planning staff on a regular basis to discuss key elements of the plan. In total, there were six CPT meetings between 2007 and 2008. Unlike the other opportunities for public participation such as newsletters, information sessions, surveys, online forums and workshops, the CPT meetings provided for a more continuous and sustained engagement with the neighbourhood planning process.

## *2.3 Evaluation Methods and Rationale*

Given the variety of approaches in evaluation research, we made some design choices that involved trade-offs. As the Sherwood–Graceville plan was finalized

TABLE 3. The range of participation tools utilized in the neighbourhood planning process (BCC, 2011)

Participation technique	Description
A citizen advisory committee (Community Planning Team [CPT])	The CPT was the primary advisory committee (non-executive roles) consisting of a diverse range of stakeholders (approximately 30 members). CPT members were nominated by local residents. The CPT met with Council's planning staff on a regular basis to discuss key elements about the neighbourhood plan. In total there were six meetings held between the year 2007 and 2008.
Newsletters	The Council also sent newsletters to all the residents in the area to inform them about the neighbourhood plan while requesting them to participate.
Information sessions	The Council organized various information sessions during the Sherwood Festival and Ambiwerra Festival to inform the community and provide an overview of the planning process.
Surveys	The Council surveyed local residents to assess their values and preferences for the area.
Online forum	The Council set up an online forum for people to discuss about the plan.
Workshops	The Council organized four workshops for community debate and discussions that were themed around design, heritage and character, parks and open space, and getting around the area.

with no further participation activities, our evaluation was retrospective and *summative*, rather than *formative*. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, our study examined both *process* and *outcome* criteria for effectiveness (Chess & Purcell, 1999). While *user-based* criteria can be tailored to each unique case study, these criteria are less generalizable (Chess, 2010), so we selected *theory-based* evaluation criteria from the literature. As evaluations are prone to bias and interference from personal agendas in participatory evaluations (Scriven, 1997; Coghlan & King, 2005; King *et al.*, 2007), our evaluation was primarily based on participants' views of public participation effectiveness, the most prominent approach among practicing planners (Laurian & Shaw, 2009).

To evaluate the public participation process for the Sherwood–Graceville neighbourhood plan, we used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. We examined the research literature review to identify a reasonably comprehensive list of potential evaluation criteria. We performed a desk review of documents from the BCC to gain a retrospective look at the public participation events and techniques used in the process (Butterfoss, 2006). And we designed and implemented a survey of participants in the process based on the evaluation criteria. Our decision to use survey research rather than interviews was based, in part, on our desire to design an evaluation instrument that could potentially be used in future public participation evaluation research. In our literature review, we found few examples of standardized evaluation questions that could be applied to public participation processes for land use planning.

*2.3.1 Survey design.* The questionnaire was organized into four parts. The first set of questions asked about the participant's involvement in the participation process. This included asking how long they lived in the area, how they came to learn about the neighbourhood plan, how familiar they were with the plan and what formal or informal participation activities they engaged in the process.

The participants' formal and informal participation activities were used to develop an 'engagement' index that quantifies the number of different activities, events or actions undertaken by an individual. We provided a list of formal participation events organized by the Council, followed by a list of informal participation activities where the participant could have engaged with the plan outside the Council's formal activities. Each potential activity had a 'yes' or 'no' response. This list of formal activities included attending information sessions during community festivals, participating in surveys conducted by the BCC, engaging in online forums set up by the BCC, attending community workshops organized by the BCC, nominating someone to become a CPT member or becoming a CPT member. Informal activities included verbally speaking to a Council member about the plan, speaking to a Council planning staff member about the plan, writing a letter or email to the Council, joining a community group because of the plan or actively encouraging family, friends or neighbours to participate in the plan consultation. The questionnaire also asked if the participant was a CPT member.

The second part of the survey contained operationalized statements to evaluate the participation *process* and *outcomes* using effectiveness criteria drawn from the

literature. Participants responded whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

In addition to the list of statements, the survey also included the IAP2 spectrum (IAP2, 2007a). The spectrum describes the participant’s role in the process using categories of ‘inform’, ‘consult’, ‘involve’, ‘collaborate’ and ‘empower’. These categories represent increasing levels of participant empowerment in the process. Participants were asked where they perceived the participation process operated based on their experience and where they would have personally preferred it to operate. This approach measures whether there were performance gaps between *preferred* and *actual* empowerment levels among participants.

The third part of the survey measured satisfaction with outcomes of the neighbourhood plan on specific planning issues, how they perceived their personal influence on plan outcomes, how they perceived other community members’ influence on plan outcomes and whether they would participate in future participation activities based on their experience. An open-ended question was included to identify recommendations for future participation practice.

The fourth and final part of the survey asked for respondent characteristics that included basic demographic questions and their role in the community consultation process. The questionnaire ended with an open-ended question asking for additional comments.

