

Culture



Organizational Responses to Issues Concerning the Delegation of Authority in Situations Involving Public Participation

Sheldon Goldenberg

Volume 4, numéro 1, 1984

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078319ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078319ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Goldenberg, S. (1984). Organizational Responses to Issues Concerning the Delegation of Authority in Situations Involving Public Participation. *Culture*, 4(1), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078319ar>

Résumé de l'article

La délégation d'autorité crée des problèmes idéologiques et structurels pour les organisations mettant en oeuvre des programmes de participation du public. Deux raisonnements spécifiques, fallacieux et idéologiques, sont examinés. Ils constituent des rationalisations contre toute participation du public au processus décisionnel et proposent une intégration mécaniste au sein des organisations existantes, de bureaux de participation publique. Celle-ci exige, pour être efficace, un type d'organisation flexible agissant à la fois rapidement, directement, de manière autorisée et en interaction avec les groupes de résidents locaux. Mais, comme aucune bureaucratie « mécaniste » ne répond à ces derniers critères, toute tentative de participation du public échoue. Nous suggérons donc que les organisations qui souhaitent promouvoir une telle participation changent leur structure d'organisation interne et adoptent un type d'organisation « organique ».

Organizational Responses to Issues Concerning the Delegation of Authority in Situations Involving Public Participation

Sheldon Goldenberg
University of Calgary

The delegation of authority presents ideological and structural problems for organizations implementing programmes of public participation. Two specific ideological fallacies are examined as these embody rationalizations for opposition to public involvement in decision-making and at most only the “mechanistic” incorporation of public participation bureaus within existing organizations. Since effective public participation requires a flexible organization that can respond quickly, directly and authoritatively in interaction with local resident groups, and mechanistic bureaucracies can do none of these, this organizational structuring guarantees the failure of public participation. It is therefore suggested that those organizations that wish to engage in meaningful and useful public participation programmes will have to alter their internal organizational structures in the direction of the “organic” type.

La délégation d'autorité crée des problèmes idéologiques et structurels pour les organisations mettant en oeuvre des programmes de participation du public. Deux raisonnements spécifiques, fallacieux et idéologiques, sont examinés. Ils constituent des rationalisations contre toute participation du public au processus décisionnel et proposent une intégration mécaniste au sein des organisations existantes, de bureaux de participation publique. Celle-ci exige, pour être efficace, un type d'organisation flexible agissant à la fois rapidement, directement, de manière autorisée et en interaction avec les groupes de résidents locaux. Mais, comme aucune bureaucratie «mécaniste» ne

répond à ces derniers critères, toute tentative de participation du public échoue. Nous suggérons donc que les organisations qui souhaitent promouvoir une telle participation changent leur structure d'organisation interne et adoptent un type d'organisation «organique».

Much of the literature in the area of public participation deals with it in a community rather than an organizational context (Draper, 1971; Sewell and Coppock, 1977; Bachelor and Jones, 1981; Rich and Rosenbaum, 1981)¹. It is rare to see public participation related to the organizational structures of the proponent organizations involved (Blumberg, 1973). And yet, in ten years of consulting experience² it has been our observation that the “success” of public participation programmes³ appears to be directly, systematically and clearly related to structural characteristics of the proponent organizations—the organizations proposing a given project. For this reason, it appears critical that one analyze the internal characteristics of the proponent organizations with a view to discovering which characteristics are amenable to, which ones facilitate, and which ones inhibit successful implementation of public participation programmes. There is another way of viewing this question, and that is simply to ask what organizational implications follow from the commitment on the part of the

proponent to implementation of “public participation,” whether this commitment is forced (by government, for example) or voluntary (Goldenberg *et al.*, 1980). It is our view that both of these questions lead to the same set of problems and eventually to the same organizational structure (Almond and Verba, 1963; Simmie, 1974). This is not a new question, and we will suggest an old analysis based on the early contributory work of Burns and Stalker (1961).

One of the central problems of any bureaucratic arrangement is that of the *delegation of authority*, and it is this problem of deciding how much responsibility to delegate, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of setting up a structure within which it can be delegated in a “responsible” manner, that seems to plague public participation programmes. For public participation involves allowing a new “player” into the game, with the power to affect the outcome—an unknown player, and one beyond the control of the proponent organization. It is particularly the delegation of authority from those within proponent organizations to laypersons in the community to be impacted upon that is most problematic from the point of view of the former (Jacobs, 1978; Ward, 1978; Weissman, 1978; Smith, 1982), and it seems to be irrelevant whether the proponent is government (at any level) or industry.

