Community Engagement in Australian Local Governments: The Practice and its Pressures

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Helen Christensen declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Community engagement has become an imperative of Australian local governments. Driven by legislative requirements and increasing demands from communities, there has been a proliferation of practitioners, policies, frameworks and reports that aim to enhance public involvement in decision-making. The facilitation of this involvement is lauded as a demonstration of democracy in action; however, the practice in its current form is in relative infancy. As such, issues surrounding the practice and professionalisation are emerging which require examination and careful consideration. These issues include the increasing commercialisation of community engagement, social closure created through professionalisation, and the impacts of current practices on the quality and effectiveness of local democracy.

The purpose of this research is to critically explore the practice and professionalisation of community engagement in Australian local governments. The exploration is guided by an explanatory mixed-methods research approach that combines quantitative and qualitative instruments to ensure a robust and thorough exploration. The main instruments for collecting data are a census of local government community engagement practice, a survey of community engagement practitioners and a series of semi-structured interviews with senior practitioners.

The relevant literature, findings and analysis are presented in a series of seven publications. The first outlines the legislative environment in which local governments have been increasingly required to undertake community engagement. The second presents empirical data which show how Australian local governments understand and practise community engagement, and the third uses participatory budgeting to explore how Australian local governments 'adopt and adapt' community engagement processes. The fourth problematises the commercialisation or growing 'industry' that has emerged around community engagement. The fifth problematises the professionalisation that is occurring in community engagement, while the sixth presents empirical data on the practitioner cohort in Australia and identifies how they differ by work context. The seventh and final paper explores the tensions that practitioners face and how they manage them.

The research makes contributions in four areas. First, it presents empirical evidence about the historical development and contemporary legislative requirements for local governments to undertake engagement, discusses how Australian local governments are practising engagement, and provides basic demographics and experience of the practitioner cohort and describes the type of work they do and the tensions they experience in practice. Second, it challenges existing knowledge around the complexities in the field, focusing on the role of commercialisation in community engagement

practice. Third, it advances understandings of local democracy and professionalisation. Finally, its findings are of relevance to policy makers, public managers, professional associations and practitioners.

Appreciation, gratitude and apologies

It is standard practice to call this section 'acknowledgements' but I'm going to see if I can buck the trend as 'acknowledgements' sounds a bit too sanitised for what has actually gone on. While I'm proud of this accomplishment, I'm cognisant that my achievement is ultimately the result of the time and resources given to me by others. I'm also aware that over the last four years there may have been times where I was not my "best self". So here goes…

One of the benefits of starting a PhD in your late 30s is you know yourself a little better. For me that meant knowing that if I was to have any success I would need to have a supervisor who I respected intellectually, who could assist me to navigate the bureaucracy, who could give me feedback in a way that wouldn't bruise my sensitive ego, who would tolerate my need to work very much on my own terms, who was quick to reply and easily available (even though I'm not) and who had a particular sense of humour. No mean feat given this needed to be coupled with the somewhat specialist research interest of community engagement in Australian local government. I have been extremely fortunate to have had Bligh Grant as my supervisor as he has exceeded in all of my unreasonable expectations. He has challenged me, supported me, shielded me, tolerated me and made me laugh. I couldn't have done it without you, Bligh, my most sincere thanks.

I also couldn't have done it without the participants. Hundreds of community engagement practitioners and local government staff who completed surveys and took time to be interviewed. Not only did they participate willingly, they regularly inquired into my progress and were keen to find out what I had discovered. My research has confirmed my suspicion that community engagement practitioners and local government staff are some of the kindest and most selfless people around. My heartfelt thanks to all of you.

My thanks also to the Institute of Public Policy and Governance, including my co-supervisor Alan Morris. I'm extremely grateful for the support and for the Centre for Local Government scholarship which allowed me to take the time to focus on my research. I'm also grateful to UTS and its wider community, from the librarians to the IT support staff to the people who keep the places clean and the people who keep the lights on.

Thanks also to those in the academe who have supported me. This has included unknown individuals who have acted as blind reviewers of the articles, journal editors, university assessment panels, conference organisers, panel attendees and people who have kindly had a chat with me during those awkward conference breaks. It can be an intimidating environment, but I have never felt like I don't belong.

Last but not least my family and friends. While this journey has seen me be less socially active than normal, I'm lucky to have friends who seem to thrive on neglect. I look forward to being more present in the future. And my family, Bernie, Linda, Michael and John. Thank you for your unwavering unconditional love and support. A special thank you to Mum and Dad for the sacrifices you've made (for all us) to achieve our best. (I'm picturing you, Mum, reading this with a big smile on your face, pleased with yourself because your strategy of very regularly telling me that you picked my name because you thought "Doctor" sounded good in front of it worked. Well done you.)

I could keep going – Ruby (the mini foxie) for the emotional support and lap warming, Cadbury for making chocolate, Netflix for endless procrastination opportunities but I best leave it there.

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CHAPTER 1 - EXEGESIS

Introduction

There is no doubt that the participation of the public in decision-making is experiencing a period of popularity, being described as the 'imperative of our time' (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2017, 3). While public participation may not be the panacea to all of society's ills, the experience of public institutions suggests that it certainly has the potential to offset risks with the citizenry, perhaps even while fostering local democracy. This research explores the phenomenon of public participation in decision-making, focusing on the practice of public participation in Australian local governments and the professionalisation that is occurring as result of increasing practice.

Community engagement (the widely accepted alternative term for public participation in Australia) has become synonymous with the core functions of Australian local governments. Driven by the legislative requirements of the Australian states and territories, all current Local Government Acts require that local councils engage with their respective communities, albeit to varying degrees. Consequently, considerable time and resources have been committed to community engagement by Australian local governments (Brackertz and Meredyth 2009; Reddel and Woolcock 2004), with engagement processes now being described as systemic to Australia's procedures of public administration (Head 2007). The resources being committed typically comprise staff – community engagement practitioners – whose role it is to contract, design, facilitate, report on and evaluate community engagement processes.

Legislative requirements and ensuing policies, guidelines, engagement processes and dedicated staff and teams have emerged relatively quickly and have grown quite substantially. While this is an exciting development from the point of view of enhancing democratic opportunities, the haste in which these developments are occurring entails results in local governments and practitioners possibly not giving due consideration to the greater impacts of their practice on the quality of democracy. This research seeks to address this gap, first by identifying the growth of current practice and that practice itself and, second, by critically reflecting on several dimensions of it. The guiding research question is: *How is the practice and professionalisation of community engagement maturing?* The research looks at what is driving practice, that state of Australian local government community engagement practice, the practitioner and the process of professionalisation. It draws a series of conclusions relating to areas requiring consideration and further research.

The research seeks to frame Australian local government community engagement practice and professionalisation within the key fields that lay claim to it: democratic theory, public

administration, governance, sociology and ethics. Since the deliberative turn in democratic theory in the late 1970s (see Dryzek 1994, 2012; Fishkin 1995) the international and Australian literature on participation and democracy has focused on deliberative democracy, deliberative methods and the benefits they bring (see, for example, Black et al. 2011; Gastil and Levine 2005; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Johnson and Gastil 2015; Lee 2011; Nabatchi 2010; Thompson 2008). The question of how deliberative democracy and participatory democracy relate to each other persists (Mutz 2006; Pateman 2012) and has particular relevance for Australian local governments, given that not all community engagement process are deliberative. In the public administration and governance fields, much of the recent research builds on deliberative development and examines collaborative governance models and practice, with many incorporating deliberative elements (Ansell and Gash 2008; Aulich 2009; Bingham et al. 2005; Emerson et al. 2012; Fung and Wright 2003; Grant et al. 2012; Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015; Newman et al. 2004; Reddel and Woolcock 2004; Weymouth and Hartz-Karp 2015). Other work relating to Australian local government community engagement practices has focused on the role of participation in policy-making, participant experience, and participant and systems capacity (Bell and Hindmoor 2009; Grant et al. 2011; Head 2007, 2011; Smyth et al. 2005). Rather than focus on deliberative methods, governance models and the role of participation, this research seeks to reflect on these developments within the context of Australian local government in an attempt to start to gain an understanding of how a community engagement industry is emerging and professionalising.

In addition, research on those who practise community engagement and their professionalisation (for example Bherer et al. 2017a; Cooper and Smith 2012, Lee 2015) has gained attention only in recent years as scholars become aware of practitioners' influence on the design, delivery and reporting of democratic processes (Carcasson and Sprain 2016; Pierce et al 2008; Spada and Vreeland 2013), after a period of the relative neglect of their role. To date, little to no research has explored Australian practitioners. By investigating who practises engagement and what informs their practice, it is hoped that further light can be shed on how the industry is professionalising and ultimately how democratic quality is being affected.

Thesis Overview

The thesis has eight chapters. The first is this exegesis and the subsequent chapters are the published papers. This chapter introduces the research methodology, which includes the research questions and the methodology devised to answer these. Being a mixed-methods study, the quantitative and qualitative instruments are described and the process for data collection and analysis is outlined. Synopses of the chapters are then provided which summarise each of the articles, including the

research questions they address, the main theoretical concepts used, key findings and conclusions. There is then a discussion of the contributions of the thesis, including contributions to knowledge, theory and practice. Areas of future research are highlighted before the conclusion reiterates the key findings and contributions.

The body of thesis is divided into three parts, comprising seven chapters. Part 1 (chapters 2–3) is designed to orientate the reader to the contextual environment of community engagement in Australian local government by examining the development of the regulatory environment which has enabled community engagement practice, and their associated practitioners, to proliferate. It then tracks the state governments' requirements of councils to engage with their communities, primarily through the Local Government Acts (Christensen 2019a). Finally, Chapter 3 presents a 'snapshot' of current practice, focusing on how councils are engaging, what is driving practice, who is designing and delivering local government community engagement, and what the challenges are for councils in this area (Christensen and McQuestin 2019).

Part Two (chapters 4–5) primarily expands on the theory in this area. Chapter 4 is a case study of an increasingly popular engagement method utilised by Australian local governments – participatory budgeting (Christensen and Grant 2016). It allows for a deeper exploration of practice and once again makes use of Haus and Sweeting's (2006) theory of local democracy, along with Fung's (2006, 2015) discussion of the democratic values of legitimacy, effective governance and justice. Haus and Sweeting's (2006) theory is then further expanded on in Chapter 5, which explores tensions that arise in the community engagement field due to the competing interests of democratic principles and commercial imperatives (Christensen and Grant 2019).

Part 3 (chapters 6–8), focuses on the practitioner in the context of competing interests of democratic principles and commercial imperatives. Chapter 6 examines the issue through the lens of applied ethics (Christensen 2018). It discusses the professionalisation of community engagement and the types of tensions that practitioners may face. Chapter 7 seeks to understand who practises community engagement and what informs their practice. It presents findings from the mixed methods study which includes demographics of the practitioner group, their backgrounds and qualifications, and their views on how practice is maturing (Christensen 2019c). Finally, Chapter 8 expands on the line of inquiry by providing empirical evidence of tensions that experienced community engagement practitioners have faced and the strategies they have used in response (Christensen 2019b).

Research Methodology

Research Questions

Community engagement, in the context of Australian local government, is undergoing a period of growing pains (Aulich 2009; Grant and Drew 2017). Its practice has grown exponentially in recent years as a result of multiple drivers, internal and external to government (Grant et al. 2011; Grant et al. 2012; Head 2007). Consequently, there is a need to critically reflect, to ensure that practice is achieving its desired aim of enhancing democracy. Ultimately, the research seeks to understand the pressures faced by community engagement practice, so that these pressures can be adequately understood and addressed to ensure quality in democratic process. To do that, the research much first establish the current state of practice and identify is who is practising it. From there, explorations into what is driving practice and what pressures it is facing can then be made.

In consideration of these issues, the research has a guiding question:

How is the practice and professionalisation of community engagement in Australian local government maturing?

The question calls for reflection on past developments and identification of major drivers, and hints at the future. The practice of community engagement and its professionalisation are both topics substantial enough to warrant their own investigation. However, given that professionalisation is a likely driver of practice, the two are not mutually exclusive, and nor should they be considered so. The guiding questions were broken into four smaller sub-questions to make the research more manageable and to give focus:

a. *What is driving community engagement practice in Australian local government?*
b. *How are local governments practising community engagement?*
c. *Who is practising community engagement?*
d. *How is professionalisation influencing practice?*

A representation of the questions and where they are addressed in the articles is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Research questions and chapter references

	What is driving community engagement practice in Australian local government?	How are local governments practising community engagement?	Who is practising community engagement?	How is professionalisation influencing practice?
Chapter 2 – Legislating community engagement at the Australian local government level	■			
Chapter 3 – Community engagement in Australian local governments: A closer look and strategic implications		■		
Chapter 4 – Participatory budgeting in Australian local government: An initial assessment and critical issues		■		
Chapter 5 – Outsourcing local democracy? Evidence for and implications of the commercialisation of community engagement in Australian local government	■	■	■	■
Chapter 6 – Community engagement and professionalisation: Emerging tensions			■	■
Chapter 7 – Participatory and deliberative practitioners in Australia: How work context creates different types of practitioners			■	■
Chapter 8 – Managing divided loyalties in the emerging profession of community engagement			■	■

Rather than extensively describe the contributions of the individual articles here, I direct the reader to the actual articles themselves.

Research Design

The research questions posed were essentially exploratory; as such the answers were likely to be drawn from both deductive and inductive approaches. Consequently, it was decided that a mixed-method approach would be most suitable. Considering the absence of existing baseline data, such as the current state of practice of community engagement in Australian local governments and basic characteristics of the practitioner group, an explanatory mixed-methods approach was selected. This approach, as illustrated in Figure 1, allowed for the collection of quantitative data; the results were then further explored and elaborated on in the qualitative research (see Creswell and Plano Clark 2007).

Figure 1: Explanatory design (QUAL emphasised)

Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark 2007, 73

Some adaptations were made to the standard explanatory mixed-methods design in response to contextual considerations. First, with a focus on both the practice and the profession, a decision was made to allow for collection of quantitative data from two different samples, namely local governments and practitioners. This decision was made primarily because many practitioners are contracted, rather than employed directly, by local governments. This appeared as the most logical adaptation to enable the research to explore the commercialisation and professionalisation of community engagement. This meant that the samples for the quantitative instruments were fundamentally different. The collection of two separate quantitative data sources makes this a convergent parallel design (Creswell 2013). Second, the quantitative instruments included the collection of a small amount of qualitative data. This decision was made to take advantage of the opportunity to gather data from large samples and to assist in developing the questions for the qualitative instruments. Third, and finally, the design employed was not as sequential as the standard process outlined above, with some quantitative and qualitative data collection occurring concurrently. This was due primarily to the collection of the aforementioned early qualitative data, together with theorisation and time constraints.

The resulting 'hybrid explanatory mixed-method' approach utilised two (primarily) quantitative instruments (surveys) that fed into a qualitative instrument (series of semi-structured interviews). The survey of local governments is referred to as the Local Government Community Engagement Census and the survey of practitioners is known as the Practitioner Survey. The semi-structured interviews are known as the Practitioner Interviews. Figure 2 shows the adapted methodology inclusive of the major conceptual and empirical methods. Table 2 at the end of this section shows which instruments and data sources were used for each of the chapters.

Figure 2: Hybrid research methodology

Conceptual

Empirical – "Hybrid" Explanatory Mixed Method

Content & Textual Analysis – Legislation (qual)

Literature Review

Theory Expansion

Content & Textual Analysis – Grey Lit (qual)

Local Government Census (quan)

Practitioner Survey (quan)

Practitioner Interviews (QUAL)
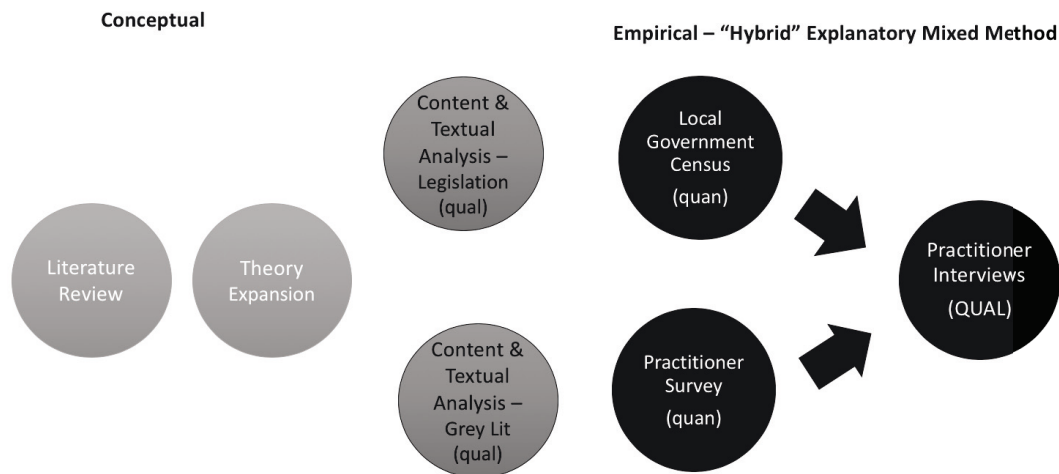
Quantitative Instruments

Local Government Community Engagement Census

The primary purpose of the census was to gauge the view of local government practice at a point in time – a 'snapshot' (McNabb 2010). The census was the central data set used for Chapter 3 (Christensen and McQuestin 2019) and was also a reference in Chapter 5 (Christensen and Grant 2019). It was designed to address the first three research questions: *What is driving community engagement practice in Australian local government? How are local governments practising community engagement?* and *Who is practising community engagement?* The survey instrument had 14 questions, including: council name (for classification purposes only); the number of community engagement processes conducted in the last 12 months; the position of the community engagement function in the organisation; where responsibility for planning and delivering community engagement was located in the organisation; the number of dedicated community engagement staff; the proportion of community engagement processes designed and delivered by staff in the organisation; reasons for using external consultants, if applicable; methods used in the past and present, and being considered for the future; factors driving community engagement practice; and difficulties experienced in delivering engagement from an organisational perspective. The survey was piloted with four councils to ensure its suitability and some minor changes were made prior to finalisation. A copy of the instrument is available in Appendix 1.

The survey population comprised the three Australian east coast mainland states and South Australia. These four states were chosen primarily for the variation in their approaches to legislating for community engagement (see Chapter 2; Christensen 2019a). When the survey was conducted, in April 2017, there were 352 eligible local governments invited to participate: 77 in Queensland, 128 in

New South Wales, 79 in Victoria and 68 in South Australia and. Eligible local governments were defined as those under the jurisdiction of the states' Local Government Acts (see the notes at the end of Chapter 3; Christensen and McQuestin 2019 for more detail). Councils were asked to provide their name so that they could be correctly classified according to the Australian Classification of Local Governments (ACLG) (Australian Government DIRD 2017) and to assist in analysis. They were assured they would not be identifiable in any published results to encourage honesty and frankness in responses. Minor adaptations were made to the ACLG in presenting the data; this was to reflect the council mergers that had recently occurred in New South Wales and to ensure the local governments in south-east Queensland were in alignment with other states (once again, more details can be found in Chapter 3; Christensen and McQuestin 2019).

Local governments were contacted by email and invited to participate in the census, with a link provided in the email that directed participants to SurveyMonkey where the census was being hosted. Reminder emails were sent, and social media channels were used to encourage participation. A respectable response rate of 49.7% was achieved (175 of 352). A breakdown of response rate by council type and by state is available in Chapter 3 (Christensen and McQuestin 2019). The data collected were analysed in Excel, with the descriptive analysis being undertaken by the author and the statistical analysis undertaken by the co-author, Dana McQuestin. The main weakness of the data set was that seven local governments provided multiple, and at times contradictory, responses. This highlights issues with the collection method and the nature of self-reporting.

Practitioner Survey

The practitioner survey was devised to answer the third and fourth research questions: *Who is practising community engagement?* and *How is professionalisation influencing practice?* The survey was the major data source for Chapter 7 (Christensen 2019c). The major challenge in answering the question of who practises community engagement was that the population was unknown and unknowable. This is because it is a relatively recent practice/profession and does not require any formal registration, such as is required with more established professions. While there are professional bodies, membership is voluntary. Previous research (Bherer et al. 2017a; Hendriks and Carson 2008; Lee 2015) has suggested these practitioners are found in all sectors: public, not-for-private and private. And as Chapter 2 (Christensen 2019a) illustrates, with considerable legislative requirements in local government, it was likely that in the Australian context a great number are either directly employed by the public sector or work in the private sector that contract to the public sector (see also Hendriks and Carson 2008). Given this difficulty, the decision was made to survey all those who identify as 'working in community engagement in Australia'. This broadened the scope beyond local government but resulted in gathering baseline data that did not exist, a major weakness of the data.

The survey included 25 questions soliciting age, gender, location, years of experience, employment status, sector experience, qualifications, professional trainings and memberships, tasks

and methods used, perceptions of the practice as a profession, and competencies required (a copy is provided in Appendix 2). Participants were anonymous to encourage participation and a willingness to respond openly. The survey was initially piloted with seven practitioners to ensure usability.

The survey was open for the month of August 2017. Participation in the survey was promoted in two main ways: through the email list of practitioner organisations (International Association of Public Participation, Engage 2 Act) and through social media networks. Participants were encouraged to recruit others in their networks. A total of 375 complete or mostly complete responses were received. If we (reasonably) assume that the actual population is 15,000 or less, this number of respondents could give confidence of 95% (± 5%). However, rather than speculate, the data are presented as descriptive statistics rather than inferential. Excel was used for the analysis.

Qualitative Instruments

Practitioner Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a research method to assist in answering the third and fourth research questions: *Who is practising community engagement?* and *How is professionalisation influencing practice?* The data from these interviews are utilised in chapters 7 (Christensen 2019c) and 8 (Christensen 2019b). Semi-structured interviews were selected as they allowed for reflections from practitioners about how they understood the field and their experiences of professionalisation (see Morris 2015). To develop the questions, the findings of the Local Government Census and Practitioner Survey were examined, identifying gaps and areas requiring deeper exploration. The interview contained 14 questions, themed around basic demographics, conceptualisations of community engagement, current practice and professionalisation.

Where the Practitioner Survey allowed for participation, as all those who identified as working in community engagement in Australia, the sample here focused on senior practitioners who were employed by or regularly contracted to public institutions. They were also required to have more than 10 years' experience, so they could reflect on changes they had witnessed in the field. Participants were de-identified to encourage openness in responses. They were recruited in two main ways. First, those with a high profile were identified by informal conversations with practitioners about who they saw as the 'elders' of the profession and by internet searches that showed profiles with evidence of a strong commitment to community engagement. Second, interviewees themselves were asked who else might be suitable, particularly those who were likely to have different views to their own to ensure eventual data saturation. A total of 20 interviews were conducted between November 2018 and January 2019. All practitioners who were approached agreed to participate. The sample included a mix of practitioners: 15 females and five males, from five Australian states, four

employed in local government, four in state government and 12 in the private sector (a breakdown is available in the appendix of Chapter 8; Christensen 2019b). The interview questions were provided to participants prior to the interviews and the interviews were conducted in person or via video conference (Zoom). They ranged in duration from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed by the author and then Dedoose, qualitative research software, was used to assist in organising themes.

Content and Textual Analysis

While content and textual analysis is a staple of the social sciences and evidenced in each of the chapters, special mention must be made of chapters 2 (Christensen 2019a) and 4 (Christensen and Grant 2016), where document identification and analysis were the primary sources of data. Chapter 2, which focused on exploring how legislative requirements had driven and directed the growth of community engagement in Australian local government *writ large*, required analysis of statutory and regulatory documents. The sample was the Local Government Acts of Australia's six states (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia) and the Northern Territory. As the research was concerned with community engagement requirements, only the acts with such requirements were included; this was generally those from the 1970s onwards although some other relevant statutes were included. So that changes to the requirements could be identified, the statutes identified and analysed included the 'as passed' versions of the acts, as well as any amendments and updated versions. Identifying relevant parts of the acts involved thorough reading of the older statutes as they were often scanned documents, and hence unsearchable. Most of the recent statutes are in Portable Document Format (PDF), which assisted in identification of relevant parts as these documents are easily searchable. The search terms are included in the methodology section of the paper. An excel spreadsheet was used to record the relevant reference in the 41 statutes examined to assist in analysis and comparison.

Chapter 4 (Christensen and Grant 2016), the focused exploration of participatory budgeting in Australian local government, used publicly available documents and texts. More specifically, these documents included grey literature in the form of online news articles, local government websites, council minutes and local government reports. These texts were identified using online search tools. The limitations of this approach are that there is no guarantee that all relevant texts were identified, although considerable effort was made, and that the analysis is limited to texts that were publicly available.

Table 2: Data sources and chapter references

	Content and Textual Analysis	Local Government Community Engagement Survey	Practitioner Survey	Practitioner Interviews
Chapter 2 – Legislating community engagement at the Australian local government level	X			
Chapter 3 – Community engagement in Australian local governments: A closer look and strategic implications		X		
Chapter 4 – Participatory budgeting in Australian local government: An initial assessment and critical issues	X			
Chapter 5 – Outsourcing local democracy? Evidence for and implications of the commercialisation of community engagement in Australian local government		X	X	
Chapter 6 – Community engagement and professionalisation: Emerging tensions	X			
Chapter 7 – Participatory and deliberative practitioners in Australia: How work context creates different types of practitioners			X	X
Chapter 8 – Managing divided loyalties in the emerging profession of community engagement				X

Once again, instead of providing an extensive description, I direct the reader to the actual articles.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the quantitative and qualitative research, the ethical implications for conducting the research were considered. Participation in both surveys and the semi-structured interviews was voluntary with the major impost being the time required to participate. To ensure participants' willingness to participate and to speak frankly, data collected from participants were de-identified. Consequently, data management systems were established to ensure the integrity of the data and confidentially of participants. The UTS Ethics Committee (HREC) approved the research (ETH17-1225) in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the Australian code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, and relevant UTS policy and guidelines.