**2.3.2 Sampling.** We purposively sampled individuals who had lodged submissions for the Sherwood–Graceville Neighbourhood Plan as identified from the BCC submissions report (BCC, 2010). A total of  $n = 697$  questionnaires with cover letters were distributed by mail with a postage-paid return envelope. After approximately three weeks, a follow-up letter was sent to non-respondents to encourage completion of the survey. In the follow-up letter, participants were offered the option to complete an identical version of the questionnaire on the Internet.

### **2.3.3 Data analysis**

**2.3.3.1 Variables that contribute to effective public participation.** We analysed the operationalized statements of evaluation criteria and ranked the means from lowest to highest. Mean values below 3 indicate respondents generally disagree with the statement and above 3 indicate agreement with the statement. The criteria were heuristically rated based on the mean responses where means falling between 1 and 2.8 were rated as ‘poor’, between 2.8 and 3.2 as ‘mixed’, and between 3.2 and 5 as ‘good’.

To examine whether some of the criteria statements potentially measure latent variables, an exploratory factor analysis was performed. Factor analysis examines the correlations within a set of variables and groups them into a smaller number of factors using an extraction method. We used principal components analysis (PCA), a method that partitions the data into linear components. To enhance the interpretation, we rotated the extracted components using direct oblimin, an oblique rotation method that assumes whether factors are potentially related or interdependent (Field, 2009).

2.3.3.2 *Factors and variables that contribute to public participation satisfaction.* The factors extracted in the previous analysis were examined for significant correlation with an overall process satisfaction variable. Where three or more evaluation items loaded on a factor, they were assessed for potential use as a scale using reliability analysis. Reliability analysis generates Cronbach's  $\alpha$  where values above 0.7 indicate an acceptable level of reliability for scaling. After measuring the reliability of the scales, the scale items were summed to create an additive scale score. Bivariate correlations were then run between the scale scores and the overall satisfaction variable using Pearson's product-moment to identify which factors appear strongly correlated with overall satisfaction.

2.3.3.3 *Relationship between perceived empowerment and participation effectiveness.* To identify the gaps in participants' actual and their preferred levels of empowerment in the public participation process, the differences in means were assessed on the operationalized IAP2 spectrum (see Table 4). As the differences in means were within subjects, a paired-samples *t*-test was used to examine the differences in mean values (Field, 2009; Pallant, 2011). A significant difference is indicative of a discrepancy or a gap in the expectations about the participation process. Bivariate correlations were run between differences in means and the evaluation criteria to determine which evaluation criteria appear most strongly related to the gaps in perceived empowerment.

2.3.3.4 *Relationship between participants' engagement and participants' experience with the planning process.* To measure participant engagement, we created an engagement index based on whether the individual had participated in various events, formal and informal, associated with the public participation process. A larger index indicates a higher level of engagement with the process. Our approach was similar to the Meaden *et al.* (2012) study where each engagement item was aggregated to form the index. The specific formula for the engagement index was as follows:

TABLE 4. The IAP2 spectrum of public participation (IAP2, 2007a)

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations 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.

$$E = \frac{[N_F + N_I]}{[N_{tF}] + N_{tI}}$$

where:

- $E$  = engagement index;
- $N_F$  = formal participation events attended;
- $N_I$  = informal participation events attended;
- $N_{tF}$  = total number of formal participation events;
- $N_{tI}$  = total number of informal participation events.

Respondents with an engagement index higher than 0.5 were coded as *high* engagement and those below 0.5 were coded as *low* engagement. Participants who were CPT members were coded separately as they had a more formal role in the process. The three groups (low, high and CPT) were examined for differences in responses to the effectiveness criteria using analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether the level of engagement was related to perceived effectiveness of the process.

*2.3.3.5 Personal influence in planning process (self-efficacy) versus the perceived influence of other participants.* Similar to the assessment of perceptions of empowerment, we conducted paired-sample *t*-tests to identify significant differences between respondents' self-rating of their own participation influence (a measure of self-efficacy) on plan outcomes versus their perceptions of other community members' influence on plan outcomes.

*2.3.3.6 Relationship between perceived effectiveness of participation process and the propensity to participate in future consultation.* We ran bivariate correlations between responses to the effectiveness variables and a survey question that asked participants how likely they were to participate in future planning consultation. The question asked, 'Based on your experience in the neighbourhood plan, how likely are you to participate in future planning consultations?' The response categories were coded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'Not likely at all' to 5 = 'Extremely likely'.

*2.3.3.7 Analysis of qualitative data.* The two open-ended survey questions were 'recommendations for future public participation practices' and 'additional comments'. The responses were coded into themes and sub-themes using NVivo® software to cross-validate the quantitative results and identify other factors that have been missed in the evaluative component (Bezeley, 2010). We report the findings of the responses to the recommendations question in this article.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Respondent Characteristics

A total of 697 survey questionnaires were sent to individuals who made submissions in the neighbourhood planning process. After accounting for non-deliverables ( $n = 40$ ), there were 169 fully or partially completed surveys returned for a response rate of 25.7%. Of the respondents, 60.3% were female and 39.7%

were male. The age of the respondents ranged from a minimum of 23 years to a maximum of 92 years. Respondents were older than the general population of Brisbane with a mean age of 63 years (SD = 14.2). The time respondents had lived in the district ranged from less than 1 year to 86 years with a mean of 27.7 years (SD = 21.0).