The proponent’s central question is why they should allow lay-persons to affect the conduct and possible outcomes of a project funded by the proponent and in which the proponent has a considerable amount at risk. After all, laypersons, by definition, lack the technical competence to assess many of the problems involved. Furthermore, the lay public often has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, in opposition to the interests of the proponent. Clearly, to the extent that differential interests are relevant here, the issue becomes “political” rather than technical (Schnai-berg, 1980) and directs our attention to the use of a conflict perspective in analyzing it (Ward, 1978; Sadler, 1979; Elder, 1975). And conflicts of interest may well arise not only between proponent and community but even between the proponent and their own consultants, who, after all, have their own interests to serve, sometimes even at cost to their client (Ward, 1978; DiSanto *et al.* 1979). In any case, delegating authority means giving up some of the power to influence outcomes, and for some proponents the issue is not even whether to grant some authority to laypersons within the community. They are concerned with how much authority or

responsibility to delegate to *outsiders*, even if these are professional consultants, and particularly insofar as they may be engaged to do the kind of background studies and environmental and social impact assessments that are a prelude to and part of public participation programmes in the community. Thus, objections to public participation may really be objections to any broadening of the field of active participants, even if they are acknowledged to possess relevant expertise⁴. These problems of delegation of authority beyond the narrow organizational boundaries are fundamental to the sociology of organization. We would argue that the manner in which a proponent deals with these ideological and *organizational* issues is strongly related to the success of its public participation programmes. The success of public participation thus becomes, *in part*, a function of the internal structure of the organizations who are proposing a given project⁵ (Burton, 1979).

We shall discuss two fundamental ideological responses that become relevant here. The first concerns a fallacy which we have heard from many proponent organizations over the past few years in our consulting practice for industrial, community and government clients. It is that “information must precede participation.” This argument is based on the premise that active participation means responsiveness, and in order to respond, one must first be informed. Hence, the first task of the proponent is to inform that public of what is proposed. This step is a necessary precondition to participation. A constructive public response is thereby encouraged, and *such a response constitutes a public participation programme*. This interpretation of the meaning of public participation has been discussed at length in Burton’s (1979) review of the social impact literature in Canada. He suggests that “public participation has been seen as an opportunity to inform and consult, not to advise and consent.” It has often been seriously suggested that allowing the public to be informed of proponent plans through newsletters and open houses *is the proper extent* of a public participation programme. On the contrary, it has been our endeavour, more often unsuccessful than not, to attempt to convince proponent organizations that public participation is *more* than a matter of keeping the public informed of “what you plan to do to them,” and more than allowing them to respond. It is our view that such a position is simply a rationale for excluding the public from participating while claiming to be involving them.

Many proponents, perhaps the great majority, seem to have very little understanding of what

public participation actually entails. Or perhaps they understand all too clearly what such participation entails (Burton, 1979). Their favoured definition means that the public will not be able to provide significant input to plans that have been created by the professionals employed by the proponent organization. The public is allowed neither the time nor the organizational format to do so (Goldenberg *et al.*, 1980). Such a programme of so-called "public participation" encourages a hostile reception by this public, presented as they are with what must appear to them to be a "*fait accompli*", and given neither opportunity nor authority to do more than either "rubber stamp" their approval or howl their outrage after the fact. In other words, this peculiar definition of participation that allows none is an inflammatory political act, even if this is rarely the intention of the proponent (Elder, 1975; Macor, 1980).

To illustrate, a few years ago a major Alberta utility company entered a community hall for an Open House session with many charts, graphs and diagrams laying out the design of a proposed new local and large-scale development that would entirely and permanently affect every aspect of the local environment, both physical and social. Several company experts presented short prepared speeches concerning the eventual appearance of the area once it had been relandscaped, the amount of coal that would be mined in the area in a given year, and the cost of all the infrastructure of the generating plant proposed. These are important issues, but they are not the issues that the community was interested in, at least not at that time. This proponent made the convenient "mistake" of assuming that public participation could not really begin, would not really begin, and should not really begin until the public had been *fully* informed of the project details. And their response to that information would constitute the sum total of their participation. Other proponents have made the same "error." The individuals in charge of public participation for a particular project sponsored by Alberta Environment have actually stated to the author that in their opinion public participation would have to wait until "the brochures had been sent out, until the public meetings had been held, until the mock-up and display had been set up in the shopping centre"; until, in other words, the public could be fully informed of the nature of the project.