Chapter Outlines

This section provides detailed synopses of the chapters, including their methodologies, findings and connections with the other papers. One benefit of the 'Thesis by publication' approach is that the chapters presented have undergone peer review processes and are much improved from their first drafts based on the feedback received.

Chapter 2 – 'Legislating community engagement at the Australian local government level' (Christensen 2019a)

The primary purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide context to community engagement in Australian local government. While community engagement processes can be led by a number of different public sector organisations, private organisations, not for profit organisations and communities themselves, inarguably a great deal is led by local governments. One of the main drivers for this is the statutory environment created by the state governments which dictate the requirements of local governments to engage. Hence this paper seeks to clearly identify the actual requirements of local governments. As well as identifying the current requirements, the article tracks their development over time so trends can be identified. This approach qualitatively differentiates it from earlier accounts (such as Grant and Drew 2017; Grant et al. 2011; Grant et al. 2012; Herriman 2011; Prior and Herriman 2010; Wiseman 2006).

After presenting an overview of the legislative environment for Australian local government, in which local government is recognised in state constitutions but not the national constitution, the paper identifies a combination of approaches that state government legislators adopt in encouraging, or requiring, local governments to engage their communities. These approaches are based upon whether or not the legislation stipulates at which junctures engagement needs to occur and whether the method/ology for engagement is stipulated, partially stipulated or not stipulated at all. The combination of approaches results in a typology of approaches to community engagement legislation by Australian states and territories – an original contribution (presented again in Table 3).

Table 3: Typology of approaches to community engagement legislation in Australia

	Junction not stipulated in legislation	Juncture is stipulated in legislation
Methodology not stipulated in legislation	Aspirational	Empowered
Methodology partially stipulated in legislation	(Not evidenced)	Hedging
Methodology stipulated in legislation	(Not evidenced)	Prescriptive

Source: Adapted from Christensen (2018).

The article then divides the development of legislative requirements into four main periods. The first period is from the origins of Australian local government itself, i.e., prior to the Constitution of Australia in 1901, from either 'constitutionalist' or 'state interventionist' origins (see Grant and Drew 2017), until the 1970s, where legislation was not a viewed vehicle for facilitating democratic participation. Three developments in the 1970s facilitated the future inclusion of participatory initiatives: the increase of Commonwealth grants to local governments, which allowed for greater service offerings; the ascension of the *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978 (Commonwealth)*, which was the first to document an opportunity for the public to be involved with council processes; and the passing of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW)*, which also invited participation.

From the late 1980s to the mid-2000s, Australia's local governments were subject to the first wave of reforms. The reforms included reviews of the Local Government Acts, which overall encouraged local governments to provide opportunities for community participation. Attempts were initially prescriptive in approach (*Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)*; *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Amendment Act 1992 (SA))*, but then broadened to all include prescriptive approaches combined with aspirational approaches (*Local Government Act 1993 (NSW), Local Government Act 1993 (Qld), Local Government Act 1995 (WA))* and, in some instances, were even empowering, with local governments free to devise their own methodologies to engage (*Local Government Act 1993 (Tas), Local Government Act 1993 (NT)).* In 2001, South Australia (*Local Government (Consultation on Rating Policies) Amendment Act 2001 (SA))* diverted from the trend of popular approaches, and stipulated the point at which engagement must occur (in this case for rates policy and variation changes) but that councils could follow their policies for methodology, as long as a minimum requirement of public submissions were incorporated. This is identified as the hedging approach in the typology.

In the mid-2010s, relevant changes to the legislative environment centred around state governments requiring local government to produce a variety of strategies and frameworks and meet

additional reporting requirements. Community engagement in community strategic plans was required in Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia by 2005, with other states following to varying degrees of commitment in the years that followed. By 2012, the Local Government Acts of all states demonstrated or had demonstrated prescriptive, aspirational and empowering approaches, generally in that order. New South Wales had followed South Australia with the hedging approach. In the last few years, Australia's local governments have been subject to more reforms, with reviews of the Local Government Acts occurring more frequently. At each stage of readying the article for publication, there were a series of new developments to consider and indeed there have been changes since it has been published.

The article makes three main comparative observations: it discusses the four developmental stages which align with the typology; it briefly mentions the trend to use regulations and guidelines rather than parliamentary acts as a means for state governments to make quicker changes to requirements (although this approach does circumnavigate the parliaments); and it discusses how planning issues and legislation often serve as a catalyst for local governments to enhance their engagement requirements. Challenges highlighted include discrepancies in terminology within each of the current acts (such as 'community participation', 'public consultation' and 'community engagement'), as well as the tendency to rely on prescriptive approaches, such as public submissions. It also raises the questions of how the requirements might be interpreted by local governments and whether they are meeting them or exceeding them.

The conclusion reflects on the future trajectory for legislative requirements to encourage councils to engage their communities. It suggests that this may depend on what state governments are attempting to achieve – the fostering of local democracy or ingratiating themselves with communities to lessen the perceived negatives of various reform programs. The biggest concern is that the dominant, outdated and tokenistic 'prescriptive' method-driven approach may continue, rather than the 'empowering' purpose-driven engagement approach, which has proved more effective (Bryson et al. 2013; Leighninger 2014).

The chapter serves as a platform for which to start the thesis by providing an overview of the regulatory landscape that has fostered the growth of community engagement by Australia's local governments. It highlights issues captured in other chapters, such as the ambiguity in community engagement terminology, the over-reliance on prescriptive engagement methods by councils and how local governments might be interpreting the requirements into practice.

Chapter 3 – 'Community engagement in Australian local governments: a closer look and strategic implications' (Christensen and McQuestin 2019)

Chapter 3 presents an overview of current community engagement practice of Australian local governments. It builds on the context set by Chapter 2 (Christensen 2019a) by seeking to understand how councils are interpreting their legislative requirements, whether they are going beyond them and what the practice is. It presents empirical data which outline how often councils are engaging, what methods they are using, what is driving their practice, who is designing and delivering the engagement for councils, and what related challenges councils are experiencing. The article identifies literature that outlines three broad approaches to community engagement, put simply as the theoretical, the institutional and the practical. The theoretical positions community engagement within the conceptualisations of 'local democracy' (Haus and Sweeting 2006; Pratchett 2004). The institutional approach focuses on the legislative and regulatory definition of the term (such as that outlined in Chapter 2), and the practical approach is one where meaning has been contextualised amongst broader political and policy frameworks (for example, Hendriks and Carson 2008; Head 2007).

The paper draws on data gathered from the Local Government Community Engagement Census – one of the major quantitative instruments for the thesis. The census invited the 352 local governments in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria to complete a 14-question survey. The census received a relatively high response rate of 49.7% (n=175) with some types of councils more likely to respond than others (for example, responses from capital and metropolitan councils were higher than rural and remote ones). Responses were grouped based on the Australian Classification of Local Government (ACLG) used by Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (Australian Government 2017), with some minor adaptations required as a result of the program of amalgamations in New South Wales. A descriptive analysis of the data was conducted and the co-author (McQuestin) provided statistical analysis to identify any differences between council types and states.

Major findings include the amount of engagement councils are conducting – approximately 30 processes per annum across all council types, with higher amounts reported for capital and metropolitan councils and urban regional councils. Responses indicated there was some confusion in councils as to what actually constitutes community engagement. When asked what methods had been used in the previous 12-month period and current 12-month period, traditional methods dominated. This included public submissions, public meetings, advisory/reference groups, drop in sessions and online surveys. Public submissions were the most popular, presumably as a result of this being the most commonly required method in legislation (as discussed in Chapter 2; Christensen 2019a). The responses for intended future use suggest that councils are keen to move away from traditional

methods and towards deliberative and emerging methods, such as citizen panels and participatory budgeting (see Chapter 5; Christensen and Grant 2019). Local governments reported that the higher driver for community engagement practice was its 'known effectiveness in assisting council with its decisions', followed by the need to 'meet statutory requirements'.

As for who is practising community engagement on behalf of local governments, the census found that half of the councils surveyed do not have a dedicated community engagement staff member/practitioner. In local governments that did employ practitioners, the number ranged from 0.3 to 20 positions, with an average of 2.49. The number of positions was higher in capital and metropolitan councils. The responsibility for community engagement processes was predominately a hybrid arrangement in most councils (46.9%), where relevant staff, presumably from the technical area that is the focus of the engagement, work with specialist staff to plan and deliver the engagement. In 26.9% of councils it was considered the responsibility of relevant staff, without support of a community engagement specialist. In other councils arrangements included ad hoc methods, centralised specialist staff and relevant staff with executive staff. These findings suggests that local government staff are expected to have a degree of understanding and involvement in community engagement, and therefore the knowledge and skills required for engagement are intrinsic, acquired on the job or not viewed as important. The census identified that only one-third of councils do all their own planning and delivery, with many using external consultants (see Part 3 of the thesis for continuation of these themes).

The findings also identified that community engagement is positioned within the organisation in a variety of places. The majority of local governments did not have an organisational home for community engagement, while others were located with the communications/media/public relations area or with the community/social planning areas, amongst others. Local governments reported that the main difficulties in delivering engagement were the time required, suggesting inadequate resourcing and/or poor planning. Other challenges included public interest, budget, leadership commitment and geographical disbursement of communities.

In sum, the current practice outlined in the article suggests that current and future practice are being informed by legislative environments, local understanding of what community engagement is and how it is done, as well as leadership and resourcing. The article concludes by stating that practice has been led predominately by an intuitional approach, evidenced by the use of traditional methods such as public submissions, followed by the practical, evidenced by the resources available, whether that be the staff available or the use of inexpensive methods (e.g., online surveys). The theoretical approach forms part of the motivation evidenced as the main driver being its effectiveness in decision-making. While the article presents a 'snapshot' of current practice, the findings raise additional questions – some of these centre around the practitioners, whether they are internal or external to local governments, and their influence on practice. This theme is explored in Part 3 of the thesis.

Chapter 4 – 'Participatory Budgeting in Australian Local Government: An Initial Assessment and Critical Issues' (Christensen and Grant 2016)

Chapter 3 identified that roughly a third of councils were committed to using participatory budgeting in the future. Chapter 4 focuses in on this emerging method as a case study and basis for exploring the issues raised and encountered by community engagement and reflects on its role in facilitating local democracy. Simply defined, participatory budgeting is a 'process through which citizens can contribute to decision-making over at least part of the governmental budget' (Goldfrank 2007, 92). In Australia this method is receiving wider attention and is increasingly used. The article gives an overview of participatory budgeting's global origins (Porto Alegre, Brazil's direct model) and development and an account of common principles and features identified in practice (de Sousa Santos 1998; Goldfrank 2007; Shah 2007; Sintomer et al. 2008; Wampler 2012). This account identifies how practice varies, particularly with regard to the principles and practices of 'open to all', representativeness, social justice and deliberation. Participatory budgeting is then contextualised within the broader context of local government and local democracy. Haus and Sweeting's (2006) local democracy theory again proves relevant, particularly in relation their 'participatory democracy' component. The authors expand on this principle to incorporate the conflict between participatory and deliberative democracy (see Pateman 2012), and also include collaborative governance and co-design to signal developments in contemporary theory and practice.

The findings include the presentation of key features and significance of the earliest identifiable participatory budgeting processes conducted by Australian local governments: six processes conducted between 2012 and 2015. The processes were the Canada Bay 2012 Citizens Panel (New South Wales), Melville's 2012 Project Robin Hood (Western Australia), Geraldton's 2013 10-year Capital Works program (Western Australia), Geraldton's 2014 Range and Level of Services Budget (Western Australia), Darebin's 2014 Community Infrastructure Citizen's Panel (Victoria) and Melbourne's 2015 10-year Financial Plan (Victoria). The study examined the budget timeframe, the area of the budget available for the community to decide, the proportion of the total budget this constituted, the methods available for wider community involvement, deliberative random selection methods employed, the outcome, and whether and how any third parties were involved. All of the data were sourced from publicly available documents.

In summary, there is considerable variation in how these six local governments approached participatory budgeting. Budget timeframes varied: one year (Melville, Geraldton), two years (Darebin), four years (Canada Bay) and ten years (Geraldton, Melbourne). Budget areas available consisted of the entire services/operating budget (Canada Bay, Geraldton), the community grants part of the services/operating budget (Melville), the capital budget (Geraldton), a section of the capital

budget (Darebin) and the entire budget (services/operation and capital) (Melbourne). Actual budget amount also varied: $100,000 (Melville), $2 million (Darebin), $68 million (Geraldton), $70 million (Geraldton) and $5.9 Billion (Melbourne). In the case of Canada Bay actual amounts were not stipulated. The actual budget amount ranged from a very small proportion of the total budget area (Melville, Darebin) to the entire budget (Geraldton, Melbourne). Geraldton, Darebin and Melbourne all conducted methods involving the wider community followed by deliberative groups utilising random selection. Canada Bay used a randomly selected deliberative group. Melville used workshops and an online budget allocator tool. Outcomes were typically a series of recommendations (ranging from 85 (Canada Bay) to 8 (Darebin)) or a prioritised list for spending. Third parties were used in all processes, except for Melville's, and their roles included process design, facilitation, recruitment and/or recruitment oversight.

The article acknowledges that participatory budgeting is likely to remain increasingly popular. However, rather than hypothesise about future directions, the article raises a series of questions for consideration by readers, policy makers and practitioners. First, it asks whether deliberative, mini-public like processes are an assumed feature of the Australian participatory budgeting process. It argues that, while deliberative processes are well suited to the task of exploring information, testing assumptions, asking questions, setting criteria and deliberation (see Gollagher and Hartz-Karp 2013; Lerner and Secondo 2012; Nabatchi 2010 for additional examples), using a small selected group means the process in not inclusive. And, while councils have sought to run adjacent processes open to all, marrying the two processes together has proved difficult. Second, it questions the likely longevity of participatory processes. Global practice over the past quarter of a century suggests that the practice either becomes embedded and regular or it disappears after a short period (see Sintomer et al. 2013 for examples). Third is the question of how prepared and equipped organisations and their leaders are to implement participatory budgeting process, given they require a degree of knowledge and skill, time and resources (see Chapter 3; Christensen and McQuestin 2019), as well as support from employees (Hartz-Karp 2012). Fourth is the question of how the outcomes of participatory budgeting may impact on the relationship, and division of responsibilities, between local and state governments. This question was prompted by the cases of Canada Bay and Melbourne, where both groups reached consensus that council rates should be increased, a decision which in Melbourne's case is not in the purview of local government. There is also a risk that deliberative groups may be used to make unpopular decisions as they may appear more trustworthy than elected representatives. The fifth question is the roles of the various actors: in the Australian context, community are participants who make recommendations but yet recruitment of participants, design of the process, facilitation of the process, and implementation and oversight of the budget all sit with the organisation – wherein either the organisation delivers or a third-party intermediary is brought in. The sixth and final question is whether or not the Australian processes demonstrate democratic values Referring back to Fung's 'democracy cube' (2006, 2015) and Haus and Sweeting's (2006)

components of local democracy, the authors suggest that participatory budgeting only enhances democracy if the other components, as defined by Haus and Sweeting, are in place.

The paper concludes with three considerations for future practice. First is that of the proportion of budget available for decision-making needs to be large enough to justify the expense of the process and not be tokenistic. Second is the degree of influence participants should have over the process (rather than just making recommendations) or, once again, the process will appear tokenistic. Third is the issue of inclusivity, which existed in the direct Brazilian model and even the Melville experience, but cannot be substituted with the deliberative mini-public approach alone.

Chapter 5 – 'Outsourcing local democracy? Evidence for and implications of the commercialisation of community engagement in Australian local government' (Christensen and Grant 2019)

The fifth chapter of the thesis principally problematises the practice of community engagement in Australian local governments with a political science lens. Where Chapter 2 (Christensen 2019a) gave an account of the legislative frameworks that have driven the practice and professionalisation of community engagement, Chapter 5 analyses the consequences of the emerging industry on local democracy. The chapter commences by introducing the emerging industry. It gives a brief account of what community engagement is, what has driven its growth and how it is understood in practice. It also introduces the growing literature concerned with commercialisation overseas (Bherer et al. 2017a; Lee 2015) and in Australia, for which Hendriks and Carson (2008) have made the most notable contribution.

The chapter then presents a conceptualisation of local democracy which draws attention to the general neglect in Australia (see Halligan and Paris 1984; Smith 1996). The conceptualisation draws on the liberal canon (Hindess 2002; Mill 1865; Pratchett 2004), where local democracy is justified by local government freeing up central government from local issues and as a means of building capacity for local leaders to then operate at higher levels of government. Both arguments focus on how local governments can benefit central governments and neglect local government and local democracy as autonomous endeavours. Therefore, the conceptualisation of local democracy as outlined by Haus and Sweeting (2006) that formed the theoretical basis of the inquiry in Chapter 4 (Christensen and Grant 2016) is instead adopted and significantly extended and applied to the Australian context. Haus and Sweeting (2006, 267) provide an ethical foundation of for local democracy which highlights the common good and the process and outcomes of local democracy, stating, 'local democracy implies that local government, like governments at upper levels, ha[ve] a process of collective self-determination as its normative core'. Beyond this defining of local democracy, Haus and Sweeting

(2006) identify four types of local democracy: representative, user, network and participatory. The most relevant to this study is the participatory approach, which the authors interpret as including participatory, deliberative, collaborative governance and co-production. Before moving on, the article notes that commercialisation is not accounted for by Haus and Sweeting (2006) nor in any other contemporary accounts of participatory democracy, except for that by Hendriks and Carson (2008, 295), who note the 'contrary worlds' of the market and deliberation.

After a brief explanation of how community engagement is understood in practice, the article presents three pieces of evidence of the Australian local government industry. First is the 'demand' for engagement. This evidence uses data from the local government census, a major quantitative data source from the mixed-methods study and includes the quantity of engagement processes being undertaken by the local governments surveyed – an average of 29.4 per annum across all council types, with more being reported in metropolitan councils. Popular engagement methods were public submissions (82.4%), online surveys (73.3%), advisory/community reference groups (70.3%), public meetings (69.1%) and drop-in sessions (65.7%). The methods can be considered quite traditional, with many being prescribed in the legislation. The article also notes that half of the councils have no dedicated community engagement staff, and only 22.9% of all councils report undertaking all of their own engagement without outsourcing.

Second is the evidence relating to the private 'supply' of community engagement. The data presented in this section are from the practitioner survey, another major quantitative data source from the mix-methods study. Of the 375 practitioners surveyed, 25% worked in the private sector, 58.4% in local government and 12.3% in state government. Practitioners are relatively transient, with experience across sectors, although predominately local government (82.1%). The methods used by practitioners were similar to those regularly utilised by local governments. Private sector practitioners reported a high number of processes delivered in the previous 12-month period.

Third is the evidence of professional associations. Membership of the International Association of Public Participation is increasing, and the organisation is enjoying a growth in attendances at their training courses and conferences.

The final section of the paper highlights the potential risks to local democracy from the community engagement industry, with three main areas of discussion. First is the issue of commercialisation and how the democratic and profit imperatives can be balanced. The authors highlight the uneasiness of the two realms and the risk of the client's interests overriding those of the community. Second is the issue of standardisation and whether or not it is improving practice. Standardisation is occurring in legislated processes, professional recognition, training and services and, while aimed at ensuring a degree of 'best practice', it risks delegitimising alternative approaches and losing flexibility and effectiveness. Third is the issue of capacity. This speaks to the importance of local governments and local communities working together to improve their local area, rather than outsourcing the work to those who are not beneficiaries of the process or outcome. The paper

concludes that ongoing scrutiny of these areas is necessary to ensure the success of the local democracy experiment.

Chapter 6 – 'Community Engagement and Professionalisation: Emerging Tensions' (Christensen 2018)

Chapter 6 opens Part 3 of thesis and signals a shift in focus. While Part 1 sets the historical and contemporary legislative context and Part 2 focuses on local government practice and includes the key theorisation of democracy for the thesis, Part 3 focuses on the practitioners and professionalisation. Chapter 6 (Christensen 2018), which takes an applied ethics approach, examines the case for whether community engagement can be considered a profession, and what types of tensions practitioners may experience. The paper poses three questions: *Is community engagement really a profession? What tensions do community engagement practitioners face by 'serving multiple masters'?* and *How can ethics inform our understanding of community engagement and its professionalisation?* The paper draws attention to the growing body of work concerned with practitioners (such as Bherer et al. 2017a; Cooper and Smith 2012; Hendriks and Carson 2008; Lee 2014, 2015) and the increasing professionalisation of the practice. The paper problematises the professionalisation of community engagement, given that practitioners are intermediaries between communities and public institutions as facilitators of democratic processes. This intermediary role means that practitioners need to carefully balance the needs of the community with the needs of the public institution. Should favour be show to the community, the institution may be reluctant to compensate for services, whereas should favour be shown to the institution, the community may designate the process a sham. This is a unique phenomenon, as traditionally professions serve communities by first serving their clients or employers (in this case, public institutions) (Kultgen 1988). Consequently, practitioners play the role of service provider, financial beneficiary, democratic process designer and guardian simultaneously – a situation certain to result in multiple professional tensions as their interests conflict.

Theory presented in the paper includes a brief historical overview of conceptualisations of professionalism. These include the early functionalist approach (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933; Tawney 1920), the checklist approach, the social constructionist approach (Greenwood 1957, Millerson 1964; Wilensky 1964) and those that focus on social and cultural inequalities (Beagan 2001; Witz 2013). Noordegraaf's (2007) theory of 'pure professionalism' is then explained as a framework to assist the discussion. Noordegraaf's framework consists of two pillars and two sets of drives. The first pillar is 'content', which contains knowledge, skills, experience, service ethic and appearance. The second pillar is 'control', containing association, jurisdiction, knowledge transfer, codes, supervision. The pillars are underpinned by a series of 'drives': rational drive to improve

practice, ethical drive to guard industry values, political drive to gain power and status and a social drive to create community and social closure. This framework, along with the literature, is then used to explore whether community engagement is a profession. It is not intended as an evaluation, but as a means for exploration. Findings that illustrate that community engagement is a profession of sorts include a degree of common skills and experiences amongst practitioners and a shared service ethic to provide a public good. On the contrary, findings that show that community engagement is not (yet) a profession include lack of a cohesive, evidence-based body of knowledge, codes and standards that are present but are not used to control or regulate the sector or practitioners, no discrete jurisdiction, and no restrictions on how knowledge can be transferred and to whom. Based on this evidence, the paper concludes that there is some semblance of a profession.

The paper then presents three vignettes designed to illustrate the tensions for professionalisation. The vignettes centre around dilemmas practitioners may face: taking additional time to engage with a previously missed group, facing pressure from elected representatives to arrive at a particular outcome, and whether to prioritise personal financial need over good practice. The vignettes highlight issues of neutrality, transparency, commercial interests, personal interest, supervision, independence and inclusivity. With a lens of applied ethics, they speak to issues of public good, good practitioners and good actions by practitioners.

By way of conclusion, the paper returns to the three questions posed*: Is community engagement really a profession? What tensions do community engagement practitioners face by 'serving multiple masters'?* and *How can ethics inform our understanding of community engagement and its professionalisation?* It concludes that there is some semblance of a profession – more than hairdressing, for example, but not quite as professional as teaching. The vignettes serve to illustrate how practitioners' position in serving two masters means that they will inevitably face tensions. Finally, the author asserts that ethics can assist by providing guidance to the field by way of reflection and by collectively determining what makes the public good, good practitioners and good actions by practitioners. This chapter is strongly connected to the two following chapters, both of which present empirical evidence from practitioners concerning the actual tensions they face.

Chapter 7 – 'Participatory and Deliberative Practitioners in Australia: How work context creates different types of practitioners' (Christensen 2019c)

While Chapter 6 (Christensen 2018) introduces the concept of professionalisation and the tensions that practitioners may face, Chapter 7 (Christensen 2019c) provides data about who these practitioners actually are and what they do. This empirical exploration allows for greater understanding of what informs their practice as well as the diversity of their practice. Data presented in the paper are both quantitative, from the Practitioner Survey, and qualitative, from the Practitioners Interviews, enabling a deep exploration of practitioners and their work context. A brief overview of the work done by participatory and deliberative practitioners is introduced along with the different names by which they are known as (such as 'community engagement practitioner', which appears elsewhere in this thesis). The literature review is presented in three thematic areas. First is the literature that focuses on the influence of practitioners over participatory and deliberative processes. It highlights that the research to date is contradictory, with some scholars finding that practitioners enhance the processes in which they are involved (Carcasson and Sprain 2016; Pierce et al 2008) and others concluding that practitioners can influence or manipulate participants (Humphreys et al 2006; Spada and Vreeland 2013). Second is the literature which illustrates how participatory and deliberative practices, and their associated practitioners, are broadening. Literature that relates to professionalisation and commercialisation includes the study by Hendriks and Carson (2008), who conclude that deliberative practitioners were operating in a 'community of practice' rather than a marketplace, and the work of Lee and associates, who suggests that the work of practitioners is less harmonious (for example Lee 2015, 2017). Research that describes the work of practitioners includes that by Chilvers (2013), identifying actor types in science and technology dialogue, and Bherer et al. (2017b), identifying practitioner types in Quebec. Third, is the literature on how practitioners interface with public institutions (such as Cooper and Smith 2012; Escobar 2015, 2017).