As for roles in the public participation process, 87.8% of the respondents were residents living in the district while 1.4% had professional roles or represented group interests (4.8%). When asked how they first learned of the neighbourhood plan, 34.2% of the respondents indicated they learned through BCC's newsletters, 16.4% learned through other community members and 14.4% learned through family or friends.

### 3.2 Variables that Contribute to Effective Public Participation

Descriptive statistics were generated for 31 survey items that evaluate the public participation process (see Table 5). Overall, respondents expressed low satisfaction with the participation process ( $\bar{x} = 2.34$ , SD = 1.15).

Multiple *outcome* criteria indicated that the public participation process was ineffective. The criteria with the lowest mean scores were trust in developers as a result of the consultation ( $\bar{x} = 1.82$ , SD = 0.80) and trust in BCC ( $\bar{x} = 2.11$ , SD = 0.98). Participants also perceived that they were unable to influence plan outcomes ( $\bar{x} = 2.24$ , SD = 1.01), planning decisions were not made based on genuine consensus ( $\bar{x} = 2.19$ , SD = 1.01), the process failed to reduce conflict ( $\bar{x} = 2.54$ , SD = 1.01), the values of Sherwood–Graceville residents were not reflected in the plan ( $\bar{x} = 2.38$ , SD = 1.04) and the participation process failed to increase the quality of planning decisions ( $\bar{x} = 2.52$ , SD = 1.06).

There were two *outcome* criteria suggesting positive consequences as a result of public participation: participants gained a better understanding of planning issues in the Sherwood–Graceville District ( $\bar{x} = 3.28$ , SD = 0.92) and they increased trust in other community residents as a result of consultation ( $\bar{x} = 3.43$ , SD = 0.86).

The results for *process* criteria were also mixed with indicators of both effectiveness and ineffectiveness. Participants perceived that the process lacked transparency, was not fair and impartial to all participants and did not communicate how participation would influence planning decisions. The highest mean score was for agreement with the statement that the process was political ( $\bar{x} = 3.81$ , SD = 1.02). There were effective aspects of the public participation process. The community meetings were convenient and comfortable, were attended by local community interests, provided opportunities for participants to express their opinions and provided information that was not overly technical. The most positive aspect of the process was the meeting locations ( $\bar{x} = 3.68$ , SD = 0.76).

### 3.3 Factors and Criteria that Contribute to Public Participation Satisfaction

An exploratory factor analysis was completed for 30 evaluation criteria in the questionnaire to determine if the number of effectiveness criteria could be reduced without losing explanatory power. The extraction method used for factor analysis

*Assessing the Effectiveness of Public Participation*

TABLE 5. Descriptive statistics for effectiveness criteria with normative rating based on response means

Process criteria	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD	Normative effectiveness rating
Representativeness			
Participants who attended community consultation sessions represented the Graceville–Sherwood community interests.	3.47	0.87	Good
Independence			
The community consultation process was not strongly influenced by development interests.	2.53	1.07	Poor
The community consultation process was fair and impartial to all participants.	2.55	1.06	
Early involvement			
The Council made efforts to involve me throughout all stages in drafting the neighbourhood plan.	2.66	1.09	Poor
Transparency			
The consultation process for drafting the neighbourhood plan was transparent.	2.43	1.04	Poor
The community consultation process was political.	3.81	1.02	
Resource accessibility			
During consultation, sufficient information and knowledge were provided for me to take part in the discussion.	3.10	1.00	Mixed
The community consultation process provided participants with sufficient information to meaningfully participate.	3.01	0.97	
Seeking out and involving those affected by decisions			
The opportunities for participation were made clear to me.	3.32	0.92	Good
I was invited by the Council to participate in the consultation process for the neighbourhood plan.	3.05	1.11	
The community consultation involved individuals that would be affected by the neighbourhood plan.	3.36	0.98	
Comfort and convenience			
The timing of consultation sessions was suitable with my schedule.	3.19	0.97	Good
I found the consultation meeting locations convenient.	3.68	0.76	
I felt comfortable during consultation sessions.	3.26	0.90	
Deliberative quality			
I believe all participants were given a chance to provide their opinions.	3.21	0.93	Good
Seeking input from participants in how they participate			
The community consultation process requested that the participants design how they were to participate in the process.	2.85	0.85	Mixed
Non-technical information			
The community consultation process contained too much technical information for the average community member.	2.69	0.84	Good

TABLE 5. (Continued)