As social impact consultants, we have made a number of quite unsuccessful attempts with clients to try and convince them that the public frequently has far more knowledge of the immediate area to be

impacted upon than the professionals, the proponent, and all of their consultants planning that impact. Social impact does not wait for "the shovel to hit the ground," although this is precisely the suggestion made to us by another major developer. Public participation must begin when the first hint of a project reaches a community and when they become aware that there are plans that will have an impact in their local area (Macor, 1980). A series of events begin to take place that are part of a response to those plans. For example, speculators begin to acquire land in the area, counting on a short or protracted boom in the area, and house prices and lot prices rise accordingly. Small businessmen may enter town, professionals may be attracted. Any number of changes take place on the basis of no more than a rumor of a possible development of some kind. *This is impact*. It has begun long before the shovel has hit the ground, and public participation, as we understand the concept and advocate the practice, must begin then as well. This concept of public participation envisions an *active* role in the decision-making process for local impacted publics. It follows from this that as soon as the impact begins, public participation *in a decision-making capacity* must as well (Sadler, 1979).

This would suggest that the local public be involved in a decision-making capacity from the inception of planning of a project. All the early planning considerations involving, for example, the location of a potential plant site or roadway, the possibilities for employment of local residents, and certainly the mitigation of all foreseeable negative impacts in the area ought to involve active participation of members of the local community as well as independent consultants and the proponent. This version of public participation envisions having local residents from the immediate impacted area actively involved in the searching process in which different kinds of decisions will be reviewed, revised, modified, rejected and accepted. It is a very different concept of public participation from that earlier described that postpones their involvement or creates for them a role that consists of little more than "criticisms," necessarily from an opposition position, of decisions that have already been made, of alternatives that have already been considered and rejected, presumably for good reason, by the proponent organization.

To summarize, we suggest that it is quite untrue that the public must first be informed of the details of a project before they can participate responsibly in decision-making that concerns them and the immediate area in which they live. It is a

convenient fallacy, in our view that information must precede participation. It is our view that information and participation are to be viewed as interactive and bilateral processes. It is our contention that proponents gain at least as much from allowing themselves to be informed by the public as the public gains from the information delivered to them by proponents and their staffs. We would argue very strongly that encouraging the public to play an active role in the decision-making process is not in any way an abdication of authority or responsibility on the part of the proponent organization. This would seem to be another convenient rationalization for those organizations either unwilling or unable to deal with the concerns of a local population (Rochon, 1982; Jacobs, 1978). It is in this context that we would speak of this ideological fallacy that information precedes participation as a problem in the delegation of authority, and it is with this comment that we will pass on to consideration of a second related fallacy concerning the delegation of authority by proponents in the case of public participation.

On many different occasions we have seen proponents accuse extra-organizational consultants of “passing the buck”—of abdicating their responsibility to make decisions as experts. A proponent often argues that social consultants try to pass their responsibility on to laypersons in the community to be impacted upon, who are, in the judgement of the proponent, not sufficiently expert to be able to make the judgements they are requesting of the social consultant. Thus, the proponent may ask a consultant what the most severe negative impact of a proposed development will be. The consultant may reply by noting a number of likely impacts and suggesting that only a survey of local residents will allow him/her to say which impact they will consider the most severe. Further, only by communicating with local residents can one take advantage of their special knowledge of the area based on broad experience in it. The desire of the proponent for more “objective,” expert and distant analysis is thus contrasted with the consultant’s insistence that what is crucial is insider knowledge and the “definition of the situation” as experienced by the local population. This disagreement about what there is to be learned from the local population is quite common and very important. This is at least a basic misunderstanding and these are fundamental problems and charges to social consultants concerned with social impact assessment, because what the proponent organization calls “passing the buck” is frequently considered by the social impact assessors

to be the most essential component of a public participation programme which is both responsive and legitimate (Smith, 1982; Burton, 1979).

Any mistrust of social impact consultants and those who do social impact assessments may be based in part on the above misunderstanding⁶. Frequently, the administrative structure of a proponent organization mistrusts and questions the actions of social consultants because they define the behaviour as abdicating what they feel should be the social consultant’s proper role and responsibility (Burton, 1979). In essence, they feel that community participation as defined above is “passing the buck” and allowing the community to make important decisions which are in the proper realm of the social consultant as expert. And the community is not as closely tied to the proponent as the consultant whose fee is paid by the organization. This notion of “passing the buck” is an extremely serious and fallacious, if convenient, ideological rationale.

It is our position that a responsible social impact assessment involves evaluating the expert knowledge, the “grounded” assessments, perceptions and “definitions of the situations” of the local residents themselves. It does not stop—perhaps it does not even begin—with a simple systems analysis of the capacity of infrastructure of a given area to survive, handle, or cope with an influx to be expected with a particular development. Different factors will be weighed differently, viewed differently and defined differently by the residents of the local community from the manner in which they will be viewed and defined by the social consultants or proponent. A responsible social impact assessment addresses, not the views of the social impact assessors or the proponent in terms of the impact of a proposed development, but the views of the local residents. It is the people in the immediate area who will in fact be impacted upon and this does not in most cases include the social consultants. Thus, it is the views of the local residents that must be taken into account and weighed most heavily. A central component of a responsible social impact assessment *must*, therefore, consist of attempts to identify and understand those views as well as to accurately communicate them to the proponent organization.