Findings from the Practitioner Survey show the characteristics of a sample (375 responses) of the Australian practitioner cohort. More specifically, the findings show that practitioners were most likely to be female (77.6%, n=291) and that they were less likely to identify with a cultural or ethnic group (70.9%, n=266). These two findings illustrate that the practitioner cohort is generally not representative of the communities with which they work. The findings also show that the highest number of practitioners were employed in local governments (58.4%, n=291), although this may simply reflect a collection bias. The survey also found that practitioners were generally quite well educated, with 64.7% (n=242) holding a bachelor degree or higher (compared with 22% nationally, see ABS 2016). The average number of qualifications was 2.7 per practitioner and these were in 17 different areas, the top five being management (38.1%, n=128) and public relations, communications and media (33.3%, n=112), community development (29.5%, n=82), social sciences (25.3%, n=99)

and social/community planning and research (24.4%, n=82). There are no dedicated tertiary courses in Australia but 89.1% (n=334) had attended trainings or tertiary courses in community engagement.

The paper then shifts to report on the qualitative findings, where those interviewed (20 senior practitioners) were asked to reflect on some of the survey findings and the factors that had shaped their practice. There were two main areas of influence over practice identified by practitioners: the practitioners' previous experience, study and training; and their individual traits, such as their capabilities, interests and personalities. Previous work experience was diverse, and practitioners spoke of how they learned from mistakes, learned from trainings and education and transferred skills learned from other areas. When they spoke of compatible traits, they spoke of being comfortable with ambiguity, flexibility and personal values. Practitioners were asked if the diversity of experiences, qualifications and skills was a strength or a weakness in the field. Results were divided, with some thinking there is strength in diversity and others concerned that previous experience may bring biases to practice and may means there are gaps in knowledge and skills that could adversely affect the processes they design and facilitate. Unprompted, a couple of participants concluded that a degree of standardisation was needed to ensure universality of core principles and knowledge.

With the diversity in backgrounds and experiences, it was assumed the field has broadened to the point of having different types of practitioners. Based on the interview data, the paper identifies three areas where practitioners diverge. The purpose of identifying these differences was to gain greater understanding into the work of practitioners, not to classify them. The first area was whether practitioners were internal or external to public institutions, with participants acknowledging that being based internally brought additional challenges, related primarily to navigating bureaucracies. The second area was whether practitioners were working on projects with limited or considerable scope, defined as those with limited negotiables available for community influence versus those where community had more and/or greater negotiables available to them for influence in to affect outcomes. Third was the whether practitioners were involved in processes with limited (one-off) timeframes or were involved with ongoing and sometimes multiple projects either in the same organisation or same locations.

All of these findings illustrate how the work of participatory and deliberative practitioners is shaped by their previous experience, by their position relative to the public institution with which or for which they are working, and the work that that institution undertakes. Some similarities can be found with other contexts, for example Escobar's (2015, 2017) research into internal practitioners in Scotland and the research by Bherer et al. (2017b) into the scope of processes with which practitioners are involved in the Quebec context, but there are also differences when compared with Australia. The paper concludes that the empirical data collected in this study suggest that Hendriks and Carson's (2008) view of a 'community of practice' is more likely to actually be a series of 'communities of practices'. It reaffirms the views that practitioners are influential over participatory and deliberative processes, that the practice is broadening and that public institutions face complex challenges in this

area. Finally, the paper suggests avenues for future research that may assist in gaining a greater understanding of how practitioners are affecting the quality of the democratic processes they design, facilitate and coordinate.

Chapter 8 – 'Managing Divided Loyalties in the Emerging Profession of Community Engagement' (Christensen 2019b)

The eighth and final chapter concludes Part 3 of the thesis by presenting data on the tensions that senior practitioners experience in their community engagement work for public institutions. Where Chapter 6 (Christensen 2018) presented vignettes of how practitioners may be experiencing ethical tensions, Chapter 8 (Christensen 2019b) presents actual empirical evidence of what these tensions are and how practitioners manage them. The introduction highlights the uniqueness of the community engagement practitioner and their need to adequately and simultaneously cater for both the public and the public institution (see Chapter 6). The article then presents the relevant literature as it pertains to community engagement practitioners (Bherer et al. 2017b; Hendriks and Carson 2008; Lee 2014, 2015, 2017). Topics discussed include the nature of public institutions and how they often hinder the effectiveness of public participation processes (Chilvers 2017; Cooper and Smith 2012; Lewanski and Ravazzi 2017; Mazeaud and Nonjon 2017), and the sociological findings of tensions in professional practice more broadly. The discussion highlights how the market adversely impacts practice and that public institutions can stifle professional autonomy. The chapter utilises the same qualitative data set used for Chapter 7, that is, 20 semi-structured interviews with practitioners who have more than 10 years' experience in the field. This paper was concerned primarily with participants' answers to the following questions: *What is making it difficult/challenging to deliver good engagement? What types of tensions or dilemmas do you face in your work? How do you manage these?* The interview transcriptions were themed for analysis.

The findings identified four origins of practitioner tensions. First were tensions related to the divided loyalties of serving employers or clients on one hand, and communities on the other, all while appearing loyal to neither party. Practitioners discussed how they gave advice on engagement policy and processes, and were sometimes viewed suspiciously by the public organisation for 'working for the other side' or, conversely, communities assuming practitioners were aligned with the organisation. Australian practitioners spoke of the importance of being 'independent' from the subject matter or the public organisation, although not necessarily independent from the community.

Second were tensions related to whether practitioners were employed by public institutions or were private consultants to public institutions. Those employed by, as opposed to contracted to, public institutions reported that they faced internal barriers to delivering good engagement, and some

reported concerns for job security. One of the main barriers was resistance to undertake engagement, from technical staff as well as at the management, executive and decision-maker levels. Some private practitioners reported difficulties in balancing commercial imperatives with their client relationships. Some private practitioners believed it was easier as an external practitioner as issues of internal resistance were mostly minimised before their arrival, and it was easier to remain impartial given no ongoing links to the organisation or community.

Third were tensions related to the constraints and behaviours of public institutions. Eight themes were identified in this area: (i) the tension created when the institution announced a decision that the community opposed, and the practitioner agreed with the community; (ii) when practitioners lack authority during the process and they do not feel empowered to be able to answer questions from the community directly; practitioners feel they are unable to demonstrate their values of integrity, honesty and openness as the institution has not given them permission to do so; (iii) when the engagement with the community is unlikely or will not have any influence over the project and is therefore tokenistic; (iv) when the bureaucracy and decision-makers are not aligned, meaning that these two groups have different ideas of what the engagement, or even the outcome, should be; (v) when decision-makers are not fully committed to the process or they are not fully aware of what it will involve; (vi) tensions that arise from interference from senior public servants or political advisors; these staff are keen to manage risk, assure decision-makers that there are no problems, and consequently attempt to make changes to processes and reports from the community; (vii) when public institutions are unsure how to balance community views with expert views; and (viii) tensions that arise from how decisions will be implemented, or not, once practitioners leave.

Fourth were tensions from the community. These were given only a cursory mention from practitioners as they appeared to assume that facilitation and issues management with the community was likely to be difficult but expected.

The study found that practitioners employ three main strategies for managing tensions: avoidance, prevention and management. Their selection of the different strategies appeared mostly ad hoc and contextually dependent. There are two related areas in this discussion: the role of principles, used by some practitioners as a guide to recognising when their practice was at risk of compromise, and the level of experience of the practitioner. This study interviewed senior practitioners and many acknowledged that they had built up their skills and confidence in advocating for good process, but that less experienced practitioners would be likely to feel less confident – a situation which has consequences for the quality and effectiveness of engagement.

Returning to the themes from the literature, the chapter concludes that it is not a case of practitioners operating a like a 'community of practice' (Hendriks and Carson 2008) or struggling with contrary identities (Lee 2014, 2015, 2017) – but the reality is likely to be somewhere in between. With respect to challenges faced when working in and with public institutions, the findings mirror those found overseas.

Discussion of Contributions

The thesis seeks to answer the question *How is the practice and professionalisation of community engagement in Australian local government maturing?* To do this it has reflected on the existing literature, gathered quantitative and qualitative data as part of a mixed-method methodology, and analysed this data and other texts. Consequently, this body of work has made contributions in four areas. First are the contributions to knowledge, where empirical data gathered have filled gaps, creating new knowledge. Second are the challenges to existing knowledge, where the assumptions that underpin concepts and normative understandings have been problematised, creating new perspectives on existing knowledge. Third is the advancement of theory, where existing understandings have been further developed to build theory. Fourth are the contributions that can be applied to policy and practice, giving the research relevance to the field.

Contributions to Knowledge

The research contributes to knowledge in a number of areas. First, it provides empirical evidence which maps the legislative requirements for local governments to undertake engagement. Previous work in this area had focused only on a single jurisdiction or a single point in time (Grant and Drew 2017; Grant et al. 2011; Grant et al. 2012; Herriman 2011; Prior and Herriman 2010; Wiseman 2006). Instead this research maps the legislative requirements across all Australian states and the Northern Territory and it does so historically, so that trends can be identified. The research identified four different approaches that state and territory governments take in legislating: aspirational, empowered, hedging and prescriptive (see Chapter 2; Christensen 2019a).

Second, it presents empirical evidence on how Australian local governments are practising community engagement: how much engagement they are doing, the methods they are using, their motivations for engaging, who is responsible in the organisation for conducting engagement and where community engagement features in the organisation (see Chapter 3; Christensen and McQuestion 2019). The findings confirm the legislative driver for local governments to undertake engagement and highlight that practice varies between local governments, suggesting that local governments are able to practise engagement in ways that are appreciative of the characteristics of their local communities, and also that the understanding of engagement and its leadership within the organisation may also have implications for practice.

Third, and following from the previous point, we now know how local governments are adopting and adapting methods through the exploration into the practice of participatory budgeting in Australian local governments (see Chapter 4; Christensen and Grant 2016). The processes undertaken so far vary with regards to budget timeframes, budget areas, proportion of budget available for

community input, methods used and outcomes, but some general trends can be seen in terms of the use of deliberative methods and the sustainability, or otherwise, of the approach.

Fourth, new empirical data on the community engagement practitioner cohort indicate who they area, where they work, what training and education they have and their work experience. We now know that there is considerable diversity in the cohort, which likely suggests there is diversity in practice as well. We now also know that the diversity is likely to be shaped by whether the practitioner is positioned internal or external to public institutions, whether they work on processes with considerable or limited scope and whether their processes were ongoing or limited (see Chapter 7; Christensen 2019c).

Fifth, and finally, new data illustrate the tensions that practitioners face in their work and how they manage these. The tensions relate to three areas: the need to serve both the community and the engagement sponsors, their position in either the public sector or as private consultants to the public sector, and the constraints and behaviours of public institutions. Management of these tensions is ad hoc but often informed by the values or principles of the practitioner, as well as the position they hold, their experience and their confidence (see Chapter 8; Christensen 2019b).

Challenges to Existing Knowledge

In addition to contributing new knowledge, the research challenges some assumptions in existing understanding, mainly by problematising community engagement practices. More specifically, it first problematises the community engagement 'industry' at a structural level by exploring commercialisation in the field (see Chapter 5; Christensen and Grant 2019). The research posits that community engagement is an industry, evidenced by the supply of services (by practitioners) and the demand for services (by local governments in this instance). Given that the ultimate aim of community engagement is to enhance local democracy, this commerciality is problematic as practitioners seek to generate income and make a profit while at the same time demonstrating fair and transparent democratic processes. As a result, local democracy may be at risk due to the need to balance commercial interests, the standardisation of practice which is occurring and the strategic capacity of local governments to be able to deliver community engagement. While there is no obvious solution to these issues, continued and careful scrutiny is warranted.

Second, the community engagement industry is problematised at the practitioner level. Once again, the issue of practitioners being required to serve the commercial interests of their client or employer can be at odds with that of being required to serve the democratic interests of the communities for whom they are facilitating engagement. At the practitioner level, this is experienced as ethical tensions or practice decisions which will affect the way the process is run, the way the public institution is perceived, the way the practice of community engagement is understood, or even

the way the practitioner is perceived (see chapters 5 and 6, in particular). By considering these tensions, the view that the work of community engagement practitioners is relatively unencumbered is challenged, bringing with it implications for the facilitation of democratic process.

Third and finally, the thesis challenges the notion, articulated by Hendriks and Carson (2008), that the practitioner cohort operates a 'community of practice' and suggests instead that there are multiple 'communities of practice' that reflect the different work contexts that shape practice. This is a view which aligns more closely with that of Lee (2014, 2015, 2017) and gives more nuance to reality (see Chapter 7; Christensen 2019c).

Advancement of Theory

The thesis has advanced understanding of local government and its community engagement practice and of the professionalisation of community engagement practice. More specifically, the research expands on the theory of local democracy by progressing the work of Haus and Sweeting (2006) and Grant et al. (2014). It takes Haus and Sweeting's (2006, 267) conceptualisation of local democracy and their four types of 'non-exclusive components' of local democracy – 'representative', 'user-pays', 'network' and 'participatory' – and expands on the 'participatory' type to include deliberative, collaborative/community governance and co-production. Participatory budgeting is used as a case study from which to explore Haus and Sweeting's (2006) theory of local democracy (see Chapter 4; Christensen and Grant 2016) and it finds that the practice of participatory budgeting which is situated, for the most part, in the 'participatory' type, requires the other three types be in place so that it can enhance local democracy. Haus and Sweeting's local democracy conceptualisation and types also feature in the discussion of the community engagement industry (Chapter 5; Christensen and Grant 2019). Once again, the four types feature with the expanded presentation of the 'participatory' type but this time the 'representative' types is elaborated on to include individuation, party-politicisation, parliamentarisation and decentralisation. The theory is explored in this context of commercialisation, an area not directly addressed by Haus and Sweeting (2006), nor in other academic accounts (see, for instance, Keane 2009). The discussion argues that the commercial element should be incorporated into wider understandings of local democracy.

Understandings are also advanced in the areas of community engagement professionalisation. Chapter 6 (Christensen 2018) introduces Noordegaaf's (2007) pillars of pure professionalisation as a means to explore whether community engagement can be considered a profession. Noordegraaf (2007) argues that 'pure' professionalism is one of three types, with others being 'situated' (including experts and traditional professions) and 'hybridised' (reflective practitioners who require links to the outside world). The findings presented throughout the thesis suggest that even these three types might

be limiting to community engagement, as such engagement can be easily understood as belonging to any of the three, subject to different contextual factors.

Relevance to Policy and Practice

Even though this research was not designed to be directly applied to policy and practice, it does identify a number of areas that policy makers and practitioners may want to consider. First is a call for policy makers to consider more evidence-based approaches to policy-making in engagement. As Chapter 2 (Christensen 2019a) discusses, requirement for local governments to employ prescriptive engagement methods, such as public submissions, are counter-intuitive as they are not fit for purpose, or context. Second is the opportunity to use the data collected from the survey, and presented in Chapter 3 (Christensen and McQuestion 2019), to benchmark community engagement practice, including considering how and where to position it in their organisations. In fact, local governments have made a number of requests for this particular research as they search for evidence that will assist them in gaining additional resources. Third are a number of considerations for local governments considering undertaking participatory budgeting processes. Chapter 4 (Christensen and Grant 2016) outlines these as the total budget available for community involvement as well as the role of deliberation, whether the process will be sustained, how organisations can prepare, the roles and responsibilities local governments and state governments can negotiate and the role of their party actors. Fourth is information in the thesis that may be of interest to public managers with regards to the barriers practitioners experience in conducting their work. Chapter 8 (Christensen 2019b) gives a list of constraints and behaviours of public institutions which hinder effective work; policy makers and public managers may wish to consider these in an attempt to ensure the work of staff and contractors can be more effective. Fifth are considerations for professional associations and others who lead practice. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 (Christensen 2018, 2019c, 2019a) give more information about the practitioner cohort and the challenges they experience. Standardisation of core knowledge and skills are discussed along with ethics and principles. Finally, and reflective of all of these opportunities, is the need for policy makers, public managers, professional associations and practitioners to regularly and critically reflect on community engagement practice, as there is a democratic imperative to ensure practice is of a high quality.

Areas for Future Research

The irony of undertaking a large piece of research, such as a PhD, is that upon conclusion, one is left with more questions than answers. As demonstrated, research into the practice and professionalisation of community engagement is relatively sparse and therefore future research could take a number of directions. This thesis identifies two main areas worthy of future research. The first is related to local government community engagement practice. It would be useful to know whether local governments are interpreting legislative requirements to engage as 'minimums' or 'maximums' and, if it is a combination of both, what criteria they are using to decide. It would also be useful to learn why there is declining interest in traditional methods and what is the appeal of emerging methods. Further research could also investigate the barriers to good community engagement practice and how resourcing, profile and leadership of community engagement affect outcomes. This knowledge could help local governments provide more effective democratic opportunities for their communities.

The second area relates to the community engagement practitioner. Future research could examine the impact of specialist community engagement staff on practice and how the role is understood by other professions and the community. There could also be explorations into whether standardisation – of core knowledge, skills and values – would serve to strengthen the practice and act as a protective factor for the delivery of democratic processes. In addition, investigations or experiments could be conducted into the decision-making processes of practitioners to identify when and how decisions in the design and delivery of engagement are made, and what impact these have on the quality of participatory and deliberative processes.

Conclusion

In order to answer the question *'How is the practice and professionalisation of community engagement in Australian local government maturing?'* this research has explored concepts related to local democracy and professionalisation and framed them within the fields of democratic theory, public administration, governance, sociology and ethics. The study's mixed-methods research approach gathered quantitative data on local government practice and on the practitioner cohort and qualitative data on the practice and practitioner experience. This research has provided a number of insights into the practice and the pressures it faces, and it has identified a number of areas worthy of future consideration.

The findings reveal that local government community engagement practice is heavily driven by the legislative environment to which it is required to conform. Beyond this, the findings show that practice varies between local governments, based on how community engagement and its role in governance is understood and how it is resourced and supported. The findings also reveal the growing evidence of the effects of commercialisation and the tensions this causes for practitioners as they seek to serve both their commercial interests and communities simultaneously. In sum, the practice and professionalisation of community engagement in Australian local government is extremely varied, quite complex and, at times, ethically fraught.

To assist in gaining a greater understanding and demystifying these complexities, the research makes a number of contributions. First, it contributes to knowledge in how jurisdictions legislate for community engagement at the local level and provides a typology for greater understanding. Second, it provides empirical data on the current state of community engagement practice in local government. Third, it provides an insight into how local governments are adopting and adapting engagement methods. Fourth, it presents data on the practitioner cohort, focusing on what informs their practice and the tensions they experience in their work. As well as contributing to knowledge, it challenges existing assumptions, namely by problematising the community engagement industry at a structural and at a practitioner level. Suggesting that commercial interests may pose a threat to the quality of local democracy, this research advances theory in the areas of local democracy and professionalisation by expanding on Haus and Sweeting's (2006) conceptualisation and components of local democracy and by starting to apply theories of professionalisation (Noordegraaf 2007) to community engagement. Policy makers, public managers, professional associations and practitioners should find some relevance in the findings, not least as an opportunity for critical reflection.

As an early exploration, the research identifies a number of avenues for future research, focusing on both local governments and practitioners themselves. The benefits of such investigations could have positive implications for the quality and effectiveness of participatory and deliberative processes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Local Government Census – Survey Instrument

Appendix 2: Practitioner Survey – Survey Instrument

Appendix 3: Practitioner Interviews – Questions

Appendix 4: Information and consent forms

Appendix 1: Local Government Census – Survey Instrument

Local Government Community Engagement Census

Q1. Please select your Council from the drop down list: >> Selection List of 361 Councils <<

Q2. In the last 12 months, how many community engagement processes did your council deliver?

Q3. How is the community engagement function positioned in your organizational structure? (May select more than one)

- Centralised Community Engagement Team/Role with full responsibility
- Community Engagement combined with Communications/Media
- Community Engagement combined with Community/Social Planning
- Community Engagement combined with Governance
- Decentralised (Function sits in work areas)
- Ad hoc (Manage on a case by case basis)

Q4. How many staff have the term "community engagement" in their job title?

Q5. What proportion of community engagement processes are designed and delivered by council staff (as opposed to those designed and delivered by external consultants)?

- All (100%)   >> skip Q6 <<
- Two-thirds or more (66% - 99%)
- About half (33% - 65%)
- Up to a third (1% - 32%)
- None (0%)

Q6. What are the main reasons for using external consultants to deliver community engagement for your council?

Please rank reasons in order of importance and note any other reasons not listed.

- Existing staff do not have the time
- Existing staff do not have the knowledge and skills
- Specialist knowledge required due to complexity of project
- Specialist skills required to manage stakeholders and/or community
- Desire for an independent 'third party' to ensure integrity of process
- Other, please specify: _____

Q7. For each of the community engagement methods listed, please identify if your council has used them in the past as well as if they are using them now or plan to in the future. (Select all that apply)

	Have used in the past (12 months or more ago)	Using at the moment (This year)	Considering using in the future (Next year or after)
Advisory/Community Reference Groups			
Citizens jury/Deliberative community panel/forum			
Co-design			
Community Summit/Workshop (30 participants or less)			

Community Summit/Workshop (More than 30 participants)			
Drop in/Open house/Staffed display			
Focus groups			
Online discussion forum			
Online survey			
Open space/Unconference			
Participatory Budgeting			
Public meetings			
Public submissions			

Q8. Please rank what you believe are the main reasons driving community engagement practice in Australian local government today?

- Meet statutory requirements (Legislation and policy from state government)
- Its known effectiveness in assisting council with its decisions
- Enthusiasm of council staff
- Public demand and/or expectation
- Deliver on corporate strategies and policies
- Other, please specify: _____

Q9. Please rank what you believe are the main inhibiting factors for Australian local governments designing and delivering community engagement processes today?

- Statutory requirement (Legislation and policy from state government)
- Time
- Budget
- Knowledge and skills of staff
- Lack of leadership commitment at executive level
- Councillor support
- Public interest
- Other, please specify: _____

Appendix 2: Practitioner Survey – Survey Instrument

Community Engagement Practitioner Survey

About you

A1. Which decade were you born in?
- 1940s
- 1950s
- 1960s
- 1970s
- 1980s
- 1990s
- 2000s

A2. Which gender do you identify with?
- Male
- Female
- Other

A3. Where do you live?
- ACT
- NSW
- NT
- Qld
- SA
- Tas
- Vic
- WA
- Other, please specify: _____

A4. Which of the following best describes where you live?
- Capital city/Metropolitan area
- Regional area
- Rural/Remote area

A5. Do you identify strongly with any of the cultural and ethnic groups listed?
- Do not strongly identify with a cultural and ethnic group
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- North African and Middle Eastern
- North East Asian
- North-west European (British, Irish, Western European, Northern European)
- Oceanian (South Sea Islander, Maori, Melanesian, Papuan, Micronesian, Polynesian)
- People of the Americas (North, South, Central, Caribbean)
- South East Asia
- Southern and Central Asian
- Southern and Eastern European
- Sub-Saharan African

A6. Which of the following political perspectives do you identify with?
- Very conservative/traditionalist
- Conservative/traditionalist
- Moderate
- Liberal/progressive
- Very Liberal/progressive
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Your Experience and Qualifications

B1. How many years' experience do you have in community engagement?
- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 31+ years

B2. What level of expertise do you have in community engagement?
- Novice
- Experienced beginner
- Practitioner
- Knowledgeable practitioner
- Expert

B3. What is your employment situation? Select all that apply.
- Employee (--> B3A)
- Self-employed solo operator (-->B3B)
- Owner manager of a micro business (2-4 employees) (-->B3B)
- Owner manager of a small business (5-19 employees) (-->B3B)
- Owner manager of a medium business (20-199 employees) (-->B3B)
- Owner manager of a large business (200+ employees) (-->B3B)
- Volunteer
- Retired
- Currently seeking work
- Other – Please specify

B3A. Who are you employed by?
- Federal government
- State government
- Local government
- Private sector - Micro (2-4 employees)
- Private sector – Small enterprise (5-19 employees)
- Private sector - Medium enterprise (20-199 employees)
- Private sector – Large enterprise (200+ employees)
- Not for Profit
- Higher education
- Other, please specify _____

B3B. What are the main areas of activity of your business? Select all that apply.
- Community engagement
- Engineering and Infrastructure
- Environment
- Marketing and Advertising
- Media
- Planning
- Public relations
- Social and economic consulting services
- Training
- Other, please specify _____

B4. What is the level of the highest qualification you have completed?
- Certificate
- Advanced Diploma/Diploma
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate
- Postgraduate degree

B5 & B6. Please indicate the areas in which you have a. qualifications and b. experience.
- Community development
- Conflict resolution/Mediation
- Counselling/Psychology
- Education – Early childhood, Primary or Secondary
- Education – Higher Education or Vocational
- Engineering
- Environmental Science
- Land use planning
- Management
- Organisational development/Corporate Strategy
- Organising/activism
- Politics
- PR/Communications/Media
- Public Administration/Policy
- Science
- Social Science
- Social work
- Social/Community Planning/Research
- Other, please specify: _____

B7. In the past 10 years, have you participated in any training or short courses to assist in your community engagement practice?
- International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Module and/or Certificate
- Subject/unit as part of a tertiary education course
- Training provided by a not for profit
- Training provided by a private provider
- Training provided by an employee of your organisation
- Other, please specify: _____

B8. Which of the following organisations do you hold memberships with?
- Engage 2 Act
- IAF/AFN – International Association of Facilitators/ Australian Facilitators Network
- IAP2 – International Association for Public Participation
- PIA – Planning Institute of Australia
- PMI – Project Management Institute
- PRIA – Public Relations Institute of Australia
- Other/s, please specify: _____

B9. Which of the following sectors have you designed and/or delivered community engagement for in the last 10 years. (As an employee or a contractor/consultant). Select all that apply.
- Federal government
- State Government
- Local Government
- Private sector
- Higher education
- Not for Profit
- Health
- Planning

- Infrastructure
- Environment
- Disaster and Emergency Response
- Other, please specify

About your practice

C1. What are the most common activities you perform in relation to your work in community engagement? (Select up to 3)
- Conduct research on community engagement
- Coordinate multiple community engagement processes
- Design, deliver and report on community engagement processes
- Evaluate community engagement
- Facilitate face to face community engagement methods
- Produce community engagement resources, policies, procedures
- Provide a product/tool used in community engagement (including online)
- Provide advice on the design, delivery, reporting and evaluation of community engagement
- Provide community engagement training
- Manage/supervise community engagement practitioners
- Other

C2. Approximately how many engagement processes have you designed and/or delivered in the last 12 months?