Process criteria	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD	Normative effectiveness rating
Communicate influence on decision			
The Council explained how my input would affect decisions in drafting the neighbourhood plan.	2.67	1.02	Poor
How the results from community consultation would be integrated into plan decisions was clearly communicated to the participants.	2.52	0.95	
After the community consultation process, participants learned how their participation affected the neighbourhood plan decisions.	2.69	0.97	
Planning decisions that could not be changed or influenced by community consultations were clearly communicated to the participants.	2.60	1.04	
Influence			
I was able to influence the neighbourhood plan in the consultation process.	2.24	1.01	Poor
The values of Sherwood–Graceville residents were incorporated in the neighbourhood planning decisions.	2.38	1.04	
Increased understanding			
After my participation, I gained a better understanding of planning issues in the Sherwood–Graceville District.	3.28	0.92	Good
Consensus reached			
The decisions made in the neighbourhood plan are based on genuine consensus.	2.19	1.01	Poor
Conflict reduction			
The community consultation process helped reduce conflict with the neighbourhood plan.	2.54	1.01	Poor
Increased trust			
As a result of community consultation, I increased my trust in other Sherwood–Graceville community residents.	3.43	0.86	Good
As a result of community consultation, I increased my trust in Brisbane City Council.	2.11	0.98	Poor
As a result of community consultation, I increased my trust in property developers.	1.82	0.80	
Workable solutions			
The community consultation process increased the quality of decisions made in the neighbourhood plan.	2.52	1.06	Poor
Satisfaction			
Overall, I am satisfied with community consultation in drafting the neighbourhood plan.	2.34	1.15	Poor

<sup>a</sup> Means are based on a five-point Likert scale with responses as follows: '1' = strongly disagree; '2' = disagree; '3' = neither disagree nor agree; '4' = agree; '5' = strongly agree.

was PCA with oblique rotation (direct oblmin). Diagnostics for the factor analysis indicated sampling adequacy (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin = 0.85), while Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded a result of  $X^2(435) = 2097.9, p < 0.001$ , indicating that correlations between survey items were sufficient for PCA.

Eight factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than one (Kaiser, 1974) that explained 68.7% of the overall variance. Loadings for coefficients below 0.5 were not included in the factors. Table 6 shows the eight factors and survey items that comprise them. The factor accounting for the greatest variation (32.8%) contains seven evaluation criteria that collectively measure the quality of participation outcomes. Factors with more than three survey items loading were treated as potential scales with reliability analysis performed to determine scale cohesiveness. The first factor—quality of participation outcomes—was highly reliable with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.90$ . The other two scales representing aspects of process convenience and information were less reliable with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  equal to 0.67 and 0.60, respectively.

The relationships between the evaluation criteria and process satisfaction were analysed with bivariate correlations for both summative scale scores and individual survey items. There were strong and significant correlations between satisfaction and multiple evaluation criteria. The strongest correlation was between satisfaction and the quality of outcome scale ( $r = 0.76, p < 0.01$ ), where satisfaction is positively related to outcomes that include resident values, achieve consensus, improve the quality of planning decisions, reduce conflict, increase trust in local government and exert influence over plan decisions. Individual scale items that were highly correlated with participant satisfaction include whether values of residents were incorporated in the plan ( $r = 0.73, p < 0.01$ ) and whether planning decisions were based on consensus ( $r = 0.71, p < 0.01$ ). One other evaluation criterion that did not load on any of the extracted factors—transparency of the process—was also strongly related to participation satisfaction ( $r = 0.60, p < 0.01$ ). There were other survey items and factors with statistically significant, but not exceptionally strong correlations. The results indicate that participation satisfaction is more closely related to participation *outcomes* rather than *process* variables such as comfort and convenience.

### 3.4 Relationship Between Perceived Empowerment and Participation Effectiveness

We analysed responses to the survey questions asking participants where they perceived the participation process operated on the IAP2 spectrum and where they would have preferred to see the process operate. Based on their experience (see Figure 2), 52% of the respondents believed that the participation process operated at the level of *consult* while 29% thought the process only operated at the level of *inform*. In contrast, about 55% of participants would have preferred the process to operate at the level of *collaborate* and 22% would have preferred to be *empowered* to make decisions about the plan. These descriptive results indicate a large performance gap between what participants experienced and what they would have preferred to experience, a result that was confirmed by paired-samples *t*-tests. Participants preferred greater empowerment ( $\bar{x} = 3.81, SD = 1.0$ ) than what they experienced ( $\bar{x} = 1.92, SD = 0.71, t = -15.4, p < 0.001$ ).

Bivariate correlations were run between the performance gaps (quantitative difference between experiences and preferences on the IAP2 spectrum) and responses to the effectiveness criteria variables. Many of the effectiveness criteria

TABLE 6. Results of factor analysis for 30 evaluation criteria with item loadings, percentage of variance explained, scale reliability and bivariate correlations with survey item measuring participant satisfaction