Allowing the public to play an active role in decision-making that involves a particular project is not a matter of “passing the buck.” It is enacting participatory democracy (Blumberg, 1973; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Rich and Rosenbaum, 1981). It allows those about to be affected to have some say in the decisions that most closely affect them (Macor, 1980). It is clear that the so-called “engineering

mentality” that allegedly pervades both government and private industry often views public participation in one of two ways. It may be seen as harmless “window-dressing” or “p.r.,” or it may be derogated as “passing the buck.” In this latter case, it is viewed as presenting a serious threat to open up decision making to the “opposition,” to invite a “fifth column” into the proponent organization itself. And accusing the consultant of “passing the buck”, when and if he/she wishes to involve the community more actively in data collection and assessment, may provide the proponent with an ideological rationale for opposing public participation while not appearing to do so (see Burton, 1979). This is, in our view, both a very unfortunate kind of metaphor and an unfortunate situation. It is also, nonetheless, part and parcel of the fundamental problems to which this paper is addressed. In our understanding of the nature of public participation, the public is encouraged to participate, and is expected to participate, actively. They are encouraged to respond, communicate and interact. Public participation does not merely refer to a situation in which the public is allowed to adapt as best it can to decisions made by experts located elsewhere who have no immediate vested interest in the local area, are strangers to it, and are not likely to return to it. It is a bilateral communication process (Sadler, 1979).

We are dealing here with issues concerning the responsiveness (or the resistance) of the proponent to the inputs of the community, and the responsiveness (or the resistance) of the community to inputs that are made to them by the proponent, perhaps mediated by various consultants. Public participation seems to require, in an ideal sense, that the public interact directly (and not through an intervening mediator) with the proponent (Macor, 1980). However, until such time as the community is able and prepared to interact directly with the proponent, the role of the social consultant involves the definition of the situation for the community and the translation of their concerns into terms that can be understood by the proponent.

A genuine commitment to public participation requires that the proponent be responsive to public criticism, to public inputs, public demands for information and the public suggestion of information to be incorporated into decisions by the client. This responsiveness is a very central component of the public participation process and it is a component that has very straightforward implications for internal organizational structure of the proponent organization itself (Priscoli, 1977). It seems to follow that a genuine commitment to public par-

ticipation would require that this proponent be in such a position as to be able to respond quickly, flexibly, and responsibly to inputs from the community. This is rarely done. More frequently, public participation has been set up as an additional (sometimes *ad hoc*) department with a certain level of autonomy at the bottom of a hierarchical arrangement of a chain of command (Burton, 1979). The proponent has a pre-existing set of communication channels through which information will slowly be filtered on up from the community, (sometimes through the social consultant) through the middle management structure for planning, and up through various vice-presidents of different departments. Eventually, through this chain of command, the communication flow will reverse and very slowly the spread of some kind of decision will go back down along these frequently “broken” telephone lines, and eventually back to the community. The length of time required for information to be transferred along this communication network, the amount of distortion in the process as it is translated and transferred along this chain of command, and the lack of concern that this seems to indicate to the inputting community, all have contributed seriously in the past to the detriment of any kind of public participation of a genuine sort in an affected community that would like to speak directly to, and interact directly with, those who are making decisions about their fate (Jacobs, 1978; Smith, 1982).

In a more responsive organizational environment the chain of command and communication flow looks quite different. This brings us back to the key work of Burns and Stalker (1961). It is their analysis that enables us to link directly this discussion of the fallacies involving the delegation of authority in public participation programmes, to an organizational critique and analysis. Burns and Stalker, along with several other authors, (e.g. Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Gouldner, 1954) have contributed a critique of Weber’s notion of bureaucracy that begins with the division of bureaucracy into two ideal types. Their types are called “mechanistic” and “organic.” These two types have quite different internal structural characteristics and tend to arise in quite different environmental situations. The two ideal types of organization distinguished by Burns and Stalker relate to the two ways in which public participation has been incorporated into proponent organizational structures. To the extent that the currently fashionable trend to matrix organizational forms is compatible with organic organization as explained here, it also follows that this organizational form would be preferred to mechanistic

bureaucracy. However, matrix is not simply an operational definition of organic, and organic is the more precise term for the present discussion (see Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Davis and Lawrence, 1977). The one feature that is essential in the present discussion is that whether in matrix or in organic formats, *relevant decision-makers* must be directly accessible and responsive to the public involved. While the concept of organic bureaucracy is a heuristic device, Burns and Stalker do derive it from empirical case analysis, and it is intended to be descriptive and prescriptive of real organizations. This is not a purely theoretical type, of a different order from the inductively generated and empirically grounded work on matrix forms. Again, where these two concepts overlap, it matters not at all whether one refers to organic bureaucracy or matrix. Where they differ, this paper refers to organic.