C3. For each of the methods listed, please identify if you have designed and/or delivered them:
1. In the past (12 months or more ago)
2. This year (current 12 month period)
3. Intending to/hope to use in them in the future (Next year or two)
 (Select all that apply in each row)

- Advisory/Community Reference Groups
- Citizens jury/Deliberative community panel/forum
- Co-design
- Community Summit/Workshop (30 participants or less)
- Community Summit/Workshop (More than 30 participants)
- Drop in/Open house/Staffed display
- Focus groups
- Online discussion forum
- Online survey
- Open space/Unconferences
- Participatory Budgeting
- Public meetings
- Public submissions

C4. Please list up to three other methods that you regularly design and deliver.

Your thoughts on the development of community engagement

D1. Which term would you be most likely to use to describe a community engagement professional?
- Practitioner
- Professional
- Facilitator
- Expert
- Other, please specify _____

D2. Would you describe community engagement as?
- a field

- a discipline
- an industry
- a sector
- a community of practice
- a movement
- a profession
- other, please specify _____

D3. Do you believe that community engagement is generally viewed as a profession?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

D4. Please explain your answer.

D5. What do you see as the core skills or competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, values) of someone who works in community engagement? Please list up to five.

Appendix 3: Practitioner Interviews – Questions

Semi-Structured Interview – Community Engagement Practitioners

Introductory Demographic Questions

> How many years of experience do you have in community engagement?
> What do you call yourself?
> Highest level qualification? In what area?

Concept/Definition

1. How do you define community engagement?
2. What do you think is the biggest misconception about community engagement?
3. What fields are closely related to community engagement? How does community engagement differentiate itself from these?

Practice

4. What changes/trends have you noticed in the practice of community engagement?
5. Do you think there is an increase in demand for community engagement? If so, what's driving it?
6. What is making it difficult/challenging to deliver good community engagement?
7. What sort of impact do you think community engagement is having?

Professionalisation

8. Some of the following questions make reference to a recent survey of 375 practitioners. Figures A-C are provided on the pages following.

9. What are your thoughts on these results? Do you think community engagement is a profession? (Reflect on survey findings – Figure A)
10. Do you think the different knowledge backgrounds impacts how practitioners understand and practise engagement? (Reflect on survey findings - Figure B)
11. In the practitioner survey, participants were asked to identify competencies required by practitioners. Competencies were defined as knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours and values. Soft skills and attitudes dominated the responses.
12. Do you have any reflections on this? What knowledge/theories/content do you think practitioners need, if any?
13. Do you think there are different types of community engagement practitioners? If so, what are they?
14. What types of tensions/dilemmas do practitioners regularly face in serving their clients/organisations as well as the public/community? How do they manage these?
15. This question is about your thoughts on standardisation. Standardisation inclusive of: standardising engagement processes ("off the shelf" offerings), standardising legislative requirements (Acts and regulations calling for the same sort of engagement or approach to), the desire for practitioners to be accredited and for processes to meet quality assurance standards and so on. What standardisation have you witnessed? Is it a positive or a negative?
16. What do you think the future holds for community engagement?

Figure A. Is community engagement viewed as a profession outside of community engagement circles? (n = 363).
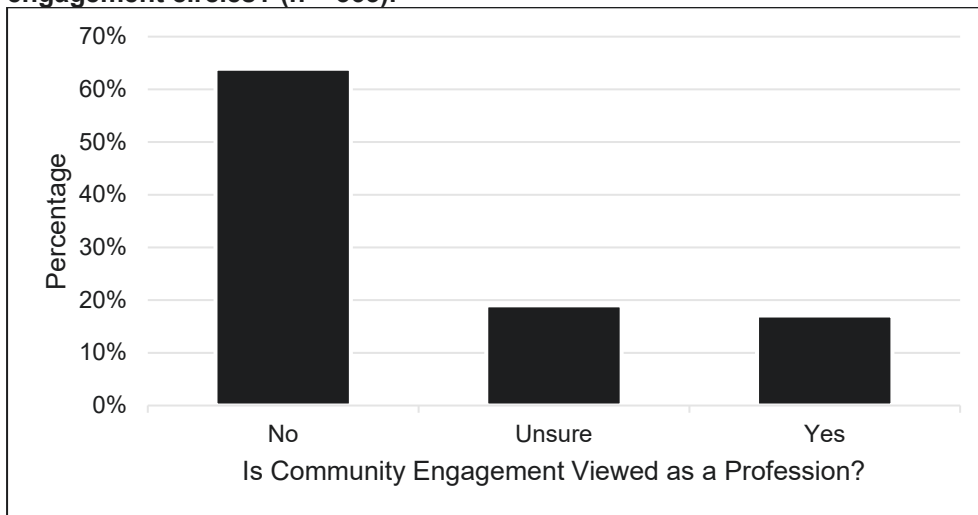
Figure B. Areas of qualification of community engagement practitioners (n = 336).

Appendix 4: Information and consent forms

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR ONLINE SURVEYS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CENSUS
The Emerging Community Engagement Profession of Australian Local Governments: Drivers, trends and trajectories (UTS HREC APPROVAL NUMBER ETH17-1225)

My name is Helen Christensen and I am a PhD student at UTS. (My supervisor is Bligh Grant)

The purpose of this research is to find out about community engagement practice and the community engagement profession in Australian local governments.

I will ask you to complete a short survey on behalf of your council. The survey consists of 10 questions, which are predominately quantitative. The survey is expected to take 5-10 minutes to complete.

You can change your mind at any time and stop completing the survey without consequences.

If you agree to be part of the research and to research data gathered from this survey to be published in a form that does not identify you, please continue with answering the survey questions.

If you have concerns about the research that you think I or my supervisor can help you with, please feel free to contact us on: Helen.christensen@uts.edu.au (or ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛) and/or bligh.grant@uts.edu.au (02 9514 4901).

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 2478 or Research.ethics@uts.edu.au and quote this number ETH17-1225.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS)
The Emerging Community Engagement Profession in Australia
UTS HREC APPROVAL NUMBER ETH17-1225

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?
My name is Helen Christensen and I am a PhD student at UTS. My supervisor is Bligh Grant (bligh.grant@uts.edu.au 02 9514 4901)

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?
This research is to find out about the practice and professionalisation of community engagement in Australia.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?
I will invite you to participate in an in-depth interview.

The interview will be semi-structured which means that some of the questions will be pre-prepared. You will have the opportunity to view these questions beforehand. Other questions will be in the moment. The interview should not take longer than 60 minutes and with your consent will be audio-recorded so that it can be transcribed. The interview will take place at your workplace, over the phone or at an alternative appropriate location to which you agree.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?
The only risks/inconvenience you are expected to experience are: an inconvenience to your time or an uncomfortable question. You are under no obligation to answer questions you don't want to.

Any information obtained in connection with this research that can identify you will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law.

The research team plan to discuss and publish the results in academic journals, blogs, thesis and at conferences. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?
You have been approached because you have knowledge and/or experience about community engagement.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?
Participation in this research is voluntary.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?
You are free to withdraw from participating in this research at any time without consequences. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?
You can change your mind at any time. However, changing your mind after data collection may affect analysis and research outcomes. Please advise as soon as possible of any intension to withdraw. I will thank you for your time so far.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?
If you have concerns about the research that you think I or my supervisor can help you with, please feel free to contact us on: Helen.christensen@uts.edu.au (or ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛) and/or bligh.grant@uts.edu.au (02 9514 4901).

NOTE:
This study has been approved by the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (UTS HREC). If you have any concerns or complaints about any aspect of the conduct of this research, please contact the Ethics Secretariat on ph.: +61 2 9514 2478 or email: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au), and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any matter raised will be treated confidentially, investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

PART 1

Chapter 2 – Christensen, H.E. 2019a. 'Legislating community engagement at the Australian local government level.' Commonwealth Journal of Local Government, 21: Article 6515.

Legislating community engagement at the Australian local government level

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Abstract

Community engagement has assumed a more salient role in the operations of Australia's local governments. A vast number of legislative instruments and reporting requirements are imposed upon local governments by the states and the Northern Territory across Australia's seven local government jurisdictions. Consequently, a set of identifiable practices is solidifying as a core element of local government practice and state–local relations. However, while practices have recently proliferated, it is easy to forget that they are relatively new. This article examines the legislative frameworks of Australian local government systems by chronologically mapping the development of legislation and other reporting requirements. It is argued that community engagement now occupies a central place in local government, and that the jurisdictions use four different types of approaches, often simultaneously, which can fruitfully be described as 'prescriptive', 'aspirational', 'empowering' and 'hedging'. The discussion draws comparative observations and identifies key issues and challenges for the future of community engagement.

Keywords: Community engagement; Australia; local government; public participation; legislation

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed increased interest in, and a proliferation of, the practices of community engagement in Australian local governments (Aulich 2009; Grant and Drew 2017; Head 2007, 2011). This article argues that the legislation set by the states and territories, which dictates how local governments are to engage their communities, is one of the main drivers for this proliferation. In the Australian local government context, 'community engagement' is the popular term used to describe all levels of engagement and participation, from giving information to seeking feedback, and from inviting input right through to collaborative governance. Terms such as 'consultation' and 'participation' are often used interchangeably with 'community engagement' and, as discussed here,

this is adding to confusion in legislation and practice. However, for the purposes of the legislative review presented here, the broad definition of community engagement is adhered to.

There are several reasons offered for the proliferation of community engagement practice in Australian local governments. First is the quest for better and more democratic outcomes resulting from participatory processes (Bell and Hindmoor 2009, p. 137). Second, governments seek increased legitimacy through these practices (Fung 2015), in an environment of community activism and increasing distrust of government (Head 2007; Smyth et al. 2005). Third, community engagement may be undertaken as a response to increasing demands from communities (Bishop and Davis 2002; Head 2007; Herriman 2011). Fourth, the advent of technology has made it easier and more cost-effective for governments to engage with their communities (Bell and Hindmoor 2009). Fifth – and perhaps less noble – is the desire of governments to broaden the base of their decision-making responsibilities – and thereby share the potential blame for poor decisions (Bell and Hindmoor 2009; Head 2007).

It is important to note, however, that while the reasons local government practises community engagement are proliferating, support for community engagement is not universal. For example, Pini and Haslam McKenzie (2006) report that community engagement in small rural populations can be perceived as irrelevant, as community members can easily access their elected representatives anyway, and community engagement is therefore perceived as unproductive and wasteful. Another concern is the fear of creeping privatisation: Grant and Drew (2017) have pointed to ambiguities surrounding the roles of private sector organisations in facilitating community engagement on behalf of local governments.

The article has the following structure. It first outlines the methodology. It then provides an overview of how local governments are positioned in Australian jurisprudence and explores what purposes legislating community engagement might serve. Following this it gives a chronological account of requirements in the local government acts from each of the states and the Northern Territory, highlighting changes and other relevant contextual developments. Next, the author presents a comparative discussion of the development of the legislative approaches to community engagement and identifies challenges and issues. Finally, the article concludes by reflecting on the past and current trajectories of community- engagement-related legislation.

Methodology

This article reviews historical and current legislation from the Australian states and the Northern Territory, where community engagement is either referred to or legislatively required of local governments. The review focuses predominantly on local government acts, but includes other relevant historical legislation and regulations in order to map the introduction and repeal of engagement

requirements. As mentioned, the widely accepted definition of 'involvement of community in decision-making' is used (see, for example, Rowe and Frewer 2005, IAP2 n.d.) to identify which references and requirements involve community engagement. This is interpreted as any instance where local governments are encouraged or required to communicate with their communities, and to invite or provide opportunities for their communities to give comments, input, feedback or direction to councils; or even to collaborate with local government. A total of 41 statutes were examined. The requirements for community engagement were investigated using the following search terms of the legislative documents, both individually and in combination which each other: 'consultation', 'engagement', 'public', 'community' and 'participation'. It should be noted that some of the historic legislation is not available online in a searchable format, and in these instances every effort was made to identify the relevant sections of the acts. The review was conducted throughout 2017 and 2018.

This article is the first to conduct a chronological, comparative and national review of the legislation. Other similar reviews have focused either on single jurisdictions (Grant et al. 2012; Prior and Herriman 2010; Wiseman 2006) or on a point in time (Grant et al. 2011; Grant and Drew 2017; Herriman 2011). By taking an inductive, historical approach the analysis allows for close comparison. For instance, it provides answers as to which state first took a particular approach; which states followed which; which states have atypical approaches; and how engagement requirements have been prioritised or reprioritised by individual state and territory governments. From this inductive methodology, the article derives a typology of approaches to legislating for community engagement which is referred to throughout the timeframes presented.

Legislative frameworks of Australian local governments

The Commonwealth of Australia is a federation of six states: New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (Qld), South Australia (SA), Tasmania (Tas), Victoria (Vic) and Western Australia (WA). The Commonwealth also has authority over ten territories, including the Northern Territory (NT). Seven of the ten territories are adjacent to the continent of Australia. All the states and the Northern Territory (NT) legislate for local government. The number and size of local governments varies within each state; there are currently 537 across all states and the Northern Territory. Figure 1 shows a map of the states and current number of local governments for each.

Figure 1: Map of Australian states with number of local governments
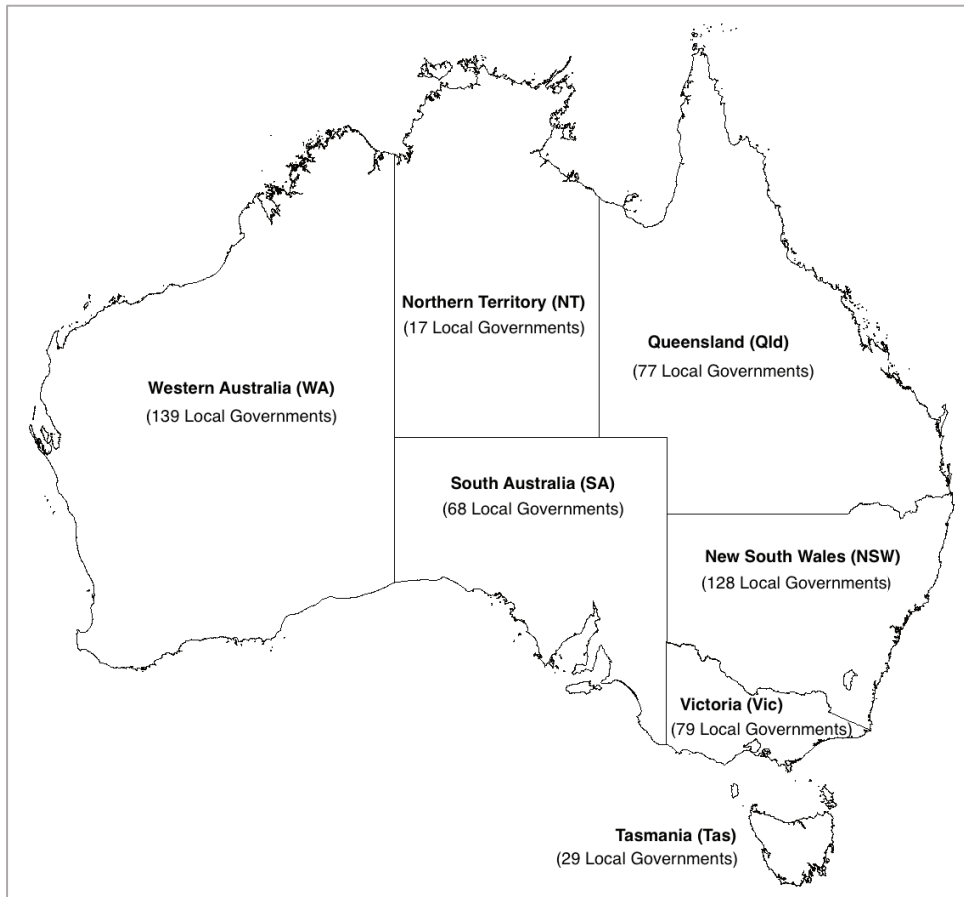
Source: Adapted from Grant and Drew (2017, p. 360) and Office of Local Government NSW (2018)

The legislative frameworks within which Australian local governments operate have two defining features. First, the Australian Constitution outlines a two-level system of government which includes the federal and state governments, but not local governments. While national constitutional recognition has not been achieved (see Grant and Drew 2017), since 2005 local government has been recognised in the constitutions of all the states, although to varying degrees (see Aulich and Pietsch 2002; Grant and Drew 2017; Saunders 2005; Twomey 2012). This lack of recognition at a national level has relegated local government to a 'lesser' or subordinate level of government (Brackertz 2013, p. 3; Twomey 2012). This in turn has contributed to uncertainty in a number of areas, such as: whether, and if yes how, the principle of subsidiarity ought to apply in Australia (Aulich 2005; Grant et al. 2016); shifting roles and responsibilities in response to political changes at the state and federal levels (Aulich 2009; Brackertz 2013; Dallinger 2009); financial constraints and dependencies (Brackertz 2013; Productivity Commission 2008; Twomey 2012); and the ability of local governments to be democratically responsive (Aulich 2009, 2015; Brackertz 2013). Furthermore, this list of issues suggests that Australian local government is a unified, comprehensive system of government; however, this is misleading. Without national constitutional recognition, local governments are statutory bodies or 'creatures of state', with their powers granted by the state or territory governments.

With each state and the territory having its own statutory and common law and (importantly) political culture, reform processes and statutes reflect the distinctiveness of these jurisdictions (Grant and Drew 2017; Marshall et al. 1999) – although there are some overarching similarities.

Australian local governments are bound by a significant number of legislative instruments (see, for example, Dollery et al. 2009 for a discussion). Each state and the Northern Territory has a principal local government act; all states except for Tasmania also have a separate capital city act; and Queensland and South Australia have separate electoral acts. South Australia also has a finance authority act – the Local Government Finance Authority Act 1983 (SA). These acts have numerous accompanying regulations for planning, the environment, building, health and many other areas. For instance, one Victorian Government web page (n.d.) states that Victorian councils have responsibilities under 126 different acts and regulations.

When legislating for local government, state and territory governments originally set the rules of operation by detailing what local governments could and could not do and, in many cases, exactly how they must do it. Therefore, these statutes were largely prescriptive (Marshall 1998) and followed the *ultra vires* doctrine, under which local governments were not permitted to act 'beyond powers'; the exception being Queensland, which as early as the late 1920s granted powers of general competence (see Grant and Drew 2017). Aulich (2005, 2009) emphasises how the local government reforms of the 1990s and their consequent legislative changes saw a move away from the *ultra vires* doctrine to the current situation, in which local governments are empowered to undertake any activities they deem necessary to fulfil their role.

Without empirical evidence, it is difficult to know why Australian states and the Northern Territory have generally increased their requirements for local governments to engage their communities, or their reasons for taking a particular approach. Presumably it is a combination of factors, including the reasons outlined in this article's introduction. However, there are several likely political reasons: to offset concerns that reforms to local government have been driven by economic imperatives (Marshall et al. 1999); to compensate for the diminished representation that has resulted from amalgamations (Marshall and Sproats 2000; Grant and Drew 2017); and to ensure local governments are accountable and responsive to their local communities (Aulich 1999) – which presumably eases the burden for the state government (Hawker Report 2003). Whatever the exact motivators, state and territory governments have made a commitment to ensure their local governments are engaging their communities. In doing so, they have taken a combination of different approaches, which this discussion has sorted into a typology.

The typology assists with analysis as it allows both for legislative approaches to be compared across jurisdictions and time, and for possible future impact measurement (see Collier et al. 2008, 2012; Kluge 2000). The types are defined by two categorical variables: to what degree the engagement

methodology is stipulated in the legislation; and whether or not the point in time, or juncture, at which community engagement must be conducted is stipulated in the legislation. As shown in Table 1, this results in four common approaches by the states and territory for legislating local government community engagement. First is the **aspirational** type, where neither the methodology nor the juncture is stipulated in legislation. This approach is a normative declaration of why participation by the community is valued and is presented in the principles, purpose or intent of the act. Second is the **prescriptive** type, where the methodology and the juncture are clearly articulated in the legislation. Third is the **empowering** type, where the legislation stipulates the juncture when engagement must be undertaken but it does not specify a methodology for how the engagement is to be done. Fourth and last is the **hedging** type, which stipulates the juncture and partially stipulates the methodology. It does this by stating that the local government can choose how it engages but that certain activities must be undertaken. This type is ultimately a combination of the **prescriptive** and **empowering** types.

Table 1: Typology of approaches to community engagement legislation by Australian states and territory

	Juncture not stipulated in legislation	**Juncture is stipulated in legislation**
Methodology not stipulated in legislation	Aspirational	Empowered
Methodology partially stipulated in legislation	*(Not evidenced)*	Hedging
Methodology stipulated in legislation	*(Not evidenced)*	Prescriptive

While the different approaches do not follow a linear progression through the developmental stages of the legislative approaches or time periods, trends can be seen. These will be highlighted throughout the paper.

The development of Australia's local government community engagement legislation

Pre 1980s: from establishing authorities to establishing democracies

The historical origins of Australian local government are contested, with opposing views that local government either emerged as a response to local demand, or was the result of legislation from the colonial governments (Grant and Drew 2017; Power et al. 1981). This *constitutionalist* versus *state-interventionist* contestation, labelled 'the history wars' by Grant and Drew (2017, p. 15), highlights an ongoing issue within Australian local government: namely, whether it is a creature of state or a form of self-government – with the latter cited as the origin of community engagement in local government. These duelling narratives persist to the current day and affect the understanding and practice of community engagement in local government (Grant and Drew 2017). Yet for the purposes of mapping the development of public consultation and engagement requirements in Australian local

governments from a legislative perspective, the journey begins in the early part of the twentieth century.

At the time of the first comprehensive local government acts in each jurisdiction, the statutes focused on services to land, even though after the world wars many local governments had increased their welfare and cultural offerings – such as childcare and recreational facilities – in response to greater community expectations and needs (Kelly 2011, p. 7). The long-standing local government acts of the Australian states were the Local Government Act 1919 (NSW), the Local Government Act 1934 (SA), the Local Government Act 1936 (Qld), the Local Government Act 1962 (Tas), the Local Government Act 1958 (Vic) and the Local Government Act 1960 (WA). Although there were multiple amendments to these large legislative instruments from the time of their enactment (see, for example, Grant and Drew 2017, pp. 15–79 for a discussion) they nevertheless stayed in place for many years (74 years in NSW, 65 in SA, 57 in Qld, 31 in Tas, 31 in Vic and 35 in WA). All these acts included stipulations that announcements and public notices were to be made at various junctures, by way of gazette and newspaper. However, they did not specify methods whereby citizens could be involved in local democracy in the sense denoted by the modern nomenclature of 'community engagement' described above. Nor were any of the regular amendments to these acts specifically concerned with community participation.

Three events took place in the 1970s which ultimately facilitated the inclusion of participatory requirements in later legislation. First was the increase in Commonwealth grants to local governments instituted during the Whitlam federal government, which allowed local governments to increase or introduce their social, recreational and educational services (Marshall et al. 1999; Reddel 2005). These programmes and services raised the importance and profile of local government, as well as strengthening the federal–local intergovernmental relationship.

Second was the passing of the Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978 (Commonwealth), a statute that serves as a constitution, and which saw the Commonwealth grant the territory self-government. This statute was important not only because it meant the new Northern Territory parliament took on most of the responsibilities (although not the *de jure* status) of a state, including local government, but also because it led to the new parliament passing the Local Government Act 1978 (NT). While the Act was concerned primarily with the creation and administration of community government councils and a provision for Aboriginal communities to manage local affairs, it also provided the opportunity for *"any person to make a submission … in relation to a draft community government scheme"* (s.433) and stipulated that *"the Minister shall cause consultation to be carried out with residents"* (s.434). While this directive did not specifically instruct local governments to engage, it was the first to reference engagement.

The third event was a period of reforms arising from the citizen-led social and environmental justice movements of the 1960s. With the combination of *"grassroots participation and the discovering of the urban problem"* (Halligan and Wettenhall 1989, p. 80), reforms *"focused on democratising local government* [ie from a property-owning to a broader franchise] *and making it more responsive to the communities it served"* (Aulich 2005, p. 198). An example and effect of this was the increase in disputes between councils and communities over environmental and development matters (Kelly 2011) which resulted in the New South Wales Wran Labor Government passing the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW), the first dedicated land use statute in Australia. The objects of the Act include the declaration that it is *"to provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment"* (s.5). The provisions for facilitating this centre on public submissions, where the community are invited to put forward in writing their objections or support for a proposal, to then be considered by decision-makers.

Arguably, these three events set the tone not only for the direction of local government, but also for how state and territory governments have legislated community engagement at the local level ever since.