Factors and loadings <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of variance	Correlation with satisfaction <sup>b</sup>	Scale reliability <sup>c</sup>
1. Quality of participation outcomes (O) Values of residents were incorporated in plan decisions (0.86) (O) Consultation increased quality of decisions in plan (0.87) (O) Decisions made for plan based on genuine consensus (0.74) (O) Consultation reduced conflict with the plan (0.64) (O) As result of consultation, increased trust in BCC (0.73) (P) Consultation process was fair and impartial (0.62) (O) Participants were able to influence the plan (0.54) Convenience and info adequacy of the participation process (P) Timing of consultation were suitable with schedule (0.91) (P) Consultation meeting locations were convenient (0.71) (P) Sufficient information provided for discussion (0.55)	32.8	0.76 0.73 0.66 0.71 0.60 0.64 0.49 0.39 0.22 0.16* 0.09* 0.38	0.90
3. (P) Consultation asked participants how they should participate (0.57)	5.0	0.42	N/A
4. (P) Comprehensibility of information (0.88)	4.7	0.04*	N/A
5. (P) Communication about scope of participants' influence (0.86)	4.2	0.37	N/A
6. Council effort to involve community (P) Invited by Council to participate (0.87) (P) Council made effort to involve participants at all stages (0.78)	3.7	N/A 0.04*	N/A
7. Trust with others involved (P) Process strongly influenced by development interests (0.66) (O) Increased in trust in other residents (0.76)	3.5	0.27 N/A 0.47	N/A
8. Information outcomes (P) Participants represented community interests (0.64) (P) Participants informed how participation affected plan (0.59) (O) Gained better understanding of local planning issues (0.64)	3.4	0.08 0.34 0.10* 0.42 0.25	0.60

<sup>a</sup> (P) indicates item is *process* criterion; (O) indicates *outcome* criterion.

<sup>b</sup> All correlations are statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$  except those denoted with \*.

<sup>c</sup> Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for scale with three or more items.

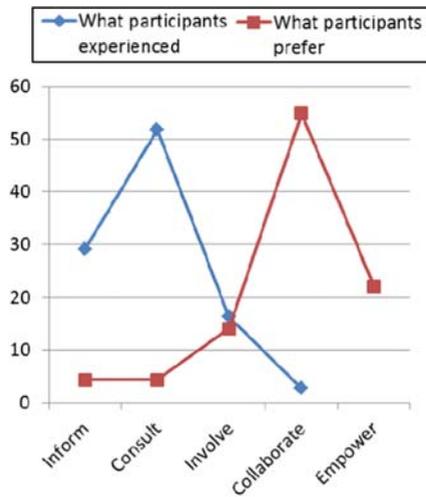


FIGURE 2. Percentage of responses in IAP2 categories showing what participants experienced in the public participation process compared to what participants would prefer in the process.

were significantly correlated with the performance gap, although none of the correlations exhibited a strong relationship where  $r$  exceeded 0.5. For example, the performance gap was significantly correlated with trust in BCC ( $r = -0.42, p < 0.001$ ), incorporation of residents' values in plan decisions ( $r = -0.39, p < 0.001$ ) and overall satisfaction with the plan ( $r = -0.34, p < 0.001$ ). The signs of the coefficients indicate that larger performance gaps are associated with lower perception of trust in BCC, less inclusion of community values in the plan and less overall satisfaction with the participation process. In other words, participants that perceived an IAP2 performance gap also perceived deficiencies on multiple effectiveness criteria.

### 3.5 Relationship Between Participants' Engagement and Participants' Experience with the Planning Process

We analysed relationships between participants' perceptions of effectiveness and their depth of engagement with the process using one-way ANOVA. Based on the quantitative engagement index, we divided respondents into three groups: 'high engaged', 'low engaged' and CPT members. In total, 104 respondents (76%) were coded as 'low engagement', 26 (19%) as 'high engagement' and seven individuals (5%) were 'CPT members'. A one-way ANOVA with Tukey's HSD post hoc test was used to determine significant differences between the three groups' perceptions of effectiveness. The variables included in the analysis were the 31 effectiveness criteria statements, the IAP2 performance gap variable and the three extracted factor scales.

Of the 35 variables examined, there were four statistically significant differences between the low- and high-engagement groups on the variables of process transparency, achieving consensus, trust in BCC and overall satisfaction

with the participation process. In all the cases, the high-engagement group had lower mean scores on perceived effectiveness variables than the low-engagement group. The CPT group size ( $n = 7$ ) was too small to generate statistically significant differences with the exception of the overall satisfaction variable, however, the CPT group had consistently larger mean scores on effectiveness than the other two groups. The CPT group had larger effectiveness scores than both the low- and high-engaged groups on most items. On the variable measuring overall satisfaction with community consultation, the CPT group was most satisfied ( $\bar{x} = 3.43$ ), followed by the low-engagement group ( $\bar{x} = 2.41$ ) and the high-engagement group ( $\bar{x} = 1.73$ ). Although caution is warranted given the small sample of CPT respondents, their formal role in the process is associated with the strongest perceptions of effectiveness, while more highly engaged participants perceived less effectiveness than less-engaged participants.