Mechanistic bureaucracy is described very much like Weber's ideal typical bureaucracy, in which "red tape" is quite familiar. It has a great many hierarchical levels of carefully defined offices and circumscribed roles and positions. Experts are hired for their expertise in order to fulfill roles in a limited and narrowly circumscribed manner. Authority is carefully restricted and allocated on the basis of both position and expertise. There is a high level of centralized control and responsibility is vested in the highest level of the hierarchy. It is management from the top down the chain of command. Certainly, Weber recognized the inefficiencies of this standard mechanistic bureaucracy. He referred at length to problems including the length of time and the amount of distortion that enters into the decision-making process across the many hierarchies of the decision-making pyramid. Still, such an organization, according to Burns and Stalker, is effective under certain kinds of environmental circumstances. Under other circumstances it is a great deal less effective and efficient. According to these analysts, the mechanistic bureaucracy is particularly effective and efficient in those instances in which the technology of production is relatively stable and unchanging and in which the marketplace environment for that product is also relatively stable and unchanging, e.g., soap manufacturers. In this particular industry the technology is standardized and relatively unchanging. There is no need for quick adaptation to rapid change in the marketplace for there is no rapid change in the marketplace. Under such circumstances a mechanistic bureaucracy is both effective and efficient.

On the other hand, an organic bureaucracy appears quite a bit different both internally and externally (Glaser, 1964; Blauner, 1964). Its internal structure is much looser. It exhibits a very small (or in some cases, absent) chain of command. There is no extensive hierarchy. Offices are not carefully defined; they are allowed to overlap and they do so a great deal. Experts are hired, but not for carefully circumscribed positions. Indeed, the assumption is made that they will allow their expertise to be used where it is most appropriate whether that jurisdiction falls well within their particular position in the company or not. Commitment and loyalties engendered in such organizations among professionals who work in such an environment tend to be much broader than is true in a mechanistic bureaucracy. It is a commitment to the product, to the process, and to the organization rather than a much more limited commitment to the office as in the Weberian bureaucracy. An example is in the electronics industry where the technology of production has been changing quickly. Revolutionary adaptations to change are commonplace and the marketplace itself is also extremely dynamic, rapidly expanding, and frequently changing to a great extent. In such a dynamic, rapidly changing environment it seems that an organic bureaucracy is far more efficient and effective than a mechanistic one. Indeed, one might be tempted to suggest that a mechanistic bureaucracy would fail within such an environment. One might also be tempted to suggest, somewhat teleologically, that organic bureaucracies are nearly predetermined within such environments. Survival depends upon the transformation of organization in such environments into organic bureaucracies from mechanistic ones (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Harvey, 1968; Stopford, 1980; Davis and Lawrence, 1977)⁷.

The major point that we would like to make in terms of public participation is simply that a commitment to public participation by a proponent is a newly emerging issue at this moment in time. The environment of public participation is changing extremely rapidly (Smith, 1982). The guidelines, such as they are, are being rewritten from one day to the next. Many are not formalized. In such circumstances organic bureaucracy appears likely to be much more efficient and effective. Rigid mechanistic bureaucracies appear to be counter-productive and this is the essence of our argument. In order for public participation to be useful, the internal organizational structure of the proponent organization must be flexible and adaptable. It must be able to respond quickly, directly and effectively to inputs

from the community. In practice, this means that an organization interested in implementing a public participation programme, as we understand the term, cannot simply tack on a new department at the bottom of an existing hierarchy. Public participation programmes must be handled by those who have the ability to respond quickly, directly and forcefully to the concerns of the public. This means that such a programme must be run by someone with direct and easy access to the highest levels of the proponent organization. Such a person must be able to call on any other department or office as needed and they must themselves actively participate in all aspects of development planning. They must be able to short-circuit the line of command or they must stand near the top of it.