Late 1980s through to mid-2000s: the first wave of reforms and a burgeoning role for communities

In the 1980s and early 1990s substantial reviews were conducted of all the local government acts. Theories on the reasons for these wide-ranging reforms include *"introducing or widening transparent and open procedures for decision-making to better inform local communities about council action and decisions, and generally encouraging community participation"* (Wensing 1997, p. 96) through to the less altruistic *"economic concerns* [which have been] *offset to a considerable degree by a commitment to community involvement"* (Marshall et al. 1999, p. 36). Regardless of the driving forces, the late 1980s and 1990s was a pivotal time for legislated community engagement. First, the Cain Labor government in Victoria passed the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic). This was two years after the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic) identified *"appropriate public participation in decision-making"* for amending planning schemes (s.4). Both acts are still current and in force in Victoria, although they have been amended multiple times. While the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic) did not incorporate any mention of community consultation and engagement as a principle of the Act, it did incorporate what was intended to be a standardised *"process for several types of decision"* (DELWP Vic 2015a, p. 12): the **prescriptive '**Section 223'. Section 223 outlines a standardised public submission process: public notice in a newspaper; a specific window of time in which submissions are to be advertised and received; the right for submitters to appear in person at a meeting to speak in support of their submission; and the obligation for the committee or council to inform submitters of the outcome by writing. While it is claimed that the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic) was designed to be constitutional and empowering for individuals rather than an inflexible blanket local government

statute (DELWP Vic 2015a), Section 223 of the Act in effect contradicts that approach, by stipulating what to engage on, and prescribing how to undertake the engagement. Prior to any amendments, the original Act listed the use of the Section 223 process in 14 different sections, related to: council powers and boundaries (ss.98, 206, 220), creation of local laws (s.119), loan projects (s.147), land valuations and ratings (ss.157, 182, 183), council property (ss.189, 222, 192), regional corporations (s.196), and drainage (ss.199, 200). Over the years small changes have been made to Section 223, such as increasing the submission period and tidying up minor administrative matters; however, the process itself has remained relatively unchanged.

Several years later, in 1992 in South Australia, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Amendment Act 1992 (SA) amended s.197 of the Local Government Act 1934 (SA) and required that councils give notice and invite written submissions on major projects and major spending of councils. It was the first **prescriptive** requirement from the state and was introduced by the Arnold Labor administration, which was in power for three months after the resignation of Premier John Bannon. Despite this initial step, the state was one of the last to pass a revised local government act during this reform period.

A significant year for local government statutes in Australia was 1993, with New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory all passing new local government acts – as we have seen, the first for many decades in all these jurisdictions. In New South Wales, the Fahey Liberal government introduced the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) which, in its second chapter, made the **aspirational** declaration that one of the purposes of the Act was *"to encourage and assist the effective participation of local communities in the affairs of local government"* (s.7). The introduction to Chapter 4 of the Act, titled 'How can the community influence what a council does?' includes the **prescriptive** *"making submissions, including comments on or objections to proposals"* as an answer. At the time the Act was passed, councils were required to give public notice and invite and consider submissions in instances of land reclassification (ss.32, 34), draft plans of management (ss.38, 40), leases, licences and other estates in respect of community land (s.47), building approvals (s.105), local policies (ss.160, 161), policies concerning expenses and facilities (s.253), draft codes of meeting practice (ss.361, 362), and financial and auditor reports (s.420). Since the Act was passed some of these requirements have remained unchanged, some have been slightly updated, and the requirements around building approvals have been moved into another statute.

In Tasmania, the newly elected Groom Liberal government passed the Local Government Act 1993 (Tas). The Act listed *"develop, implement and monitor procedures for effective consultation between the council and the community"* as a way a council could discharge its functions (s.20). This was the first instance of an **empowering** approach to legislating community engagement, where engagement is required but a specific method is not required, allowing a local government to design and deliver

the engagement as it sees fit. The Act also included providing *"a statement of procedures to be carried out in relation to consultation with the community"* when developing a strategic plan (s.67). This made Tasmania the first state to mandate engagement on strategic plans. A right to make submissions concerning proposed by-laws (s.159) was also included when the Act was passed. Over time minor changes were made to the wording of those clauses and additional requirements for engagement in relation to by-laws were added (ss.156A, 164, 170A and 170B), as well as requirements to provide the opportunity for public consultation on review procedures (ss.214C, 214J). In contrast to Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, where a new planning act preceded a new local government act, in Tasmania the Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993 (Tas) was passed the same year. Unlike other states, where land use planning is often a complementary or, in some cases, more forceful instrument for embedding community engagement practices into local government, in Tasmania the planning act at that time was focused on public exhibition requirements rather than consultation or engagement.

Commensurate with these changes, in Queensland local government reforms were conducted following two related events. First was the Fitzgerald Inquiry (1987–1989), a Royal Commission inquiring into police misconduct which resulted in a number of high-profile police and politicians, including Premier Bjeilke-Petersen, being charged and convicted for perjury. This inquiry led to the downfall of the National Party after a 32-year reign. Second, the Goss Labor government elected in 1989 oversaw the passing of the Local Government Act 1993 (Qld) three years after the Local Government (Planning and Environment) Act 1990 (Qld), which excised planning matters from the Local Government Act 1936 (Qld) and transferred them into a dedicated statute. The Local Government Act 1993 (Qld) signalled the beginning of the state placing explicit statutory obligations on local governments to consult with their communities. One of the Act's **aspirational** objects was *"providing for community participation in the local government system"* (s.3) and dictated that local governments *"must consult with the public"* by way of **prescriptive** public submissions when making local laws (ss.476–478) and local law policies (ss.485–487). There were no other requirements to consult in the Act.

At the same time, in the Northern Territory the Country Liberal Party was re-elected to lead the Legislative Assembly in 1974. Consequently, the Local Government Act 1993 (NT) reflected this conservative context and the Act focused more on administrative matters than on community engagement. However, the Act did include two requirements to consult: rate charges (s.70), with public submissions **prescribed**; and draft constitutions for community governments (s.104), with no method prescribed beyond the stipulation that *"the minister shall consult with the residents",* an **empowering** approach.

From the tracing of these developments of 1989 to 1993, the differences between the 'creatures of state' become clearer, along with their appetites for participatory approaches to democracy.

In 1995 in Western Australia the Liberal Court administration introduced the Local Government Act 1995 (WA). The Act declared an **aspirational** commitment to community engagement as it explicitly aimed for "*greater community participation in the decisions and affairs of local governments*" (s.1.3(2)(c)). As with the acts from the other states, **prescriptive** public submissions were the participatory method of choice and applied to making local laws (s.3.12), closing thoroughfares to vehicles (s3.50), notification of proposals (s.3.51), property disposal (s.3.58), commercial enterprises by local government (s3.59c), rates (s.6.36), boundary inquiries (Sch. 2.1 cl.4) and ward changes and reviews (Sch. 2.2 cls.3, 4, 7). However, the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996 (WA), released the following year, had no relevant community engagement requirements when passed.

While South Australia did not reform its local government legislation in 1993, it did pass the Development Act 1993 (SA). The Act was not prescriptive in how to engage, but made several references to 'public consultation'.[1] In 1995, the Local Government (Boundary Reform) Amendment Act 1995 (SA) amended the Local Government Act 1934 (SA) with a number of provisions designed to facilitate the upcoming voluntary council amalgamations of 1997 and 1998 undertaken during the Olsen Liberal administration. One of these stipulated that a public submission and hearing process be incorporated into reform proposals (s.21). Upon completion of the voluntary amalgamations, the number of councils was reduced by 57% and the Local Government Act 1934 (SA) was completely revised. The new Local Government Act 1999 (SA) listed the **aspiration** of "*participation by local communities in the affairs of local government*" in its principles (s.3), and implicitly defined the role of a council as "*represent*[ing] *the interests of its community*" (s.6).

It was at this point that South Australia's approach to legislating community engagement diverged from the other states and took a multi-pronged turn. The new Act required a consultation process for the development of strategic management plans (s.122), and it also required local governments to "*prepare and adopt a public consultation policy*" (s.50). Interestingly, the Act stipulated that any revisions to these policies must be undertaken via a **prescriptive** public submission process. The Act also specified the junctures at which the public consultation policy was to be followed: reclassification of land (ss.193, 194), land management plans (ss.197, 198), lease of community/council land (s.202), council meeting code (s.92), permits for using roads and footpaths for business purposes (s.223), and planting trees (s.232). By developing and then applying a policy, the South Australian Government was granting local governments more, although not full,

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[1] The current version of this Act stipulates that public consultation is to be conducted in significantly more instances, in accordance with the accompanying regulations.

independence in engaging their communities, thus demonstrating an **empowering** approach. Two elements of the Act required a 'reasonable amount' of public consultation: reform proposals (s.27) and major projects (s.48); another example of an **empowering** approach. In parallel, however, the Act required the familiar **prescriptive** public submissions in instances of public reform proposal (s.28) and ward composition (s.12). Finally, the Act contained one instance of *"should consult"* – for office locations and hours (s.45). This is the only example of a local government act merely suggesting community engagement at a juncture. Two years after the Act was passed, the Local Government (Consultation on Rating Policies) Amendment Act 2001 (SA) added another approach, with its requirements on community consultation for rates policy and variations (ss.151 and 156). The amendment act stipulated that councils were to follow their public consultation policies and that the policy must provide for a public submission process. This was the first time a state government had used the **hedging** approach, where a degree of independence was granted yet a minimum requirement was put in place. This ultimately sent a mixed message about how much trust the state has in its local governments.

The 1990s ended with the newly elected Labor Bracks administration passing the Local Government (Best Value Principles) Act 1999 (Vic) which stipulated that *"a Council must develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides"* (s.208B). This amendment finally aligned Victoria with the other states, save Tasmania, by including an **aspirational** declaration of the intent and principles of the Act and the role of community engagement. A few years later, the same administration passed the Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003 (Vic), concerned with reforming electoral processes and improving accountability and transparency. The Act required councils to produce council plans (s.125) and council budgets (s.129) that are subject to the **prescriptive** Section 223 public submission processes outlined above. The tightening of the requirements for a strategic council plan, and the inclusion of public consultation requirements, are similar conditions to those introduced by Tasmania in 1993 and South Australia in 1999. However, Victoria was the first state to introduce the requirement to consult on council budgets, albeit with the use of public submission processes.

Western Australia followed suit, with the Gallop Labor ministry making some changes to the Local Government Act 1995 (WA) in 2004. At the time the changes appeared quite small, such as the inclusion of Section 5.56, 'Planning for the future', which dictated that local governments were to plan for the future *"in accordance with any regulations"*. However, the following year, the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996 (WA) were updated considerably, introducing the requirement for strategic community plans, following South Australia and Tasmania's examples. The two-year plans were to *"set out the broad objectives of the local government"* and *"must ensure that the electors and ratepayers of its district are consulted during the development"* (r.19D). Proof of this consultation was also required, but a process or method was not prescribed, demonstrating an

empowering approach. That same year South Australia added a community consultation requirement for annual business plans and budgets (s.123), introduced with the passing of the Local Government (Financial Management and Rating) Amendment Act 2005 (SA). Like the rates amendment passed a few years earlier, the consultation requirement was to follow the public consultation policy but to also ensure a public submission process was included, once again utilising the **hedging** approach.

Also in 2005, the Tasmanian Labor government under David Bartlett passed the Local Government Amendment Act 2005 (Tas) which revised the functions and powers of councils to include the duty that *"in performing its functions, a council is to consult, involve and be accountable to the community"* (s.20) – thus bringing Tasmania into line with all other states by including an **aspirational** approach.

Mid-2000s to mid-2010s: the era of strategies, frameworks and reporting requirements

By 2005, community strategic plans and the community engagement processes that came with them were required in Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia, with Victoria looking set to follow (see Grant et al. 2011). The 2005 Victorian state government initiative, *A Fairer Victoria* (DPC Vic 2005), was aimed at addressing disadvantage and listed community engagement as a key strategy. A year later, *Strong Communities: Ways Forward* was released by the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Victorian Communities (MACVC). This document presented several community planning and engagement recommendations, noted that community planning was being practised in more than half of Victoria's local governments (MACVC 2006, p. 125), and stated that the importance of community plans should be further emphasised by the state government. Also in 2006, the Victorian Community Indicators Project released its final report aimed at *"strengthening local government planning and local democracy"* (VCIP 2006, p. 4) through the use of community well-being indicators. In mid-2007, Labor Premier Steve Bracks retired and was replaced by John Brumby. Perhaps because of this change, the mechanism to make community plans compulsory was revised. In 2007, the state government document *Planning Together: Lessons from local government community planning in Victoria* concluded that community planning approaches should be encouraged within council plans rather than in a plan of their own (West and Raysmith 2008).

Further to this, the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic) amendment in 1996 requires councils to produce Municipal Strategic Statements (MSS) (s.12A). An MSS is a statement of the council's strategic land use planning objectives for the municipality. Since 2007, the Act has stipulated that the MSS be consistent with council plans, therefore implying a requirement for community engagement without expressly declaring it. In May 2008 a practitioner body with financial support from the state government, the Local Government Professionals Corporate Planning Network (LG Pro), released *Embedding Community Priorities into Council Planning: Guidelines for the Integration of Community and Council Planning*. This document sought to bridge the gaps identified in the earlier

Planning Together report by providing guidance and frameworks on community planning in Victorian local government. Later that year, the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic) was passed, which put a requirement on local governments to also produce Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans (MPHWPs). The plans were intended to set goals and priorities for community members to achieve maximum health and well-being. Section 26 of the Act states that it *"must provide for the involvement of people in the local community in the development, implementation and evaluation of the ... plan"*. The addition of MPHWPs to MSSs and council plans has been interpreted as the final piece of the planning framework in Victoria. However, these frameworks vary between councils, with many choosing to develop community plans which they position above all other plans in their own strategic planning frameworks.

Strategic community plans gained a mention in the Northern Territory's new local government statute, the Local Government Act 2008 (NT); however, they were not required to be implemented. The new Act was passed following the local government reforms of the Henderson Labor Chief Ministership, which saw 51 of the 55 community government councils amalgamated into eight shire councils that cover extraordinarily large geographical areas. The Act included in its preamble the **aspirational** statement that the legislation was designed to *"promote and assist constructive participation by their local communities"*. The Act also called for *"municipal, regional or shire plans"* (s.23), which were to include service delivery plans and budgets, as well as to contain or reference long-term community or strategic plans and long-term financial plans. The Act does not expressly require councils to consult or engage communities in the development of these plans, nor does it expressly require a long-term community or strategic plan. It does, however, require a **prescriptive** public submission process upon annual review of the plans (s.24).

The trend for councils to develop strategic community plans continued in subsequent years, and was joined by the financial sustainability and performance reporting wave – which would also have consequences for the community engagement requirements placed on councils.

In 2006 the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) commissioned the *National Financial Sustainability Study of Local Government* report (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2006). This report highlighted issues relating to the financial sustainability of the sector and gained the attention of the Local Government and Planning Ministers Council (LGPMC).[2] Consequently, the LGPMC decided to develop a series of national sustainability frameworks that the states agreed to adopt. These frameworks have been the impetus for the incorporation of long-term financial and asset management

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[2] The LGPMC was made up of local government and planning ministers across Australia and New Zealand, and the President of ALGA. It was formed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2001 by merging the Local Government Ministers Conference and the Planning Ministers Conference. In December 2013, during the first two months of the Abbott government, COAG introduced a new council system and the LGPMC was disbanded.

plans in councils across Australia. The first state to update its legislation to incorporate the standards outlined in the frameworks was New South Wales. The passing of the Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Act 2009 (NSW) saw updates to the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) beyond the minor amendments to public consultation requirements that had so far occurred since the Act came into force. Receiving its assent under the short-lived Rees Labor ministry, the amendment focused on introducing a strategic planning framework to ensure good governance. Relevant to community engagement was the **aspirational** charter, which was expanded to include a directive that councils exercise their *"functions in a manner that is consistent with and promotes social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights"* (s.8). The introduction to Chapter 4, on how communities can influence councils, was updated to include *"by participating in council community engagement activities"* – thus broadening the interpretation of participation to methods beyond public submissions and **empowering** councils to set their own engagement programmes. Community strategic plans formed the cornerstone of the new integrated planning framework outlined in the amendment, and came with the requirement that a community engagement strategy must accompany development of the plans (s.402). The Act also called for a public submission process: the same **hedging** approach as that used in South Australia. A public submission process was also extended to requirements for the updated delivery programme (s.404) and operation plan (s.405). A proviso that the integrated planning and reporting guidelines must be adhered to (s.406) followed four years later under the O'Farrell Liberal government (DLG NSW 2013). The guidelines provide greater detail on the framework and the requirements placed on councils, along with a considerable focus on community engagement.

In the same year, the Queensland Bligh Labor government passed the new Local Government Act 2009 (Qld), repealing the existing Act after a relatively short 16 years. The new Act identified *"democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement"* (s.4) as one of five **aspirational** underpinning principles for local government. Following South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia, Queensland also incorporated the requirement for local governments to develop a long-term community plan that *"outlines the local government's goals, strategies and policies for implementing the local government's vision for the future of the local government area, during the period covered by the plan"* (s.104). Surprisingly, there were no express requirements for community engagement in the development of the *"local government's vision"*. The Act also had extensive detail on the requirements of the community forums to be used in the state's indigenous local governments (ss.82–89).

Local government continued in the spotlight in Australia in 2009, with the Western Australian Barnett Liberal government releasing the *Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) Framework and Guidelines* (DLG WA 2010). The guidelines were developed after disappointing results from a 2009 reform programme aimed at increasing the level of strategic planning occurring in local governments

in Western Australia (DLG WA 2010, p. 4). The framework referenced and built upon several other documents: the Local Government Sustainability Framework from the LGPMC; the NSW Planning and Reporting Framework outlined in the 2009 amendment to NSW's 1993 Act; the Queensland planning and accountability documents outlined in that state's 2009 Act; and the New Zealand planning and reporting requirements outlined in its 2002 Local Government Act. The Western Australian guidelines made community engagement the centrepiece, with the document providing considerable detail on how to design a tailored engagement process, thus taking an **empowering** approach rather than the now near-ubiquitous public submission process.

Just three years after the passing of Queensland's Local Government Act 2009 (Qld), sections of the Act were repealed or amended, resulting in a reduction in community engagement requirements: a first for any of the states. After 23 years in power the Queensland Labor Party was defeated in the 2012 election, losing 44 of its 51 seats to the Liberal National Party (LNP) led by Brisbane's former Lord Mayor, Campbell Newman. The LNP government claimed an *"electoral mandate to implement its announced policy commitments"* including the 'Empowering Queensland Local Government' election policy (Queensland Government 2012, p. 24). The resulting Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 (Qld) saw two main changes to the Local Government Act 2009 (Qld) with respect to community engagement. First, the requirement for long-term community plans was repealed, with the explanatory notes describing the original requirement as *"unnecessary red tape"* and stating that the repeal was designed to allow *"local governments to plan for the community in the way they know best"* (Queensland Government 2012, p. 4). The requirement was changed to *"a 5-year corporate plan that incorporates community engagement"* (s.104). While this change moved Queensland away from the long-term community plan trend, it does include an example of an **empowering** approach to engagement. Second, the Bill clarified that public consultation was not required before making a local law (s.29), presumably in response to the confusion that had followed the 1993 Act, which included considerable requirements for public consultation in the creation of local laws and local law policy. After just one term in office, Newman's LNP government was defeated in the February 2015 state election, returning Labor to power, albeit with a majority dependent on the support of independents. The Labor government led by Annastacia Palaszczuk has since made some minor amendments to Local Government Act 2009 (Qld), but none of these changes have concerned any of the previously repealed engagement requirements.

The introduction of the Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2014 (Vic) saw Victoria align with the planning and reporting approaches that emerged from the LGPMC frameworks and complemented the work the state had commenced in this arena in previous years. In 2008, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) undertook an audit of performance reporting in local government which led to the state's Essential Services Commission (ESC) developing a performance monitoring framework for local government service delivery (DPCD Vic 2012). This work, and

further work by VAGO, resulted in the introduction of planning and reporting regulations which, along with the accompanying *Better Practice Guide 2014–2015: Performance Reporting Framework Indicator Workbook* (DTPLI Vic 2014), prominently feature community engagement. The regulations require councils to report on the status of their community engagement policy as well as community engagement guidelines *"to assist staff to determine when and how to engage with the community"* (Sch. 1). They also incorporate the reporting of community satisfaction scores on the *"consultation and engagement efforts of council"* (Sch. 2). The scores from this rating and others from the framework are available online so that citizens can compare the performance of Victorian councils. While the regulations do not specifically require community engagement policies and guidelines, they do communicate to Victorian local governments that community engagement is a state priority, and which documents are expected to be in place to facilitate this. The regulations and guidelines were followed in January 2015 by VAGO's release of the *Public Participation in Government Decision-making Better Practice Guide*. Aimed at state and local governments, the guide provides a framework and principles aimed at improving practice, given the focus on community engagement in performance audits going forward (VAGO 2015, p. 1). This framework was used by VAGO to conduct audits of six Victorian councils. The recommendations arising from these audits, aimed at all Victorian councils, were: the need to assess policies and resources against the International Association for Public Participation model; that reporting and evaluation activities be incorporated into activities; and that comprehensive plans and outcomes be recorded (VAGO 2017, p. xii). These regulations and guides thus represented a change of direction for the state, in enhancing the community engagement practices of local governments beyond the **prescriptive** Section 223 public submission processes.

Mid-2010s to today: more reforms and changing landscapes as the wheel spins faster

The local government acts of the states stayed in place for an average of 48 years during the twentieth century; however, in the twenty-first century the landscape has become peppered with reforms, as well as new approaches to local democracy and local government community engagement practices. In South Australia, experiments in democracy continued against the backdrop of a long history of partnership between the state and local governments, fostered by a series of agreements dating from 1990, 1994, 2004 and 2011. The 'Better Together' programme, led by 2011 elected Labor Premier Jay Weatherill, sought to improve the state government's engagement practices with local government. The 'Reforming Democracy' strategy (South Australian Government 2015) set the bold vision of making the state a leader in democratic reform. In March 2018, South Australia elected Liberal Premier Steven Marshall and while there is evidence that the 'Better Together' programme will continue, it is unclear if the government intends to make changes.

In 2013 the O'Farrell Liberal New South Wales Government attempted an update of its planning legislation from 1979 with the release of a White Paper (NSW Government 2013a) on planning reform and the introduction of the Planning Bill 2013 (NSW). The Bill, like many planning statutes made considerable mention of *"community participation"* however the Bill failed to pass and is considered lapsed. Meanwhile in Queensland, the state turned its focus to planning matters with the passing of Planning Act 2016 (Qld). The Act and its associated instruments, such as Planning Regulation 2017 (Qld), now require planning legislation to include public consultation by local governments in a way that is **aspirational** and **prescriptive**, although not overly extensive.

In Victoria, the Andrews Labor government commenced a review of the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic), and released a discussion paper (DELWP Vic 2015b) and response (DELWP Vic 2016). The discussion paper cites *"frustration about levels of engagement with communities by councils about key decisions"* (2015b, p. 15) as an area to be addressed, and notes that approaches to consultation are inconsistent across the sector and that councils face criticism and leave themselves open to legal challenges to their decisions when they do not engage adequately (DELWP Vic 2015b, p. 52). The response paper, or 'reform directions' paper preceding consultation made strong reference to councils needing to use deliberative community engagement.[3] This is an interesting development, as deliberative community engagement methods are a group of engagement methods based on the theory of deliberative democracy and are generally considered to be more resource intensive than traditional engagement methods. Deliberative community engagement has been omitted in the Local Government Bill Exposure Draft 2018 (Vic), presumably in response to feedback from councils. The Bill includes five **aspirational** community engagement principles. These principles are more substantial than those previously seen in the acts, which typically outlined the importance of engagement. The principles in the Bill specifically address how the engagement should be supported and enabled and include: the need for a clearly defined objective and scope; the need for timely information for participants; the need for participants to be representative of those affected; the right for participants to have support to enable participation; and the need for participants to be informed of how their participation influenced the decision. The bill is ultimately **empowering** in its approach as it calls for a community engagement policy to be developed and followed, without many exact stipulations of when this should be. At the time of publication, the Bill was waiting to be passed by the newly re-elected Andrews government.

The other states are also dealing with amalgamations and reforms, or the fall out of these, the most topical at the time of publication being those in New South Wales, led by the Liberal government.[4]

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[3] In the paper, 31 of 40 mentions of 'community engagement' have the word 'deliberative' directly preceding.

[4] Upon Barry O'Farrell's resignation in 2014, Mike Baird was elected parliamentary leader. Baird won the 2015 election but resigned in January 2017. He was replaced by Gladys Berejiklian. A state election is due in March 2019.

With the failure of the Planning Bill 2013 (NSW), the Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment Act 2017 (NSW) was passed which has seen the 1979 Act overhauled considerably. The act now requires planning authorities, inclusive of local governments, to produce Community Participation Plans (CPPs). CPPs are to outline when and how authorities will engage on their various planning functions. They include minimum requirements inclusive of public displays and submissions, making them an example of a **hedging** approach.