### *3.6 Personal Influence in Planning Process (Self-Efficacy) Versus the Perceived Influence of Other Community Participants*

We analysed responses to two survey items that assessed (1) the perceived influence of the individual respondent on plan outcomes and (2) the influence of other community members on plan outcomes. Response categories were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'No influence at all' to 5 = 'Very large influence'. Most respondents believed their personal influence was between 'no influence at all' to 'slight influence' ( $\bar{x} = 1.43$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) compared to the influence of other community members which fell between 'slight' and 'moderate' influence ( $\bar{x} = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ). This difference in perceived influence on planning outcomes was statistically significant ( $t = -11.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, the majority of participants believed their participation, whether individual or collective as a community, never achieved more than a slight level of influence on plan outcomes.

### *3.7 Relationship Between Perceived Effectiveness of Participation Process and the Propensity to Participate in Future Planning Consultation*

We analysed whether participants' perceived effectiveness might be related to their likelihood to participate again in future consultation. First, the mean of all responses on the question of likelihood was 2.93 ( $SD = 1.27$ ) indicating that most respondents were 'somewhat likely' to participate in future planning consultations. Bivariate correlations were run between the responses to this future participation question and the evaluation criteria survey items, the IAP2 performance gap and the three factor scales. All but four of the variables had no statistically significant relationships with the likelihood of future participation. There were weak, positive correlations between the likelihood to participate in future consultations and the ability to influence the plan ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and the opportunity to express one's opinion ( $r = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). There was also a weak, positive correlation between the belief that participation involved individuals affected by the plan and the likelihood of future participation ( $r = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Finally, there was a moderate correlation between the comprehensibility of information provided in the process and the likelihood of

future participation ( $r = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), that is the more comprehensible the information, the more likely future participation. Given the small number of weak relationships, one can reasonably conclude that future participation does not appear strongly related to the perceived ineffectiveness of this particular process.

### 3.8 Analysis of Qualitative Responses

To cross-validate the quantitative results, we coded responses to an open-ended question that asked, 'what improvements would you recommend for future participation practices in Brisbane's Neighbourhood Planning Program?' The five major thematic categories by frequency of reference were *consultation* ( $n = 26$ ), *empowerment* ( $n = 24$ ), *provision of information* ( $n = 22$ ), *interest groups* ( $n = 10$ ) and *plan enforcement* ( $n = 1$ ).

The qualitative results reinforced the quantitative findings but also provided some new insights that were not directly asked in the survey questions. For example, on the theme of *consultation*, participants recommended that future consultation provide more opportunities to participate ( $n = 10$ ), increase the scope of discussion ( $n = 5$ ) and have a genuine consultation process ( $n = 4$ ). An important sub-theme of *empowerment* was that BCC 'listen' to the community ( $n = 16$ ), which we interpret to be less about literal 'listening' (participants did have multiple opportunities to express their opinions) and more about integrating community concerns in the plan outcomes. On the theme of *information*, participants recommended more and better information ( $n = 16$ ) and reporting of consultation outcomes ( $n = 9$ ).

The most frequent *interest group* sub-theme was the recommendation to reduce government (both state and local) power and influence on the plan ( $n = 4$ ). Other sub-themes reinforced the perceived influence of developers in the process ( $n = 1$ ), but also suggested that future participation processes would benefit from less NIMBYism ( $n = 1$ ). There were also recommendations to limit participation to those directly affected by the decisions ( $n = 2$ ), which may contradict another recommendation to increase the diversity of the stakeholders ( $n = 1$ ).

## 4. Discussion

In this case study, participants perceived an ineffective public participation process, both in *process* criteria and, especially, in *outcome* criteria. Respondents perceived community consultation to be tokenistic with negative perceptions of process outcomes including the participants' ability to influence the plan, the inclusion of local community values in decisions, the failure to reduce conflict and increase trust in local government, and planning decisions not based on consensus. These outcome criteria were cohesive as a common factor describing the overall quality of participation outcomes. These outcome criteria were strongly related to overall satisfaction with the participation process. Participants were satisfied with sub-elements of the process (i.e. convenience and comprehensibility of information) but were dissatisfied with the plan outcomes indicating that participant satisfaction is strongly related to the substantive quality of the planning decisions rather than the procedural quality of the process.

A variable not previously emphasized in public participation studies, but present in this case study, was the perceived developers' influence in the process. The existing literature on effectiveness emphasizes the importance of independence and impartiality to stakeholders without identifying developers specifically (Crosby *et al.*, 1986; Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Our findings indicate that developers' perceived influence had a negative impact on process effectiveness as they were perceived by participants to benefit from increased housing densities in the plan at the expense of local community character.

The participants' role and level of engagement in the process appears related to their perceptions of effectiveness. Members of the CPT with a formal role had a more sanguine view of the process and outcomes. For other participants, the more one engaged with the process, the stronger the perception of ineffectiveness. This finding appears inconsistent with Lauber and Knuth (1997) who found that certain groups who attended meetings and involved themselves more in the process would have a more positive perception and understanding compared to those who had minimal contact. We speculate that greater engagement and understanding of the process is a two-edged sword with the potential to produce positive perceptions as well as to amplify negative perceptions. We acknowledge that our operationalized engagement index is an imperfect measure as it simply counts the number of participation activities rather than the time and effort of participants which may reveal more of the psychological investment of participants in the process.