Under the current circumstances we would argue that mechanistic bureaucracies are simply counter-productive. Yet it is quite clear that in many cases proponent organizations have attempted to create relatively autonomous compartmentalized social impact assessment "bureaus" operating at the bottom of their pre-existing and lengthy hierarchical arrangements. Such a structural arrangement and decision is typical of mechanistic bureaucracies. It is also convenient for organizations that do not really want to engage in public participation, but either wish to or have to give the appearance of doing so. Under such circumstances, the responsiveness, the dynamic capacity to respond to input from the community, the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment, and the capacity to make use of the rapidly changing technology of social impact assessment is extremely limited (Runyan, 1977). We would argue that the enormous difficulties experienced in implementing public participation in this structure are predictable consequences of this organizational context. Such programmes have been ill-equipped both to respond effectively to demands or suggestions from the community, and even to interact directly with representative and powerful members of their own proponent organizations (Rochon, 1982; Ward, 1978; Jacobs, 1978). Instead, they have been limited to collecting information and passing it on up and down the line. This is a slow procedure and it often distorts data. In a changing environment issues may be obsolete or solved by the time work comes down from above.

Public participation is interpreted by many proponents to mean public information, i.e., we will send a "runner" out to the impacted community to tell them what we plan to do to them; he can then bring back their messages and their reactions to us

at which time we can dutifully consider their responses and then carry on with our original plans. This is a rather grim picture of public participation and public information but it adequately accounts for the frequently experienced "failures" of public participation (Burton, 1979; Weissman, 1978). The irony of the situation is that a great many of those proponents who are most vigorously critical of public participation as a strategy—claiming simply that the public is apathetic, that they do not care, that they are not responsive—simply have never engaged in a process of public participation. Their criticisms are potentially self-serving if they lead to the dismantling of public participation programmes and the loss of credibility of the very idea. What they are rightly, if not intentionally critical of, is the failure of public information programmes.

There are very few instances, with which we are familiar, in which the public has been involved in (and some would say co-opted into) active decision-making roles concerning a proposed development. In these few instances, both the advantages and the liabilities of public participation are clear (Macor, 1980; Bachelor and Jones, 1981; Rich and Rosenbaum, 1981). The public is not apathetic if given an opportunity to participate in a decision-making capacity. Some self-selected locals will devote much of their time and resources to such participation, even if there is no prospect of reimbursement for such an investment (Neiman and Loveridge, 1981). Public participation is extremely demanding of the proponent and of the public (Macor, 1980; Smith, 1982). It is slow, since information requirements are high and the art of negotiation and compromise takes time. A consensus may never emerge even with public participation and a relatively willing proponent, since there may be real irreconcilable conflicts of interest. An emerging consensus may satisfy nobody since it is a product of trade-offs. It is even possible that public participation may protect the local public no better than would be possible through existing social control requirements, i.e., The Energy Resources Conservation Board in Alberta may grant licenses and permits only after consideration of a lengthy application and the proponents testifying at a public hearing (Weissman, 1978; Goldenberg *et al.* 1980).

The ultimate justifications for engaging in public participation and modifying proponent organizational structures in order to do so meaningfully are twofold. On the one hand, the demand is there from an increasingly sophisticated and critical public unwilling for many reasons to allow a "benevolent" corporation or government to repre-

sent their interests any longer (Sadler, 1979). On the other hand, the practice of public participation is justified finally as being an affirmation of a political value judgment (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). This value judgment is simply that all who are affected must have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect them. This value judgment is the core defense of participatory democracy. It is not a justification on any instrumental grounds of increased effectiveness or efficiency or even on the grounds that the public will be better represented in such a system. It simply enshrines a political value judgment. On this level the issue becomes philosophical rather than pragmatic. It is the evolution of a political system that becomes the subject of discussion. Is participatory democracy so important a value that we wish to encourage it even in the event that it is instrumentally inferior or at least not demonstrably superior to the existing bureaucratic system?

If the question of relative efficiency and effectiveness is further examined, the case for public participation is mixed at best (Burton, 1979; Elder, 1975; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Smith, 1982). It does appear to result in more compromises than would otherwise be reached and such compromises may well be more equitable than alternative decisions. It does seem to be more effective in protecting and restoring local environments. It does seem more effective in planning for and coping with, the mitigation of foreseeable negative impacts. On the other hand, as noted, it is slow, expensive and very demanding of all concerned (Rich and Rosenbaum, 1981).

If public participation is to be implemented by proponent organizations, for whatever reasons, the organizational implications must be clarified. We would like to suggest that Burns' and Stalker's organizational analysis is entirely appropriate to the area of public participation. We would suggest that public participation programmes require organic bureaucratic contexts. They cannot be effectively administered within the constraints of wholly mechanistic bureaucracies. And, of course, it is implicit in our argument thus far that failure to implement a meaningful system of public participation can be costly. There is loss of public trust in future projects by the proponent, with the attendant risk that public interest may be mobilized sooner and more actively in opposition on the next occasion. There is bad publicity as well among other proponents and in potential future development locales. There may be a risk that opponents, made more active by failed public participation, may escalate

the issues into political ones and may succeed in having a controversial project blocked or shelved for essentially political reasons. These are some of the concrete negative motivations for organizations to bear in mind when considering how seriously they wish to take the demand for public participation.