In Tasmania in 2014, the Labor government of 16 years was ousted and Liberal Premier, Will Hodgman was elected. He made early mention of inviting councils to consider amalgamations and resource-sharing. In 2016 a media release from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania (2016a) declared a *"targeted review of the Local Government Act 1993"* in response to *"current community concern over how some councils are managing their affairs"*. A discussion paper was released (Tasmanian Government 2016b), followed by a consultation feedback report (Tasmanian Government 2016c). Ultimately, a new act was not developed and in its place was the Local Government Amendment (Targeted Review) Act 2017. Despite the mention of community engagement in the discussion paper and consultation feedback report, however, there is no reference to it in the Amendment Act. The Hodgman government was re-elected in March 2018 and in June of that year, it was announced, once again, that a review of the Local Government Act 1993 would be undertaken. At the time of publication, a terms of reference had been confirmed and discussion paper imminent.

In Western Australia, the reform programme commenced in 2009 was put on hold by the Barnett government in 2015, presumably in response to the negative reception of the 2014 announcement to reduce the number of Perth councils from 30 to 16 (O'Connor 2015). The Labor McGowan government elected in March 2017 announced a review of the Local Government Act 1995 (WA) and at the time of publication consultation had commenced by way of discussion papers and surveys around nine key reform areas, including community engagement. Regardless of the changeable climate for local governments in all states and the Northern Territory, it can be said that community engagement is an increasingly key feature of the legislation, even though the approaches to it vary.

Comparative observations and discussion

The foregoing account of the development of community engagement legislation leads to a number of observations. First is the overall trajectory of the local government acts. As a general rule, each of the states and the Northern Territory have followed the same four main developmental stages which align with the typology presented and are summarised in Figure 2. The first stage saw the introduction of **prescriptive** public submission requirements, with all states incorporating this requirement between 1989 and 1999. The second stage was the introduction of **aspirational** declarations of community engagement as a key principle, either in the preamble, purpose, intent or principles of the acts. These

declarations were made in all the acts between 1993 and 1999. The third **empowering** stage allowed for local governments to choose their own methodologies, through development of their own engagement programmes or the following of their own engagement policies. Tasmania and the Northern Territory were the first in this regard in 1993 and South Australia and Victoria followed in 1999, although Victoria's stipulation exists in the regulation, rather than the Act. New South Wales and Queensland followed in 2009 and Western Australia in 2011. The most recent approach, which has thus far only emerged in South Australia and New South Wales is the **hedging** approach, where state governments have stipulated a specific methodology (prescriptive) to be used in combination with a non-stipulated methodology (**empowering**): an approach which seems indicative of trying to ensure state-wide standards while at the same time attempting to give local governments autonomy.

Figure 2: Developmental stages in Australian Local Government Acts as pertaining to community engagement

	Prescriptive (public submissions)	Aspirational (engagement as a principle)	Empowering (develop own fit for purpose approach)	Hedging (prescriptive and empowering approaches combined)
NSW	1993	1993	2009	2009
NT	1993	2008	1993	
Qld	1993	1993	2012	
SA	1992	1999	1999	1999
Tas	1993	2005	1993	
Vic	1989	1999	1999	
WA	1995	1995	1996	
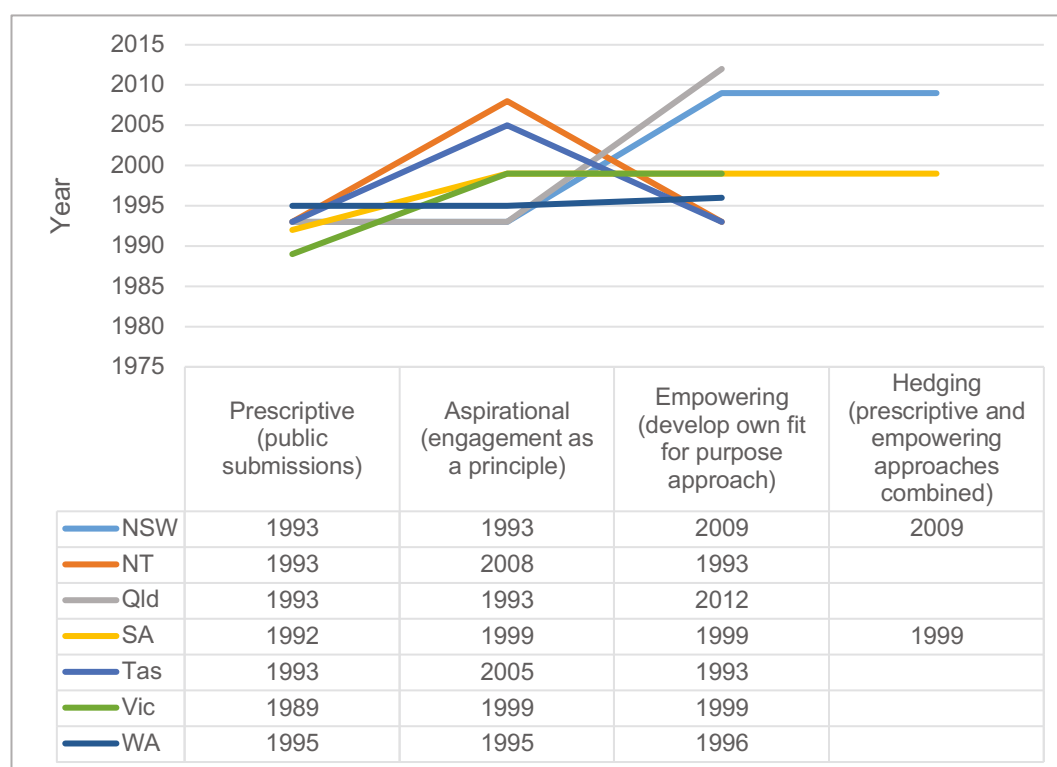
Source: Local Government Acts

The use of regulations and guidelines rather than parliamentary acts highlights another important observation: that of the preferred legislative instrument. The passing of parliamentary acts is an involved and lengthy process in all states and, while the process of passing subordinate legislation such as regulations and guidelines does vary, it is a faster and simpler one where amendments can often be made by the executive branch rather than by parliament. The author does not draw any inferences from this practice, but simply notes that it provides a potential pathway for policy-makers to effect quicker and more responsive adjustments – in all policy areas, not just community engagement.

In the same vein, it would appear that planning legislation often serves as the catalyst for legislating greater involvement of communities in local decision-making. In several states planning legislation and its engagement requirements preceded the local government acts. This was first seen in New South Wales, with its Environment and Planning Assessment Act 1979 (NSW), which featured the first occurrence of public submission requirements. Other examples include the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic), which introduced engagement requirements prior to the Local Government Act 1989 (Vic), and the Local Government (Planning and Environment) Act 1990 (Qld), which preceded the Local Government Act 1993 (Qld). Without further research it is difficult to ascertain whether the prioritisation of the community engagement requirements in planning legislation is the result of a more progressive, or merely a more political approach by land use policymakers; nevertheless, it is an important and relevant trend.

Issues and challenges

These comparisons provide an overview of how legislated community engagement has developed; they also raise a number of issues. The first is nomenclature and definitions. This paper has given preference to the term 'community engagement' due to its increasing use in the Australian local government sector; however, it is not reflective of the legislation, which presents a more complex picture. In the current versions of the local government acts, reference is made to 'community engagement', 'public consultation', 'community consultation', 'community participation', 'consultation' and 'participation'.

Figure 3: Community engagement terminology in Australia's Local Government Acts
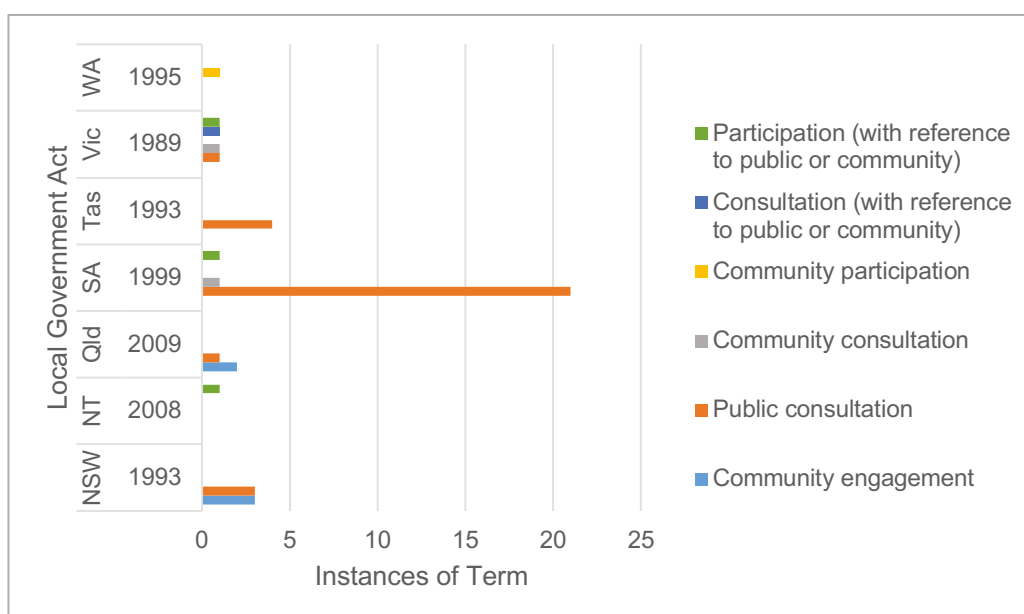
Source: Local Government Acts

As Figure 3 illustrates, some jurisdictions, such as the Northern Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia, use one consistent term; the other states use two, three, or – in the case of Victoria – four.

Some of this inconsistency is the result of amendments to the acts. For instance, in New South Wales, 'community engagement' has been used in recent amendments whereas 'public consultation' was used when the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) was passed. The fact remains that none of the present, nor superseded acts have presented a definition for any of these terms. While it appears that the terms are used interchangeably, definitions and/or consistency would be of great assistance to those attempting to interpret the acts.

Figure 4: Public submission versus non-stipulated methods in core Australian Local Government Acts
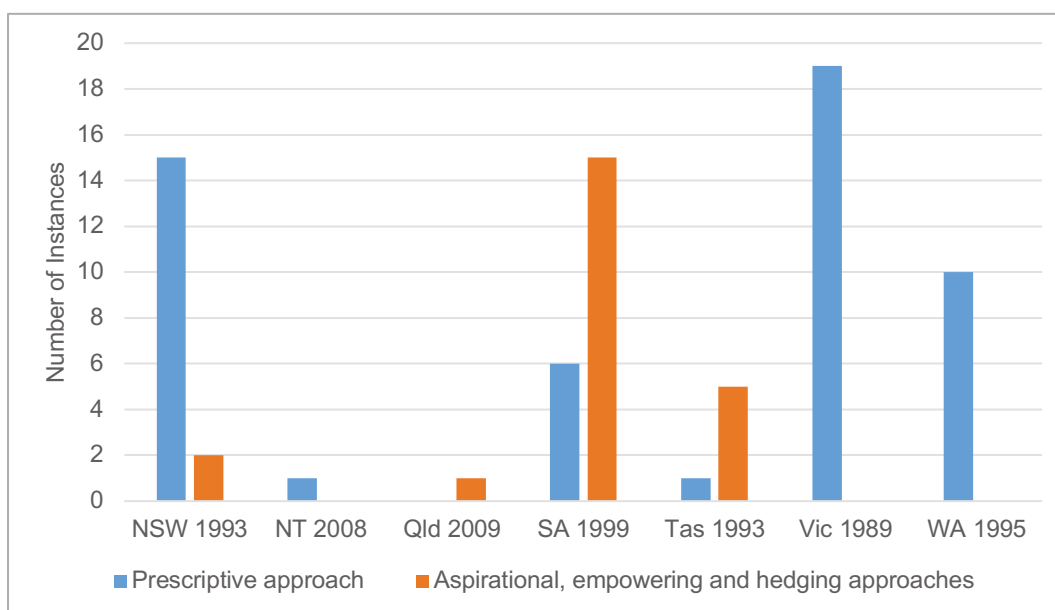
Source: Local Government Acts

The second issue is the prevalence of prescriptive methods, in particular public submissions, in the current acts. Their use in the acts has grown and, as Figure 4 illustrates, has become so pervasive that they are the prescribed methods in just over two-thirds of all junctures that stipulate engagement be undertaken. This is of concern, as research shows that effective engagement is designed to meet a purpose, rather than being forced to conform to a methodology, and that to prescribe a methodology risks the integrity of the process and increases the likelihood of being tokenistic (Arnstein 1969; Cameron and Grant-Smith 2014; Cameron and Johnson 2006; Head 2007). In his discussion of public participation laws in the USA, Leighninger (2014) argues that outdated public participation laws, such as public meetings, perpetuate discord between communities and government and are examples of *"small-minded participation"*. Leighninger (2014) from the United States cites the resource 'Making Public Participation Legal' (Working Group on Legal Frameworks for Public Participation 2013) as an example of how to help public policymakers understand the limitations of prescriptive methods and develop alternative ideas to deliver more meaningful engagement. This argument is mirrored in the review by Bryson et al. (2013) of over 250 articles and books on the same topic. The review provides evidence-based guidelines for planning engagement processes that articulate the importance of assessing both contextual factors and the purpose of the engagement as necessary and precursory

steps to identifying a suitable method for engagement. The alternative to these **prescriptive** methods is to utilise **empowering** approaches, which will not only improve the quality of engagement between local governments and their communities, but are also likely to improve the relationship between state and local governments.

Finally, it is also difficult to know exactly how the legislative requirements are being interpreted. Are councils taking them as minimum or maximum requirements? For example, are they undertaking just the prescribed requirement for public submission, or are they incorporating additional engagement activities in an attempt to provide a more robust and meaningful engagement opportunity? This is an area of enquiry which merits further study.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of both historic and current legislative requirements for community engagement by local governments. The course of development originated with the stipulation of **prescriptive** public submissions, followed by a stage of making **aspirational** legislative statements. In more recent years there has been experimentation with both **empowering** approaches, in which councils are granted permission to design their own engagement strategies, and alternatively a more conservative **hedging** approach, where **prescriptive** and **empowering** approaches are combined. There has also been a broadening of the scope of community engagement, with the more recent requirements focusing on community strategic plans and, in some instances, budgets. Notably, however, the original **prescriptive** approach remains dominant in nearly half of states. Reflecting on this, questions remain: Which approach is the most effective? What will the future trajectory look like? The most likely answer to the first question is that it depends entirely on what the states are trying to achieve. As discussed earlier, the motivations of the states at their most virtuous can be to foster local democracy and ensure accountability, but at their least virtuous may be merely to ingratiate themselves with communities to lessen the perceived negative impacts of various reform programmes.

Legislating participatory democracy can and should be an opportunity for councils and communities. Currently, however, the opportunity in Australia is limited by a dominance of **prescriptive** and dated methods, which are often counter-productive of what is, assumedly, their original aim. As for what the future may hold, the **hedging** approach first used by South Australia and later adopted by New South Wales may continue to prove popular, as it is likely to be perceived as a way for the states to give some independence to local governments while maintaining a degree of control. It can also be expected that the **aspirational** overtones are likely to persist. The most interesting development, in the author's view, will be to see whether state-level policymakers accept the growing body of evidence that purpose-driven (**empowering)** engagement is more effective than method-driven

(prescriptive) engagement. It is hoped that the typology presented in this paper can assist with this decision.

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Statement of Author's Contribution

I certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated in the Certificate of Originality.

Author	% of Contribution
Helen E. Christensen	90%
Dana McQuestin	10%

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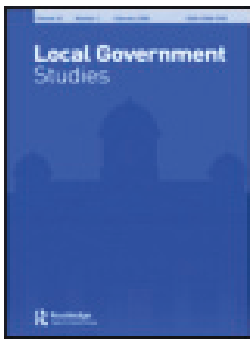prior to publication.

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Community engagement in Australian local governments: a closer look and strategic implications

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ABSTRACT
Public input into decision-making through participatory and deliberative democratic practices has become a widely accepted and legislated responsibility of Australian local governments. At any one time, councils are leading submission processes, workshops and online surveys on a multitude of projects, ranging from long-term community strategic plans to public art projects. The increase in these practices has been exponential, leaving little time for critical reflection. The lack of empirical data to illustrate how community engagement is understood and practised in different councils has hindered sector-wide reflection. This paper presents the findings of the 'Local Government Community Engagement Census', a survey of 175 councils – approximately half – from 4 of Australia's eastern states. This sectoral snapshot provides a picture of how councils understand, prioritise and practise community engagement, allowing critical reflection, an interpretation of implications and suggesting areas for future research.

Introduction

Australians citizens can vote in local elections held in the local government jurisdictions of the six states and the Northern Territory, thereby receiving local democratic representation. However, communities increasingly have the opportunity to be involved in local decision-making through participatory democratic processes, widely known in Australia as community engagement. Community engagement can be defined as a process

> by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment; and by which governments and other business and civil society organisations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes. (United Nations 2005)

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Without exception, the Local Government Acts of Australia's jurisdictions list engagement as a normative principle; further stipulating that councils must engage their communities (Local Government Act 1989 (Victoria); Local Government Act (1993) (NSW); Local Government Act 1993 (Tas); Local Government Act 1995 (WA); Local Government Act 1999 (SA); Local Government Act 2009 (Qld); Local Government Act 2017 (NT)). Consequently, many – but, as we shall see, by no means all – Australian local governments have community engagement policies, plans, staff positions and resources dedicated to this function. However, precisely how community engagement has permeated local government remains the subject of inquiry, due at least partly to a lack of empirical research (Fung 2015). The research presented in this paper seeks to redress these gaps by presenting findings of a census into local government community engagement practices.

Despite the ambiguities surrounding its meaning/s, community engagement is now a widely accepted function of Australian local government. While some see this as a 'paradigm shift' in the way democracy is practised (Aulich 2009; Stoker 2006), others remain sceptical (Head 2007). Regardless, the proliferation of practice would suggest that councils are seeing the benefits beyond merely meeting legislative requirements. Much of the literature about community engagement practices in Australian local governments – indeed more generally – focuses on the theoretical dimensions and normative efficacy of these practices (Christensen and Grant 2016; Hendriks and Carson 2008; Hendriks, Bolitho, and Foulkes 2013); the role of participation in governance (Aulich 2009; Gollagher and Hartz-Karp 2013; Reddel and Woolcock 2004), the various types and levels of participation (Bishop and Davis 2002; Head 2007), the legislative and contextual development (Grant and Drew 2017, 217–264; Grant et al. 2011), its benefits and impacts (Head 2007; Reddel and Woolcock 2004), its role in public policy (Adams and Hess 2001; Bishop and Davis 2002; Head 2011) and examinations of specific methods (Carson and Hartz-Karp 2005; Hartz-Karp 2012; Hendriks, Bolitho, and Foulkes 2013).

While this research contributes to understandings of community engagement in Australian local government, it does not facilitate a strategic understanding of how most local governments are practically interpreting this rapidly developing element of their own operations. The 'sectoral' view that is provided by the research presented here allows scholars to identify which community engagement practices are being adopted and adapted by which types of councils, allowing for comparison and critical reflections. For public administrators, practitioners and policy-makers, this research provides a benchmark which can assist in evaluation and policy change.

This paper presents the findings of a census of local government community engagement practice. Globally, similar studies include a survey of 310 of 332 authorities in the UK (Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2001) and a survey of 249 of 541 cities with populations larger than 50,000 in the USA (Wang 2001). Not only does the Australian context and setting vary, but developments in community engagement practice have moved at a rapid pace. Consequently, this study presents a snapshot of Australian practice.

The paper is divided into five main sections. We start with a brief contextualisation of community engagement followed by an overview of Australian local government. We then present an explanation of the objectives and methodology. We then present the findings in order of the questions in the census, namely: the amount of engagement conducted by councils; the methods they are using; the drivers for engaging; responsibility for planning and delivering the engagement; and the challenges in planning and delivering engagement. The paper concludes by suggesting areas of future analysis and research required to provide a fuller picture of current practice.

Community engagement

While this is primarily an empirical study, a short discussion of how community engagement is defined and theorised is useful. The term 'community engagement' (also known as public participation) has become near-ubiquitous; yet its precise definition remains contested. The United Nations (2005) definition cited in our introduction speaks of the incorporation of aspirations and needs into policy, planning and service delivery at multiple levels of government. Rowe and Frewer (2005) and the international industry body International Association for Participation 2 (IAP2) (International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) 2018) follow suit, with definitions involving the community in decision-making. Cavaye (2004, 3) refers to it as is 'mutual communication and deliberation that occurs between government and citizens'. While the intent underlying these definitions is noble, the exact meaning is unclear. Attempts to clarity the term include explorations of the levels of involvement available to communities (see Arnstein 1969; Dean 2016; Fung 2006; International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) 2014). Also included are examinations of the different purposes of community engagement (see for example Bryson et al. 2013), whether they are policy related (Bua and Escobar 2018; Head 2007; Michels and De Graaf 2017) or part of large strategies such as collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash 2008; Fung and Wright 2003).

Notwithstanding the ambiguity of the term, three broad approaches to community engagement can be discerned. First, community engagement is discussed as an a priori theoretical concept, positioned within discussions of

democracy generally and local democracy specifically – where it is placed at the core of participatory practices that are (in turn) juxtaposed against representative democratic procedures, particularly voting (see Christensen and Grant 2016; Haus and Sweeting 2006; Pratchett 2004). Second, an institutional approach can also be identified. This places to one side explicit theorisation and focuses instead upon the legislative and regulatory definitions of the term, usually emphasising reform processes and the ramifications of these for intergovernmental relations – an approach that is popular in Australia (Aulich 2009; Grant and Drew 2017, 217–264; Grant et al. 2011). Third, understandings of community engagement are drawn from reflecting on the embedded practice of local governments and other actors, where the meaning is contextualised (Hendriks and Carson 2008; Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2001) and which place community engagement in broader political and policy frameworks (Ansell and Gash 2008; Fung and Wright 2003; Head 2007). It is these three broad approaches that inform the methodological strategy of our research. This empirical study is situated within what we have identified as the embedded practice element of research on community engagement. Nevertheless, it also informs the theoretical and institutional approaches. All three approaches are revisited in the penultimate section of our discussion.

Australian local government

The Australian Constitution enacted in 1901 presents a system of government comprised of federal and state levels, yet local government as an element of the individual colonial governments has existed since the 1840s (see Power, Wettenhall, and Halligan 1981). Whether Australian local governments emerged as response to local demand or whether it was the result of the legislation from the colonial governments prior to federation is an issue of contention (Grant and Drew 2017, 15–82). Regardless, contemporaneously, the six states and the Northern Territory are responsible for legislating the powers of the local governments in their jurisdictions. Consequently, while there are some overarching similarities in the roles and responsibilities of local governments across the federation, there are differences.

There are currently 546 local governments in the Australian federation as shown in Figure 1.

The councils vary considerably in geographic and population sizes and the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development's (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (DIRD) (Australian Government) 2017) Australian Classification of Local Governments (ACLG) system is used as the reference by the federal government when allocating financial grants (indeed more broadly). The ACLG identifies 21 types, ranging from Urban Capital Cities (UCC) to Remote Extra Small (RTX) although Department of Infrastructure and
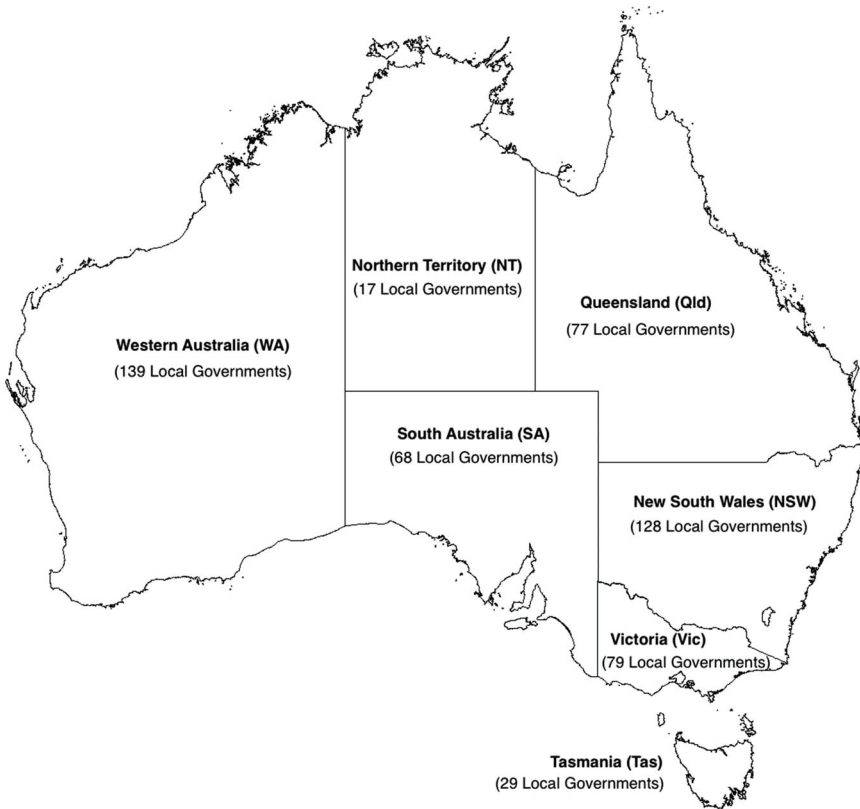
Figure 1. Australia: jurisdictions and number of local governments.

Regional Development (DIRD) (Australian Government) (2017) warns there is still considerable divergence within these types. A summary is presented in the Appendix. For this study, the council types have been grouped using the ACLG with adjustments made to reflect changes since the system was last updated.[1] The groups used in this study are: Capitals and Metro, Urban Regional, Urban Fringe, and Rural and Remote.

Objectives and methodology

The research questions for this project were: What are the community engagement practices of Australian local governments? How is community engagement positioned inside Australian local governments? What is driving and inhibiting practice?