Despite the perceived ineffectiveness of the process, respondents were still somewhat likely to participate in future community consultations. Because participants in this process perceived very low levels of influence over planning decisions, the results cannot be directly compared with studies by Valentino *et al.* (2009) and Scully (1997) which suggest that influential participation enhances participants' internal efficacy and thus increases participation rate. Participants in this study were not willing to conclude that all community consultation is ineffective, even if this particular process was poorly received. Pragmatically, our results suggest that to enhance future participation, the process should strive to include those affected by the plan decisions, provide opportunities for individual expression of opinion and keep the technical planning information comprehensible.

Our measurement of experiences and preferences on the IAP2 spectrum was designed to assess whether participant expectations for the process were realized (or not). Effectiveness is not necessarily about where the process operates on the spectrum, as there will be constraints on the decision space in every planning process. Effective participation can occur at any level on the IAP2 spectrum. The key to effective participation is more about communicating and managing the decision expectations of participants in the process.

As Collins (1978) notes, communicating the scope of participants' influence reduces backlash from communities and prevents participants from being misled with their expectations. If communities have high expectations about their level of influence only to discover that their input is advisory and largely ignored, they will develop resentment against the government.

In our case study, an important deficiency was the failure of BCC to communicate to participants those aspects of the plan that could be modified as a

result of consultation. Participants did not agree that the ‘Council explained how my input would affect decisions . . .’ and most important, participants disagreed that ‘planning decisions that could not be changed or influenced by community consultations were clearly communicated to participants’. Participants assumed, whether warranted or not, that their views would be able to influence decisions about the plan. When planning decisions such as increasing density went contrary to preferences, participants escalated their discontent into the political arena. An important lesson from this case study that is transferable to other participation processes is that the discretionary planning decision space should be clearly communicated and understood by participants at the outset and reinforced throughout the process for potential latecomers.

#### *4.1 Ineffective Public Participation Exacerbates Planning ‘Disconnects’*

Loh (2011) describes four possible disconnects in the planning process—visioning, plan writing, local government actions and ordinance enforcement. Disconnects are ‘critical points in the process—the points of decision or agreement’ (Loh, 2011, p. 36) when an individual or body must act to move the planning process forward, but is stalled by conflict or inaction. The dissatisfaction and perceived tokenism in the Sherwood–Graceville participation process suggest planning disconnects during the stages of plan visioning and local government action. The vision and principles for specific elements of the plan—the Sherwood Centre Precinct, Corinda Centre Precinct, Alan Fletcher Research Station and St Aidan’s School Precinct—were contrary to respondents’ preferences. A disconnect in the visioning process led to problems in operationalizing the plan into acceptable and enforceable development codes. For example, the development codes allowed increased densities, up to five storey buildings in centre precincts, expansion of St Aidan’s school and the use of Alan Fletcher station for residential purposes, all of which were opposed by participants.

The transfer of plans for review between different agencies (hand-offs) throughout the planning process complicates the planning process and contributes to disconnects (Loh, 2011). The Brisbane Neighbourhood Planning Program involves numerous hand-offs at different stages in the process. After a plan is drafted, BCC is required to submit the plan to the Queensland Government for review and amend it based on the feedback. The plan is transferred back to the state government again for a final review after community input during the submission phase. The need to obtain agreement and reviews from different agencies and officials complicates the planning process where final outcomes may be inconsistent with original goals. Despite public participation, local and state governments have final decision authority in the plan. Presumed agreements or understandings from the participation process may be modified resulting in the large perceived discrepancy between preferred and actual levels of influence among participants. Regardless of the variety, quantity, inclusiveness or deliberativeness of participation techniques, a community may still feel disempowered because the political realities of the planning system reproduce existing structures of power that do little to overcome public distrust either among

groups who have traditionally taken an active role in local affairs or new participants to the process (Bedford *et al.*, 2002).

The conflict between long-term, integrated regional planning and neighbourhood planning (Sirianni, 2007) was evident in this case study. There is pressure for the BCC to accommodate regional population growth which puts pressure on the Council to accommodate this growth within the metropolitan area by allocating the growth to different districts. This research showed that the participants were generally opposed to growth, including increased densities and expansion in the district. However, managing the strategic allocation of population growth is an important regional goal under the *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009–2031* (SEQRP). The SEQRP sets dwelling targets for cities in the region to accommodate the influx of population that local Councils such as BCC must fulfil (Department of Local Government and Planning, 2010). For Brisbane, the number of additional dwellings allocated is 156,000, of which 138,000 would come from infill development (section 8.1 of SEQRP). Thus, managing regional growth is an important strategy that may restrict a local council's ability to provide stronger influence from local communities. Arguably, however, BCC would appear to have some discretion over where to allocate the future growth.