Proponent organizations of *all types* will have to alter their internal structures if they wish to engage successfully in public participation. And this is as true for government proponents, at all levels, as for industrial ones. A major focus of such programmes in the past in Canada has dealt with Native Indians and northern development. In these cases too, the record of public participation is far from spotless. This is equally so for programmes designed to involve new immigrants, in cases of urban renewal (Jacobs, 1978; Weissman, 1978) and in dealing with community planning at all levels (Sadler, 1979).

The analysis presented in this paper is intended to apply to all types of proponents and to all instances of public participation programmes, whoever the sponsor. Most proponents have yet to come to grips with the problems of delegation of authority to others both inside and outside their organizational boundaries. In a rapidly changing environment the ability to adapt quickly is most functional. In the face of increasing demands and requirements for public participation, organic bureaucracies will succeed in implementing meaningful programmes where others will not. Perhaps social consultants can aid in the needed organizational transformation, and perhaps this analysis can help by illuminating some of the organizational responses likely to be met along the way.

NOTES

1. Acknowledgements are hereby expressed to my academic and consulting colleagues, Joseph E. DiSanto, James S. Frideres and Usher Fleising, and to the anonymous reviewers whose comments were most constructive.

2. For about ten years the author has been involved, fairly heavily at times, in social impact assessment. Since arriving in Calgary in 1975, he has been a principal in a small firm specializing in public participation and social impact assessment primarily for energy-related projects. Clients have included most of the major oil companies, TransAlta Utilities and Alberta Environment as well as several community groups.

3. The degree of "success" of a public participation programme refers to the degree to which the public can be

shown to have played an active role in decision-making, i.e. they have directly influenced policies with respect to a project in which they are involved.

There are several hidden problematics here. One issue concerns the proportion of public involved. Perhaps successful public participation requires the participation of as much of the relevant public as possible. This in turn raises the question of who that relevant public is, and of what form their participation ought to take.

In any event, assessment of whether public participation is an effective way of achieving instrumental goals is yet another and separate issue. The goal of public participation is to involve as many members of the relevant public as possible in the decision-making process. It is an enactment of the political value of participatory democracy. (See Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Goldenberg *et al.* 1980).

4. If the lay public is nevertheless to become actively involved, given the potential conflicts of interests, the proponent may well wish to restrict and circumscribe this involvement in any way possible, while giving the impression of implementing full public participation. If the consultants involved threaten to challenge the established practice in the organization in any way, (*e.g.*, new technologies, alternative strategies or goals) the proponent again may have an interest in structuring their involvement so as to retain as much authority as possible over them.

5. There are two issues here, as noted, one ideological and the second organizational. If an organization is willing to acknowledge, or is forced by legislation to proceed as if it acknowledged, that the affected public has a role to play in decision-making, the organizational question arises. This question is how best to structure such extra-organizational participation so as to integrate its activities with those of the "normal" organization.

6. As noted earlier, the conflict perspective suggests that this mistrust may be even more basic. It stems from an unwillingness to lose control, a fear that involving "outsiders" places a "wild card" in a high stakes game. To the extent that the outsider has interests at heart other than those of the proponent, and to the extent that engaging these interests may hurt the proponent, it is clear that the "mistrust" is well-founded. No doubt there are some social impact consultants whose view is that their job is to "protect" the local residents. Given their position and role, they may sometimes organize community opposition and create divisive issues rather than playing a constructive role in implementing useful public participation. It is because proponents feel that such possibilities for "trouble" exist that they would often rather have impact consultants do their job at a distance, with no community contact, and under the "supervision" of the proponent (see Burton, 1979). The ideological rationale for this organizational defensive strategy is the charge that community involvement is an abdication of the proper role of the expert.

7. It is of course possible, and probable, that complex organizations have many interacting components

with varying degrees of autonomy and with varying internal organizational structures. It is not uncommon to find that different products responding to different environmental constraints, (*e.g.*, market, competition, technology, budget) within the same umbrella organization, may be organized differently. In such circumstances, one sometimes finds head office personnel more innovative and responsive than their lower management bureaus. In this case, public participation must involve the head office. If authority is not really delegated down (or out) again, public participation must involve head office. If it is delegated to others (in different areas, product lines or subordinate but autonomous organizational units, *e.g.*, R and D) then public participation must still put together the decision-makers and the public, but this need not be head office.