After obtaining ethics approval, we emailed the 'Local Government Community Engagement Census' to all 352 local governments in New South Wales (NSW) (128), Queensland (77), South Australia (68) and Victoria (79) in

April 2017. We also sent two reminder emails and used social media channels to promote participation in the census. The census contained 14 questions including: council name (for classification purposes only); the number of community engagement processes conducted in the last 12 months; the position of the community engagement function in the organisation; where responsibility for planning and delivering community engagement was located in the organisation; the number of dedicated community engagement staff; the proportion of community engagement processes designed and delivered by staff in the organisation; reasons for using external consultants, if applicable; methods used in the past, present and being considered for the future; factors driving community engagement practice; and difficulties experienced in delivering engagement from an organisational perspective. The census deliberately did not provide a definition of 'community engagement' or 'community engagement process' instead preferring respondents to apply their own understanding so that a contextualised meaning could be developed from all responses.

The responses were summarised using a descriptive analysis, with the average values by council category and/or a response category provided. A statistical analysis, incorporating hypothesis testing, was then conducted to determine if any differences could be considered statistically significant. The choice of methodology employed for each census question was determined by the type of data collected. For questions with numerical responses, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)[2] was deployed. For questions with categorical responses, the Fisher exact test[3] was deployed. If significant differences were found, the Tukey-Kramer Procedure (for numerical data) and Fisher exact test (for categorical data)[4] were then used to identify which individual council categories differed. As with all surveys, this study suffered from weaknesses such as non-response, multiple response, reporting bias and point-in-time data.

Given the survey was administered online, the overall response rate of 49.7% (175 of 352 local governments) was relatively high. However, some types of councils had much lower response rates, for example, only 21.7% for rural and remote Queensland local governments (Figure 2). The findings of Morris (2012), who discusses engagement practices and challenges in rural remote indigenous local councils, partly fill this gap. Figure 2 shows a summary of the response rates by state and council type. The response rate from each state was above 40%, with the highest rate from Victorian councils (63.3%). Numbers of responses per council type across all states were also strong: capital and metropolitan councils (56.3%), urban regional councils (63.4%), urban fringe (48.3%) and rural and remote councils (39.8%). As discussed earlier, the responsibilities and sizes of Australian local governments vary widely which partially explains why the lowest response rate is from rural and
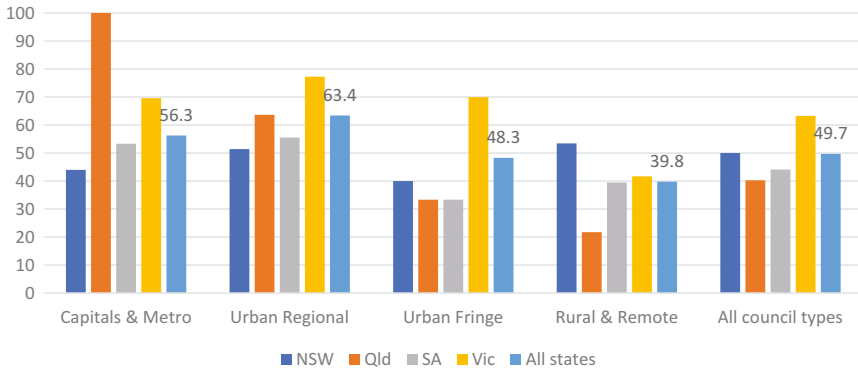
Figure 2. Response rate % by state and council type (pop = 352, *n* = 175).

remote Queensland – which includes 30 councils with populations less than 3000.

In the seven councils where more than one response was received, the representative response was chosen by selecting the response from the more senior staff member (where identifiable) or, failing that, the response that was first received. These seven cases showed some discrepancies among responses, suggesting that a reporting bias may be present in other responses.[5] These cases highlight a weakness in the collection method and in the data – namely, that what is reported by the councils may not be entirely accurate, an issue with any self-reporting method. There may also be issues with social desirability bias as respondents are keen to present their local governments in a favourable light. However, this finding also highlights the ambiguity of how community engagement is positioned and understood in organisations – an interesting result in itself. A final weakness of the data is that they provide a snapshot of practice at a particular time, making it difficult to assess trends.

Findings

How often are councils engaging?

Councils were asked to quantify approximately how many community engagement processes they had delivered in the previous 12 months. Responses ranged from none to (presumably) inaccurate outliers of 500 and 800 processes, as shown in Figure 3. The outliers, as well as some of the comments received in lieu of quantifiable amounts, highlight an important difficulty in researching community engagement practice: as one respondent stated, 'It depends on what level you are talking about. We conduct hundreds of engagements with documents on exhibition … [and]
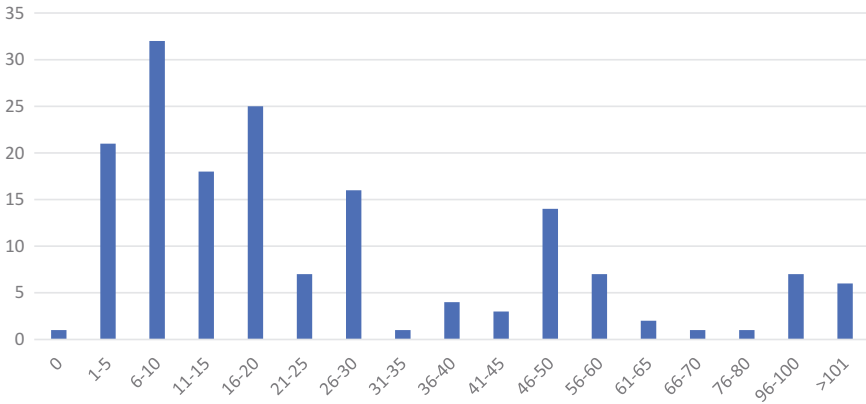
Figure 3. Estimated number of community engagement processes per council per annum (*n* = 166).
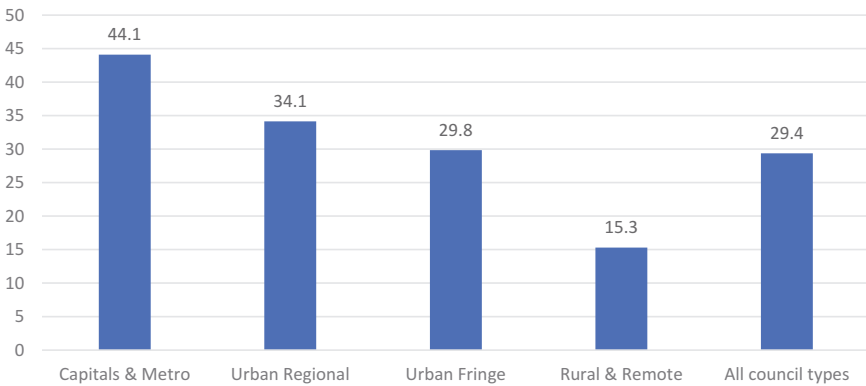
Figure 4. Mean estimated number of community engagement processes per council type per annum (*n* = 164).

… about 30 community meetings'. This ambiguity is one that has been previously identified (Head 2007) and continues to create confusion within what we have delineated (above) as community engagement understood as an embedded practice. It is likely that responses include (for example) everything from public meetings to letter notifications, and may even include phone calls or community events. On the whole, however, the responses appear realistic if community engagement processes are inter-preted as the delivery of a number of methods or activities for one particular decision-making purpose, with the majority of councils undertaking between one and six processes every few months.

Figure 4 shows the average number of processes, excluding outliers, for all council types. The overall average is 29.4 processes per annum. More

processes were reported in capital cities and metropolitan councils (averaging 44.1), than in urban regional councils (34.1) and urban fringe councils (29.4), and rural and remote councils (15.3).

These observed differences are proven to be statistically significant using an ANOVA test. As the results indicate, the null hypothesis – which suggests that the mean number of community engagement processes is equal across the four council types – was rejected at the 1% level of significance. A pairwise comparison (using the Tukey-Kramer procedure) identified that capital city and metropolitan as well as urban regional councils had significantly more processes than did their rural and remote counterparts. A difference in the number of processes was not observed among states, as the null hypothesis of equal process means could not be rejected ($p = 0.23 > 0.05$). While it is not surprising that urban councils are engaging more frequently than their regional and remote counterparts, why this is the case warrants further research. Reasons may include greater funding, and therefore resources to undertake engagement in the urban areas, perhaps along with greater prevalence of activist groups. In the smaller regional and remote councils, there may be a high degree of informal social connection that does not warrant large formal engagement processes, or perhaps limited resourcing means that there are more significant priorities and capability issues (Morris 2012).

How are councils engaging?

As we have seen, local governments across Australia's jurisdictions are obliged to conform to a variety of requirements for community engagement, as dictated in relevant legislation and regulations, including – but not limited to – the relevant local government acts. The requirements vary among jurisdictions and range from stipulations to follow the council's public consultation policy, such as in South Australia, to following public notification and submission processes, present in all of the current local government acts except for Queensland (Christensen Forthcoming; Grant et al. 2011; Grant and Drew 2017, 217–264). Legislative requirements to engage can be interpreted as the *minimum* requirements for councils.

To determine how councils were engaging, the census asked which community engagement methods councils have used in the past (12 months or more before the census), the present (current 12 months) and are intending to use in the future (the next year or beyond). Councils were surveyed on the use of 12 different methods, which are listed and grouped as follows:

Traditional methods – those that are commonly associated with local government community engagement and participation: includes public meetings, public submissions and advisory/community reference groups.

Contemporary methods – those that are more participatory than traditional methods and have become commonly associated with local government in more recent years: includes community summit/workshop (< 30 participants), community summit/workshop (> 30 participants), drop in/ open house/staffed display and focus groups.

Online methods – those that are conducted on web-based platform: includes online discussion forums and online surveys.

Deliberative methods – those that conform to principles of deliberative democracy: includes citizens' jury/deliberative panel/forum.

Emerging methods – those that are not yet commonly associated with local government but have had significant use in very recent years: includes: open space/unconference and participatory budgeting.

These methods were chosen to provide a sample of common methods, yet the list is by no means comprehensive or indicative of the suite of methods used by councils (Rowe and Frewer 2005). The list was refined in the testing of the survey and participants were invited to list any other regularly used methods, although these responses did not elicit any substantial findings. The findings are illustrated in Figure 5 (traditional methods), Figure 6 (contemporary methods), Figure 7 (online methods) and Figure 8 (deliberative and emerging methods).
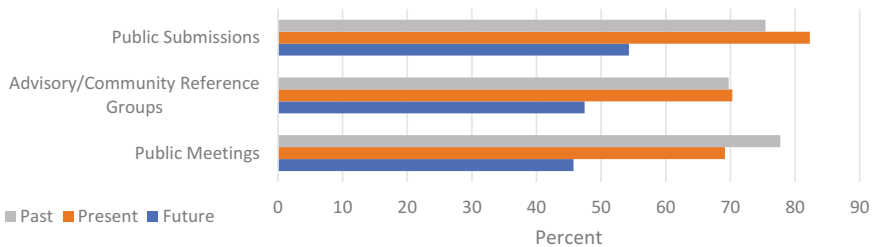

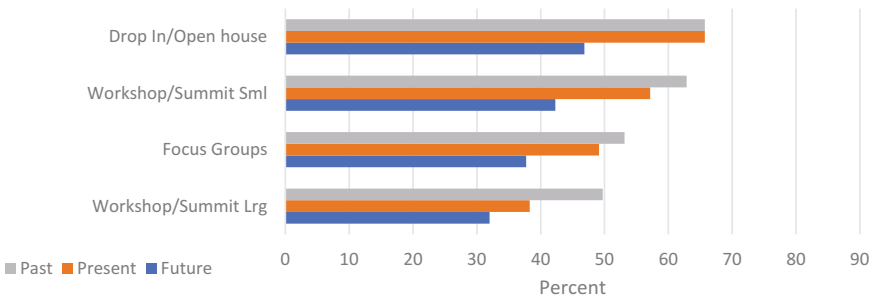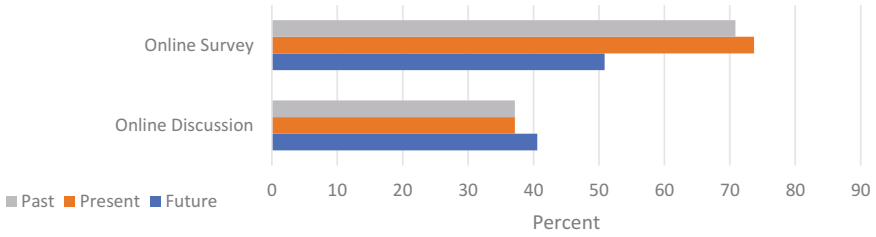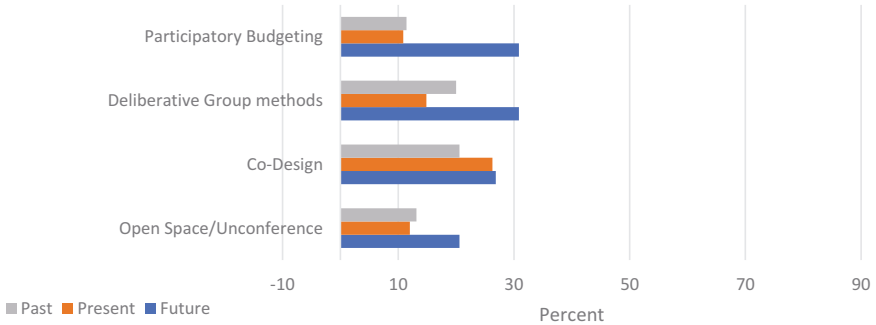**Figure 5.** Traditional method use (*n* = 175).

Figure 6. Contemporary method use (*n* = 175).

Figure 7. Online method use (*n* = 175).

Figure 8. Deliberative and emerging methods use (*n* = 175).

The data collected show that the traditional engagement methods of public meetings, public submissions and advisory/community reference groups (Figure 5), along with 'drop in' sessions (Figure 6) and online surveys (Figure 7), dominate the community engagement activities of local councils. These five methods were most frequently reported for past, present and future use, with 65% or more of councils reporting use of these 5 methods in both the previous and the current 12-month period.

Not surprisingly, public submissions (75.4% past, 82.3% present, 54.3% future) remain popular, due to their extensive use in legislation (Christensen Forthcoming). The process involves councils inviting written, and now sometimes electronic, submissions to object to or support proposals. Community members sometimes have the option to present their position at a council meeting and to receive a written response from the council.

Second only to public submissions in current use are online surveys (70.9% past, 73.7% present, 50.9% future). The main appeal of this method is that the data collected are quantifiable and require minimal analysis for decision-making, and that they can be administered at a low cost (Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-Garcia 2012), especially when compared with face-to-face methods over geographically dispersed areas. Like other traditional methods, online surveys are likely to oversample active community

members and lead to participation bias (Fung 2003), as well as failing to engage a more representative segment of the community (Leighninger 2011), thereby making it difficult for councils to make the best decision for the whole community.

Advisory/community reference groups (69.7% past, 70.3% present, 47.4% future) also remain a well-established method amongst councils, again partly because of legislative requirements (Hendriks, Bolitho, and Foulkes 2013). These groups take a number of forms and are given various levels of decision-making authority depending upon their governing legislation and context (Bolitho 2013). In her study of citizen committees, Bolitho (2013) identified common frustrations with this method, such as integration with other council functions, ability to influence decision-making and a lack of both representativeness and operational effectiveness.

Public meetings (77.7% past, 69.1% present, 45.7% future), or 'town hall' meetings as they are also known, are typically conducted in a format where officials and experts present the information and then the audience of community members and stakeholders can ask questions or make comments, sometimes with a time limit. With a long history of use in the USA (Bingham 2010) and Australia (Bishop and Davis 2002), this method is not currently stipulated in any of the local government legislation, although aspects are often incorporated into larger public submission processes. Despite its ongoing popularity, the method is now subject to increasing criticism for three main reasons: it fails to foster deliberation and generally fails to influence the public's decisions (Adams 2004; Bishop and Davis 2002: McComas, John, and Black 2010; Wang 2001); it cannot accurately assess support or opposition to proposals, as attendance is dominated by 'usual suspects', 'angry mobs' and 'grandstanders' (Leighninger 2014; Working Group on Legal Frameworks for Public Participation 2013); and negative experiences can reduce political efficacy, social capital and public trust (Knight Foundation 2010; Leighninger 2014; Lukensmeyer 2013).

'Drop-in' sessions/open houses (65.7% past, 65.7% present, 46.9% future) are often used as a less adversarial alternative to public meetings, as participants are invited to attend displays where council staff are present and where individual questions and concerns can be responded to in a one-on-one or small-group setting.

This preference for traditional engagement methods mirrors similar findings overseas (Nabatchi and Amsler 2014; Wang 2001; Wang and Montgomery 2007), although surprisingly, councils are less committed to using these methods in the future. The sharpest decline is in the intention to use public meetings, with a 44.2% drop from past use to intended future use. Also interesting is the decline in the intention to use public submission processes (28.0% drop from past to future use): this would indicate that councils are using the method even when not stipulated in the legislation,

or that there may be an expectation that future legislation will require less or no use of this method.

Despite the domination of traditional methods, other types of engagement are also used frequently. What is particularly noteworthy is the reported use of deliberative and emerging methods. In the survey, deliberative methods were described as 'Citizens' Juries, Deliberative Panels and Forums'. Past reported use was 20% of all councils, current use is 14.9% and future intended use is more than twice that at 30.9%.

Furthermore, emerging methods have a similar reported use, with nearly one-third (30.9%) of councils intending to use participatory budgeting in the future, despite only 10.9% using it in the current year and 11.9% reporting its use in the past. This is especially noteworthy, given that participatory budgeting processes have been used in Australian local governments only in the past five years (Christensen and Grant 2016).

Co-design processes are also experiencing a similar trend, with one-fifth (20.6%) of councils reporting use in the past and just over a quarter reporting use in the present (26.3%) and intended future use (26.9%). Co-design was included in the census in response to the revival of co-production, co-delivery, co-commissioning and other joint state–public approaches to service and program design and delivery (see Alford and Yates 2016; Bovaird 2007; Bovaird and Loeffler 2013; Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017; Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2015). Arguably, the term 'co-design', together with its related umbrella terms, is poorly defined and loosely applied (Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017), making it difficult to know if councils understand this method as a way of working or as a deliberative practice.

Despite the clear differences among the individual methods of community engagement used by councils, no significant difference was found among the council categories, or among the states surveyed ($p = 0.88$ and 0.97, respectively). In conjunction with the descriptive analysis above, this indicates that, although councils show preferences for certain methods of community engagement (including public submissions, online sessions and drop-in sessions), individual methods are not employed more or less by particular council types, or within particular states. Rather, we observe a relatively uniform approach to community engagement.

What is driving community engagement by councils?

Respondents were asked what they believed was driving community engagement practice in their local governments, and were provided with a number of options to rank. As shown in Figure 9, the highest ranking response was 'Known effectiveness in assisting with decisions' (27.6%), followed by 'Statutory requirements' (21.8%) and 'Enthusiasm and demand
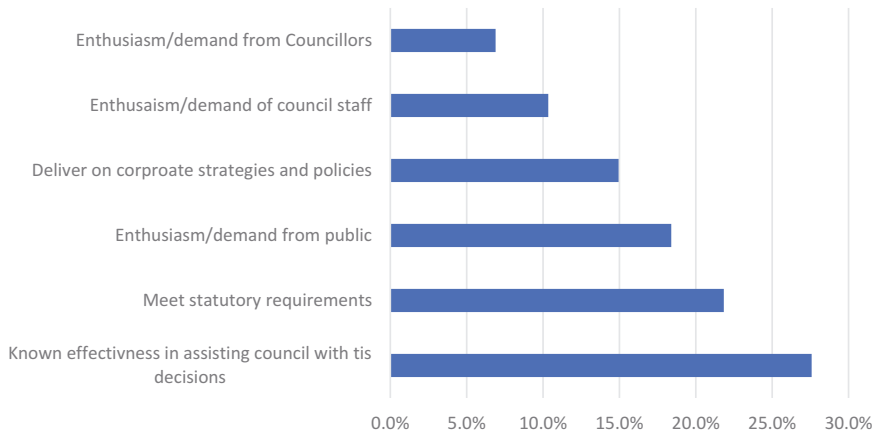
Figure 9. Highest ranked driver for community engagement practice in local government ($n = 174$).

from the public' (18.4%). When asked if there were any additional reasons or drivers, a quarter (25.3%, $n = 44$) of participants responded. These included (in order of frequency): enthusiasm/demand from executive staff, 'best practice', council policy, recent amalgamations/reforms, risk and reputation management, aligning provision with needs of changing community, and building relationships and capacity with community.

Whilst the responses chosen did not vary significantly by council type ($p = 0.171$), some states were found to have a statistically significant impact on the factors deemed important (at the 1% level). In particular, a significantly higher proportion of councils in Queensland and Victoria deemed that 'Enthusiasm and demand from the public' was a key or primary driver of community engagement, compared with councils in New South Wales and South Australia (which viewed the effectiveness of community engagement as assisting decision-making, and the ability to deliver on corporate strategies and policies as the main drivers). Moreover, 'Statutory requirements' were also deemed less important in Victoria (with only 10% ranking these requirements as the primary driver) compared with their South Australian counterparts.

Who is designing and delivering local government community engagement processes?

Given that all councils surveyed are delivering community engagement processes, a logical question is: who is planning, delivering, reporting and evaluating these processes? Consequently, councils were asked who was responsible for the planning and delivery of community engagement in
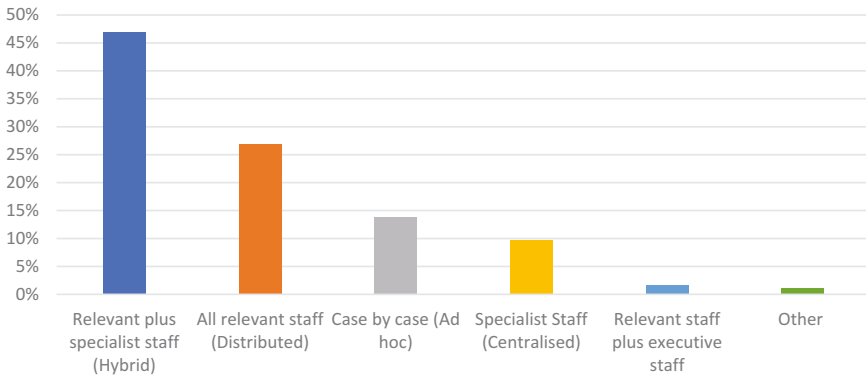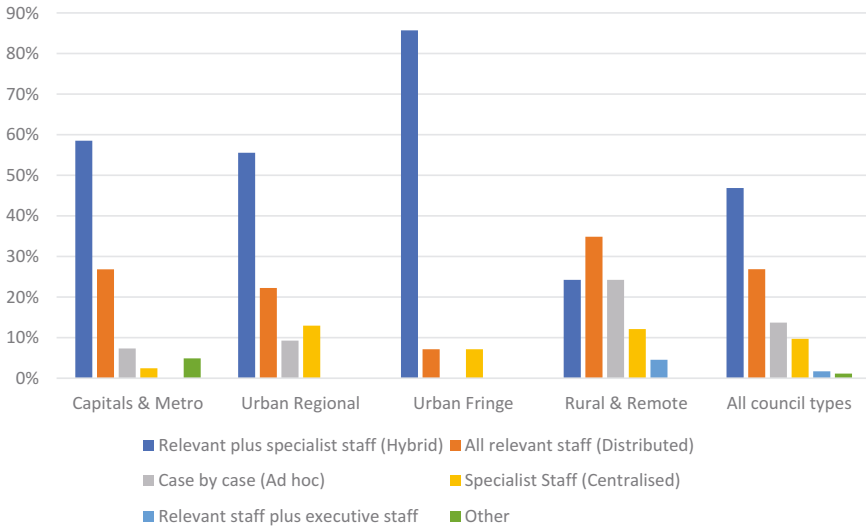
Figure 10. Internal responsibility for planning and delivery of community engagement (*n* = 175).

their organisation. As Figure 10 shows, nearly half (46.9%) of councils have an arrangement where relevant staff, presumably from different work areas such as land use planning, community services and environmental services, work with specialist staff to plan and deliver processes. The second most common arrangement was planning and delivery by relevant staff (26.9%). Other arrangements include centralised specialist staff arrangements (9.7%) and relevant staff working with an executive staff member (1.17%).

These findings are noteworthy for two reasons. First, in the instances where relevant staff are wholly or partly responsible, the arrangement assumes that, regardless of disciplinary background and area of expertise, local government staff are expected to have a degree of understanding and involvement in the planning and delivery of community engagement. This in turn suggests that the knowledge and skills for planning and delivering community engagement are either assumed to be intrinsically known, previously acquired, acquired on the job, a combination of these or, alternatively, that no specialist knowledge and skills are required. Second, in most of the councils, staffing arrangements do not extend to include specialist community engagement staff.

In order to explore where these differences occur, Figure 11 shows the same data by council type. Not surprisingly, given size and staffing constraints, all council types, except rural and remote, are likely to use a hybrid arrangement (capitals and metropolitan 58.3%, urban regional 55.9%, urban fringe 85.7%). Rural and remote councils were significantly less likely (at the 1% level) to use a hybrid arrangement for planning and delivery of community engagement, with statistically higher proportions of these councils choosing an ad hoc or distributed arrangement (compared with their urban regional counterparts). Like the individual council types, the arrangements used by councils in different states also varied substantially. Whilst

Figure 11. Internal responsibility for planning and delivery of community engagement by council type (*n* = 175).