#### 4.2 *Communicative Planning Theory, Power, and Public Participation*

The planning literature has been strongly influenced by communicative planning (CP) theory exemplified by the writing of Healey (1992, 1996) where the practice of planning is viewed as facilitating communicative interchanges between interested parties that fosters community empowerment and the development of discursive local democracy. But there is a sustained critique of CP theory that insufficient attention is given to the practical context of power in which planning is practiced and unrealistically abstracts planners from their positioning in a nexus of power, knowledge and rationality (McGuirk, 2001). The public participation process, as the most visible mechanism for communication around planning issues, plays a central role in the emergence (or not) of participatory democracy in planning. How do our case study results reflect on CP theory and its critique? Results for several evaluation criteria suggest some positive conditions for CP theory such as community representativeness, inclusion of individuals affected by the neighbourhood plan, communication in non-technical language and a 'deliberative quality' (participants had opportunity to communicate opinions). However, it is also evident from this case study that communication did not reach a critical depth of understanding and trust to create consensus (or near consensus) regarding important plan outcomes.

The communicative 'failure' in the participation process may be attributed, in part, to the context of power in neighbourhood planning in Brisbane. The participants believed that the process was highly political, that developers wielded undue influence in the process and that the process was unfair to district residents. A power differential between planning districts and the BCC is structurally embedded in the Brisbane neighbourhood planning process wherein a given district is politically represented by a single BCC member. If the district Council member represents a minority political party on the BCC, the other BCC members

can adopt a district plan that some may interpret as an expression of political power that is punitive for the district. An increase in urban density without urban area expansion requires the allocation of higher development densities. Given the generally unpopular local view of increased density, the allocation of higher density to certain districts may be viewed by some as political rationality masquerading as planning rationality.

The second critique of CP theory is that professional planners are unable to abstract themselves from their position of power and knowledge in the planning process. Regarding the knowledge claim, planners often do perceive themselves as having greater technical knowledge about urban planning than local residents which exacerbates the expert/lay divide and makes effective communication more difficult (see Friedmann, 1973). Within Australia, many urban planners have a bachelor's degree in town planning as well as professional affiliation with the Planning Institute of Australia. On the dimension of power, residents perceive professional planning staff as agents of BCC. Even if the professional planning staff aspire to adopt a more independent, facilitative role in the participation process, significant time would be required for residents to develop trust that planners can actually act independent of the BCC. When confronted by residents who disagree with certain neighbourhood plan components, it is natural for professional planners to act defensively and communicate political constraints in the planning process which serves to reinforce their dependence on the BCC. On balance, it is difficult to see how the structure of power and the role of professional planners could be overcome in this particular case study, although effective public participation outcomes via CP theory remains an attractive, if idealistic, possibility.

#### *4.3 Limitations and Implications for Future Participation Evaluation Research*

All research faces trade-offs between internal and external validity. Our case study provided an opportunity to examine participation effectiveness in depth using a comprehensive range of criteria (both *process* and *outcome*). However, by definition, case studies lack external validity to the extent that the research context is not similar to other people, places and events. Although our findings may not generalize to other settings, our evaluation methods appear adaptable for use in other public participation processes.

Our survey response rate of approximately 26% was adequate for statistical analysis, but leaves open the question about whether the respondents represent a valid, unbiased cross-section of public participants or whether respondents could be biased towards the most aggrieved participants that were more motivated to respond. If the latter, our results may overstate the ineffectiveness of the public participation process. Valentino *et al.* (2009) found that community members who were unhappy and experienced 'anger' towards political challenges were more likely to participate. In contrast, community members who were complacent with the plan outcomes participate less and prefer top-down decision-making for efficiency (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Moreover, while the survey did evaluate the deliberative quality and representativeness of the participants, our evaluation focused on the perception of individuals that participated in the process which may

not reflect the views of the wider community (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). The wider community includes hard-to-reach and disadvantaged individuals that are less likely to participate in survey research in general. Further, this evaluation research targeted a sample of process participants but there are other evaluation perspectives. For example, the planning staff, local politicians and other stakeholders could offer potentially different evaluations of both the participation process and outcomes.

There was also a limitation with respect to the sampling frame used in the study. As a retrospective evaluation, we were limited to a sampling frame that was based on individuals that had submitted comments. This sampling frame excludes individuals that may have participated in the process (e.g. phoned their Council member) but did not submit comments. The number of individuals that would fall into this category is unknown.

This study ventured into the arena of participation empowerment that identified a large gap in participant expectations for the process. Future evaluation research for public participation will confront the challenge of parsing the contribution of participation means (process) versus ends (outcomes) in determining overall effectiveness. Does it make sense to separate *process* criteria from *outcome* criteria in the evaluation? Do participants really see *process* as separate from *outcome*? Can an inclusive, equitable and empowering process that results in poor planning outcomes for the community be considered effective? Can a participation process that is top-down, exclusive and dominated by interest groups be effective if the planning decisions are highly favourable to the community? Our case study results suggest that perceived effectiveness is invariably linked with process *outcomes* but we can at least imagine a situation where this does not necessarily hold. Future research should examine how the planning decision space is negotiated and managed in the participation process to increase effectiveness even when planning outcomes appear unfavourable to community interests.

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