REFERENCES

- ALMOND, G., and S. VERBA
1963 *The Civic Culture*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- BACHELOR, L., and B. JONES
1981 *Managed participation: Detroit's neighbourhood opportunity fund*, *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 17 (4): 518-536.
- BLAUNER, R.
1964 *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- BLUMBERG, P.
1973 *Industrial Democracy: The Sociology of Participation*, New York, Schocken Books.
- BURNS, T., and G. STALKER
1961 *The Management of Innovation*, New York, Tavistock Press.
- BURTON, T. L.
1979 *A review and analysis of Canadian case studies in public participation*, *Plan Canada*, 19 (1): 13-22.
- DAVIS, S. M.
1979 *Managing and Organizing Multinational Corporations*, New York, Pergamon Press.
- DAVIS, S. M., and P. R. LAWRENCE
1977 *Matrix*, Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. Inc.
- DISANTO, J., J. S. FRIDERES, U. FLEISING, S. GOLDENBERG
1979 *Social impact assessment: the role of social consultants in Alberta, Canada*, *Social Impact and Assessment*.
- DRAPER, J. (ed.)
1971 *Citizen Participation: Canada*, Toronto, New Press.
- ELDER, P. S. (ed.)
1975 *Environmental Management and Public Participation*, Toronto, Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation.

- GLASER, B.
1964 *Organizational Scientists: Their Professional Careers*, New York, Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc.
- GOLDENBERG, S., U. FLEISING, J. S. FRIDERES, J. DISANTO
1980 Public participation: communication process or judicial structure, *Social Impact and Assessment* 55, 56; August.
- GOULDNER, A.
1954 *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*, New York, The Free Press.
- HARVEY, E. B.
1968 Technology and the structure of organizations, *American Sociological Review*, 33: 247-259.
- HOOLE, A.
1979 Public participation in planning: The Riding Mountain case, *Canadian Geographer*, 22 (1): 41-50.
- JACOBS, S. E.
1978 Top-down planning: analysis of obstacles to community development in an economically poor region of the south-western United States, *Human Organization*, 37: 246-256.
- LAWRENCE, P. R., and J. W. LORSCH
1967 *Organization and Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- LUCAS, A., and P. MOORE
1973 The Utah controversy: a case study of public participation in pollution control, *Natural Resources Journal*, 13 (1), Jan.: 36-75.
- MACOR, Y.
1980 Public participation in environmental decision-making, *Plan Canada*, 20: 154-165.
- NEIMAN, M., and R. O. LOVERIDGE
1981 Environmentalism and local growth control: a probe into the class bias theme, *Environment and Behaviour*, 13: 759-772.
- PRISCOLI, J.
1977 Public involvement and social impact analysis: a union seeking marriage, Paper presented to the American Water Resources Association, Tucson.
- PRISCOLI, J.
1978 Why the federal and regional interest in public involvement in water resources development? In *Working Papers 78-1*, Institute for Water Resources, Fort Belvoir, Virginia, Army Corps of Engineers.
- RICH, R. C., and W. A. ROSENBAUM
1981 Citizen participation in public policy, (a symposium), *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 17 (4): 437-614.
- RICH, R. C.
1982 Dilemmas in citizen participation in the neighbourhood movement, *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, 17: 387-392.
- ROCHON, T. R.
1982 Direct democracy or organized futility? Action groups in the Netherlands, *Comparative Political Studies*, 15: 3-28.
- ROTHSCHILD-WHITT, J.
1979 The collectivist organization: an alternative to rational bureaucratic models, *American Sociological Review*, 44 (Aug.): 509-527.
- RUNYAN, D.
1977 Tools for community-managed impact assessment, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 43 (2): 125-135.
- SADLER, B.
1979 Public participation and the planning process: intervention and integration, *Plan Canada*, 19: 8-12.
- SEWELL, W., and J. COPPOCK (eds.)
1977 *Public Participation in Planning*, London: John Wiley and Sons.
- SIMMIE, J.
1974 *Citizens in Conflict: The Sociology of Town Planning*, London, Hutchinson Educational Ltd.
- SMITH, M. Y.
1982 Assessing impact assessment: first annual conference of the international impact assessment association, *Futures*, 14: 242-244.
- SCHNAIBERG, A.
1980 *The Environment: From Surplus to Scarcity*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- STOPFORD, J. M.
1980 *Growth and Organizational Change in the Multi-national Firm*, New York, Arno Press.
- U.S. FEDERAL INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION
1976 *At Square One*, Proceedings of the conference on citizens participation in government decision-making, Washington.
- WARD, J.
1978 Creative conflict? A perspective on the relations between government, statutory agencies, the voluntary movement and community work, *Community Development Journal*, 13: 79-85.
- WEISSMAN, S. R.
1978 Limits of citizen participation: lessons from San Francisco's model cities programme, *Western Political Quarterly*, 31: 32-47.