New South Wales and Queensland had significantly higher proportions of councils employing a centralised arrangement, Queensland councils were significantly less likely to use a distributed arrangement, compared with councils in Victoria.

While there are relatively high proportions of specialist staff in urban regional (11.9%), urban fringe (12.1%) and rural and remote (9.7%) councils, it is likely that these staff are not solely dedicated to community engagement and their role may also incorporate other work functions such as communications. This can be inferred from the results to the next question.

Survey respondents were asked how many staff in their councils had roles dedicated only to community engagement. The question stipulated that these staff positions not be combined with other functions such as communications. The results are in presented in Figure 12 and illustrate that half of the councils do not have a dedicated community engagement staff member and, for those that do, the number of staff ranges from 0.3 to 20.

The average number of community engagement staff members in the organisation was 1.23 across all councils, and 2.49 in those organisations with dedicated community engagement staff. Figure 13 highlights the differences in the mean number of community engagement staff among council types and states. Although the differences among states were not significant, capital and metropolitan councils had significantly higher levels of dedicated staff than their rural counterparts (at the 1% significance level). However, if the sample is restricted to exclude councils without dedicated
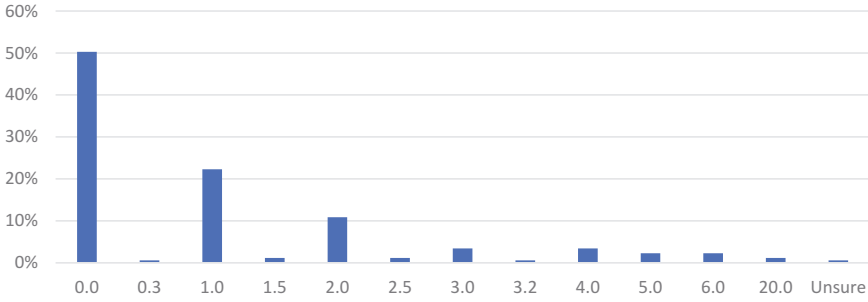
Figure 12. Estimated number of dedicated community engagement staff per local government (*n* = 175).

■ Average over all councils ■ Average over councils with dedicated staff
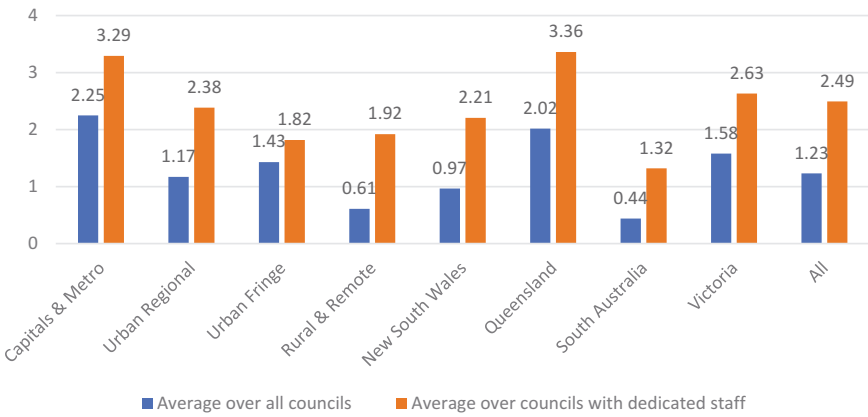
Figure 13. Average numbers of dedicated community engagement staff across council types and states (*n* = 174).

staff, this difference disappears, due primarily to the comparably large number of rural and remote councils without dedicated community engagement staff.

In the instances where a council has no dedicated community engagement staff but employs other specialist staff to assist with community engagement, it can be assumed that the community engagement function is being combined with another work function such as communications or community development. If community engagement is positioned alongside other work functions, it is likely to impact how it is understood in the organisation and how it is practiced. For example, is community engagement seen as an extension of governance and corporate strategy? Is it part of community development? Is it seen as a form of research? Is it part of communications? Is it seen as public relations?

To explore this, respondents were asked 'Where is community engagement positioned in your organisational chart?' Congruent with the earlier findings where councils had no dedicated staff and responsibility for planning and delivery sat with relevant staff, 26.9% of councils indicated that there was no specific work area for community engagement. This finding is illustrated in Figure 14, along with the position of community engagement in other councils. Of significance is the result that 25.1% of councils combine the community engagement work function with communications, media and/or public relations. While in many councils, these fields are perceived as the most complementary and compatible, the differences among them might have more of a negative impact upon community engagement than upon communications, as community engagement is likely to be the less dominant field. For example, if the focus of a community engagement process is on communications or information sharing, it might neglect the decision-making aspect, rendering the engagement tokenistic.

Only 9.1% of councils reported combining community engagement with their governance functions. This is notable, as community engagement is widely understood to be the involvement of the community in the decision-making, and formal decision-making processes, such as public submission processes, are often managed by the governance work areas as they usually have oversight for legislative compliance. Other work areas with which community engagement is combined include: community/social planning (14.3%), community development (3.4%), research (2.3%) and planning/place-making/urban projects (1.7%). Only 5.1% of councils include multiple functions alongside community engagement.

Similar to the stark differences in the position of community engagement within councils, a significant difference is observed among council types and
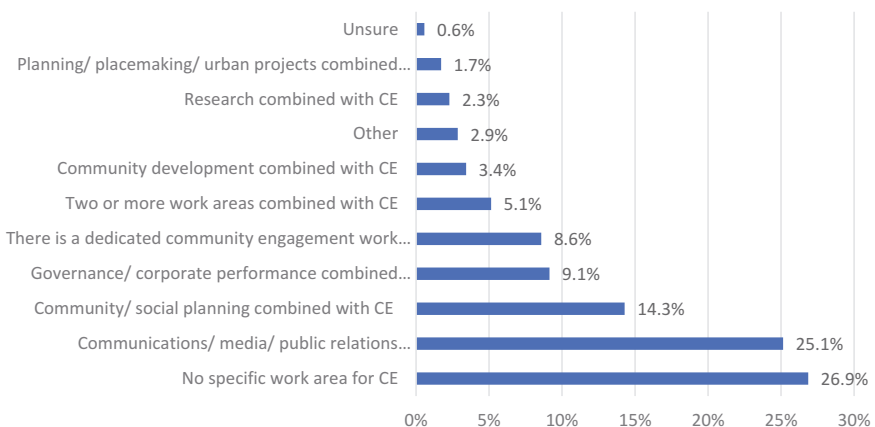
Figure 14. Organisational position of community engagement (*n* = 175).

states. In the rural and remote, and urban regional council categories, which have a higher proportion of councils without dedicated community engagement staff, a significantly higher proportion have no specific work area for community engagement (at the 1% level). In regard to the states, significantly fewer councils in South Australia (indeed, none of the councils) combine their community engagement activities with their community and/or social planning functions, compared with 22% of councils in both Queensland and Victoria.[6] Rather, similar to the rural and remote, and urban regional council categories, over 40% of South Australian councils have no specific area for community engagement.

Local government is a significant client group for the growing industry of community engagement consultants (see Bherer, Gauthier, and Simard 2017; Hendriks and Carson 2008; Lee 2015). Consequently, census respondents were asked to estimate how much community engagement they plan and deliver as an organisation, in contrast to that which is planned and delivered by external consultants. The results are presented in Figure 15 and show that roughly one-fifth (22.9%) of councils do all their own planning and delivery. Nearly two-thirds (62.3%) plan and deliver two-thirds or more themselves, 10.3% do about half and 4.0% do up to a third. Through hypothesis testing, it is evident that both fringe, and rural and remote councils are significantly less likely than capital and metropolitan, and urban regional councils to plan and deliver more than two-thirds of their community engagement processes (at a 5% level). Only 35% of fringe and 46% of rural and remote councils provide over two-thirds of processes (but not all processes), compared with 75% of capital and metropolitan, and 77% of urban regional councils. Rather, rural and remote councils are significantly more likely to plan and deliver the entire process themselves (with 36% choosing this option), whilst fringe councils are
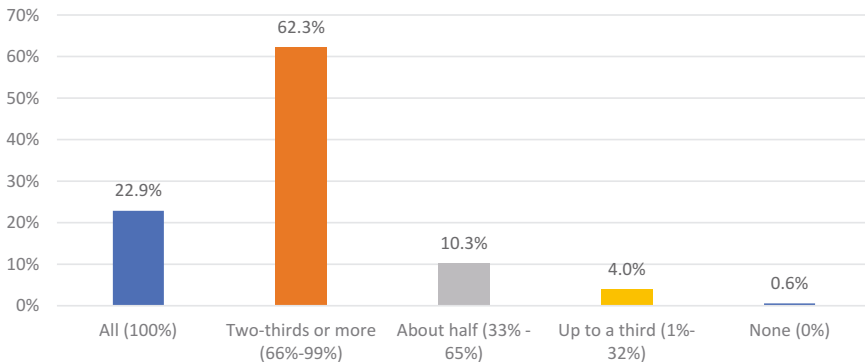

Figure 15. Estimated proportion of community engagement processes designed and delivered by local government staff (*n* = 175).

more likely to plan and deliver all processes (29%) or half of the processes (21%) themselves, although this is not statistically significant.

What are the challenges for councils in delivering community engagement?

The final question asked what respondents believed were the main difficulties in delivering community engagement processes in their local government. As Figure 16 shows, over a third (37.1%) cited the time required, which suggests problems of being under-resourced and/or poor planning. Nearly a quarter (23.4%) cited public interest, although with hindsight this response should have stipulated 'poor public interest' or 'high public interest'. Lack of budget was cited by 14.4%, also suggesting a problem with resourcing. Other reasons given were knowledge and skills of staff (8.4%), executive leadership commitment (9.0%), councillor support (5.4%) and statutory requirements (2.4%). Again, the results obtained in this question did not differ significantly by council type ($p = 0.322$) or state ($p = 0.649$). The problems of limited time, resources, staff skills and leadership commitment are probably not isolated to particular types of councils or to individual states (for instance, it is not unreasonable to suggest that councils can experience the problems of insufficient time and financial resources available for community engagement regardless of the characteristics of the council).

When asked if there were any additional difficulties, 43.5% of respondents who answered the question noted other points. In order of frequency, these included geographical disbursement of community (33.3% of additional comments), poor telecommunications infrastructure (12.1% of additional comments) and, each with less than 5% frequency, lack of dedicated staff, over-consultation or consultation fatigue, difficult community members, apathy, engaging hard-to-reach groups, poor planning and staff commitment/enthusiasm.
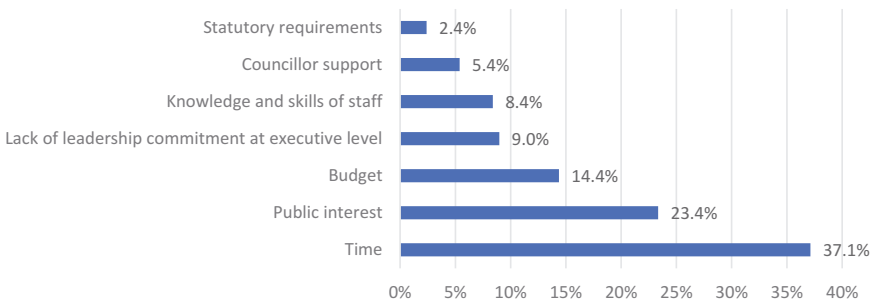
Figure 16. Highest ranked difficulties in delivering community engagement ($n = 167$).

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Summary and future research

Against the backdrop of three broad approaches to community engagement in the scholarly literature which we defined as a priori theoretical, an institutional approach and an embedded approach, this paper has presented the findings of a census probing community engagement practice in Australian local government. These initial findings show that community engagement practice has been subject first and foremost to legislative requirements, as demonstrated through the dominance of traditional methods. These methods are usually legislated (such as public submission), inexpensive to deliver (such as online surveys). However, these methods are not without their problems, which may explain the decline in intended future use, with respondents reporting a planned shift to more innovative and emerging methods. The highest reported driver for community engagement practice is its known effectiveness for assisting in decision-making, and the highest reported challenge in planning and delivering community engagement is the time required. The profile and resourcing of community engagement in local councils varies, and there is a significant coupling of a council's community engagement function with its communications, media and public relations functions. These findings suggest that community engagement is progressing in different directions, and that these directions depend not only on the jurisdictional legislative requirements but also on individual councils and their understanding of the role of community engagement, their leadership in this area and, undoubtedly, the resources they have available.

Returning to the three approaches to community engagement delineated in the scholarly literature, several points are salient. First, there is value in empirical inquiries, such as this one, informing theoretical discussions. For example, the importance of community engagement is likely to be elevated in contexts where other forms of democracy, such as voting, are less firmly established and (possibly) where local government areas are larger and where representation is a consequence of increased size (typically through consolidation of the perceived threat thereof – see Grant, Dollery, and Gert 2012). Second, it is clear from the census that compliance is a main driver for community engagement, highlighting the relevance of the institutional approach. Third, the census shows us that practice does vary between local governments. Regardless of the perceived legitimacy of some practices compared with others at the theoretical level (for example, participatory versus deliberative versus collaborative governance – see Christensen and Grant 2016), local governments are able to practise community engagement in ways that are appreciative of the characteristics of their local communities. They can also learn from different practices in different places and

innovate to tailor engagement for their communities. This accommodation of variance across different types of local governments, as well as the capacity for learning and innovation, conform to the traditional theoretical defences of local government (see Mill (1861 (1972)); Tiebout 1956).

These findings assist in creating an understanding of the current practice in Australian local governments; however, the data raise additional questions, such as: Why is there declining interest in traditional methods? What is the appeal of emerging methods? What impact does specialist community engagement staff have on practice? What are the effects of positioning community engagement in different areas of the organisation? What is the role of external consultants in community engagement? These questions ought to be explored in future research.

Notes

1. Adjustments to the ACLG are as follows: (1). Only local governments under the jurisdiction of the states' Local Government Acts have been included. This criterion excludes seven local governments in South Australia and three in New South Wales. (2). Since the publishing of the Local Government National Report 2014–2015 (Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (DIRD) (Australian Government) 2017), NSW has undertaken a merger programme and consequently the number of councils has decreased from 155 to 132. The table has been amended to incorporate these changes using the ALGC classification system provided by Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (DIRD) (Australian Government) (2017:218). (3). Five councils in Queensland – Gold Coast City Council, Ipswich City Council, Logan City Council, Moreton Bay Regional Council and Redland City Council – have been reclassified from Urban Regional to Urban Development. This is to more accurately reflect their status as metropolitan areas rather than regional towns. These local government areas are part of the metropolitan rail network as is typically the case with other Urban Development classifications.
2. As the data are normally distributed, parametric methods can be applied; however, verification with non-parametric methods has also been conducted to improve the robustness of results obtained.
3. Note: the chi-squared test cannot be used in this instance as the expected frequencies assumption is violated.
4. The Holm-Bonferroni Sequential Correction has been used in both cases to correct for familywise error rates.
5. While many of the duplicate responses were similar, there was one extreme example where, for one metropolitan council Respondent A reported 12 processes in the previous year, all designed and planned by council staff, and the key barrier was the ineffectiveness of the community engagement staff. Responded B reported 48 processes in the previous year, with two-thirds designed and planned by council staff, and the key barrier was the lack of staff resources to stretch across the organisation.
6. At the 1% and 5% significance levels, respectively.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

Table A1. Local government groups and Australian classification of local governments (ACLG) alignment.

Group	ACLG	Population and Density		NSW	QLD	SA	VIC
Capitals and metro	UCC	Pop 20K + OR Pop density 30 persons/km^2 + OR 90% urban pop	Capital city	1	1	1	1
	UDS		Metropolitan developed small (up to 30,000)	2		2	
	UDM		Metropolitan developed medium (30,001–70,000)	4		7	
	UDL		Metropolitan developed large (70,001–120,000)	6		4	9
	UDV		Metropolitan developed very large (120,000+)	12		1	13
Urban regional	URS	Urban centres and margins of developed or regional centres	Regional towns/city small (up to 30,000)	10	5	8	6
	URM		Regional towns/city medium (30,001–70,000)	17	9	1	12
	URL		Regional towns/city large (70,001–120,000)	5	3		3
	URV		Regional towns/city very large (120,000+)	3	10		1
Urban fringe	UFS		Fringe small (up to 30,000)		1	3	2
	UFM		Fringe medium (30,001–70,000)	3	2	1	1
	UFL		Fringe large (70,001–120,000)	1		1	1
	UFV		Fringe very large (120,000+)	6		1	6
Rural and remote	RAS	Pop under 20K AND pop density less than 30 persons/km^2 AND less than 90% urban pop	Rural agricultural small (up to 2000)	1		10	
	RAM		Rural agricultural medium (2001–5000)	13	3	12	1
	RAL		Rural agricultural large (5001–10,000)	22		9	8
	RAV		Rural agricultural very large (10,001–20,000)	20	8	7	15
	RTX		Remote extra small (up to 400)		5		
	RTS		Remote small (401–1000)		10		
	RTM		Remote medium (1001–3000)	1	15		
	RTL		Remote large (3001–20,000)	1	5		
Total				**128**	**77**	**68**	**79**

Adapted from: DIRD (2014)

PART 2

Chapter 4 – Christensen, H.E. and Grant, B. 2016. 'Participatory Budgeting in Australian Local Government: An Initial Assessment and Critical Issues.' *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, **75(4): 457-475.**

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Statement of Author's Contribution

I certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated in the Certificate of Originality.

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Date: 14 October 2019

Research and Evaluation

Participatory Budgeting in Australian Local Government: An Initial Assessment and Critical Issues

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Participatory budgeting (PB), a process whereby governments seek direct input from citizens into financial decisions, is gaining a foothold in the community engagement practices of Australian local governments. Following questions of definition, we survey the theoretical terrain, locating PB within several components of local democracy. We then provide details of six PB processes in New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia. We identify several questions for the future of PB in Australian local governments, including the role of deliberative practices as part of the broader work of councils, the issue of the adaptability of councils and leaders, the impacts upon state and local governments, and the role of third parties. The article concludes by reflecting on how PB sits with democratic practices at the local level if it continues to be implemented.

Key words: *community engagement, democracy, deliberation, local government finance, participatory budgeting, participatory governance, representation, tokenism*

In 2014 the City of Melbourne led a participatory budgeting (PB) process to determine how the city's $5 billion budget should be allocated over the next 10 years. The process was conducted over a period of 5 months and cost $185,000 (Clear Horizon Consulting 2015). It comprised two approaches: broad engagement of the community through a variety of outreach and traditional engagement methods, including online budget allocators and workshops; and the random selection of a representative panel that was led through a deliberative process to determine the long-term financial plan for the city. The outcome of the panel was 11 recommendations for council's consideration and response. Of these recommendations, nine have been incorporated into the financial plan, one has been interpreted as a directive for council to take an advocacy role and one recommendation could not be adopted as it contradicted the newly introduced state government rate capping policy (City of Melbourne 2014:39).[1]

The Melbourne process, while salient, was not the first of its kind in Australia. In 2012 the municipality of Canada Bay in Sydney's inner west undertook what is widely regarded as the first PB process in Australian local government (see, eg Thompson 2012). It convened a representative deliberative group of community members to make recommendations for the services budget of the council over 4 years (Canada Bay Citizens' Panel 2012). In 2013 and 2014, the City of Greater Geraldton, located 400 kilometres to the north of Perth, conducted two PB processes: one for its 10-year Capital Works budget and a subsequent process for its annual services budget (City of Greater Geraldton 2013, 2014a). Both these processes featured randomly selected deliberative panels and were tasked with making a recommendation to council for the allocation of long-term budgets; with the first representing 100% of council's capital outlays over the 10-year period.

Australian local government practice is dotted with other, albeit smaller examples of PB, such as City of Darebin's 2014 Citizen's Jury, initiated to make recommendations to council to determine the allocation of a proportion of its capital works budget over a 2-year period (City of Darebin 2014a) and the City of Melville's 'Project Robin Hood' undertaken in 2013, which saw the council's annual community grants allocated by community members through online voting rather than deliberative methods such as citizen's juries and world cafes used elsewhere (IAP2 2014; for a synoptic comparison see Table 1).

With these six processes in 3 years, as well as others commencing (Penrith City Council 2015; South Gippsland Shire Council 2015), it would appear that PB constitutes an emerging practice in the community engagement toolkits of Australian local governments (see, eg Grant et al. 2012; Hartz-Karp 2012). However, the marked increase of PB globally suggests that it might constitute a major shift in local government practices and one that Australia is quite late in adopting. For instance, the most recent attempts to estimate the number of PB projects globally identified between 1269 and 2778 such processes in 2012 (Sintomer et al. 2013). Notwithstanding the difficulty in recording the actions of local governments across the globe, the actual number may be much higher.

The incidence of the practice globally, alongside recent Australian examples, hints at how PB is being broadly interpreted and the social and political contexts it is practiced in. While some have suggested the practices are too heterogeneous to make a definition possible (Ganuza et al. 2014; Marquetti et al. 2012), others have argued that to avoid a definition or a basic set of criteria renders it impossible to classify and evaluate the practices (Traub-Merz et al. 2013:2). This article seeks to broadly define PB for the purposes of understanding how it is being interpreted in the Australian context. Our central concern is to explore emerging PB practices in Australian local governments with a view to identifying critical issues for its continued use, alongside interpreting it as an element of administrative and political reforms. To this end, we examine six specific questions,

namely: what role deliberative practices play as an element of PB; what the likely longevity and institutional thickness of PB in Australian local government; how organisations (local and state government) adapt for PB; the impact of PB on the roles and responsibilities of local and state government; the optimal role of actors in PB processes; and how the design of PBs in the Australian context is constitutive of and affects practices of local democracy.

The article itself is divided into three main parts. Initially we survey different understandings of PB and where these sit in the wider context of participatory democratic theory, theories of deliberative democracy, and participatory and collaborative governance and co-production. We then examine the experiences of Australian local governments that have conducted PB processes. We then suggest a series of questions in response to the emergence of PB in the Australian context and identify the challenges that we suggest require consideration for the future of PB in the Australian context. The article concludes with a reflection on the democratic values of effective governance, issues of legitimacy and justice (Fung 2006), and how Australian PB practice may respond if it continues to develop.

What Is Participatory Budgeting?

At its most simple, PB can be defined as a 'process through which citizens can contribute to decision-making over at least part of the governmental budget' (Goldfrank 2007:92). This definition encompasses all variations in practice, although it is considerably broader than the definition used in what is widely regarded to be the first PB process in Porto Alegre, Brazil (see, eg Baiocchi 2001; de Sousa Santos 1998; Pateman 2012). In the Brazilian context, PB was defined as 'a structure and a process of community participation based on three major principles', namely: that participation is open to all; that the process is guided by both direct and representative democratic rules; and that it uses both general and technical criteria to determine resource allocation (de Sousa Santos 1998:468). Goldfrank (2007:92) has

Table 1. Australian local government: 'Snapshot' of PB processes 2011–2015

Year & LGA	Project & timeframe (years)	Budget area	Dollars available for PB vs total budget area spend	Broad methods	Deliberative random selection methods	Outcome	Third party
2012 Canada Bay, NSW	Canada Bay 2012 Citizens' Panel (4)	Services/operating (all)	Amount not stipulated as part of the process (total services/operating budget in 2013/2014 of $72 million)	Not specified	Deliberative community panel – 32 randomly selected	85 recommendations accepted by council	Yes; design Facilitation Recruitment
2012 Melville, WA	Project Robin Hood (1)	Services/operating (community grants)	$100000 (total operating budget in 2012/2013 of $87.3 million)	Workshops Online budget allocator tool	Not specified	Over 50 projects proposed; first 12 funded; accepted by council.	No
2013 Geraldton, WA	10-year Capital Works (10)	Capital (all)	$68 million (total capital works budget $68 million over 10 years)	Various in earlier overarching '2029 and Beyond' project	Deliberative community panel – 28 randomly selected	Four major recommendations including the prioritisation of 138 projects; accepted by council	Yes; recruitment oversight

(*Continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Year & LGA	Project & timeframe (years)	Budget area	Dollars available for PB vs total budget area spend	Broad methods	Deliberative random selection methods	Outcome	Third party
2014 Geraldton, WA	Range and Level of Services (1)	Services/operating (all)	$70 million (total services/ operating budget of $70 million	Various in earlier overarching '2029 and Beyond' project	Deliberative community panel – 37 randomly selected	Five major recommendations. Accepted by Council	Yes; recruitment oversight
2014 Darebin, VIC	Darebin's Citizens Jury (2)	Capital (new community infrastructure)	$2 million ($1 million per year) (total capital works budget $40.3 million in 2014/2015)	Public submissions	Deliberative citizen's jury – 44 randomly selected	Eight recommendations; unanimously accepted by council	Yes; design Facilitation Recruitment
2015 Melbourne, VIC	10-year Financial Plan (10)	Capital and services/operating (all)	$5.9 billion (total budget of $5.9 billion over 10 years)	Workshops Discussion groups Online budget allocator tool 'Pop-up' engagement hubs	Deliberative community panel – 43 randomly selected	Eleven recommendations, nine incorporated into long-term financial plan	Yes; design Facilitation Recruitment

Note: The two main areas of expenditure in council budgets are services/operating (service, programs and operating costs such as staff) and capital works (infrastructure).
Sources: City of Canada Bay (2012, 2013, 2014), Thompson (2012), IAP2 Australasia (2014), City of Melville (2012), City of Greater Geraldton (2013, 2014a,b), City of Darebin (2014b), City of Melbourne (2014).
PB, participatory budgeting.

suggested that since this time subsequent definitions have de-emphasised the structure, loosely interpreted the process, and identified new and different principles as the underpinning normative and operational requirements for the operation of PB.

Notwithstanding attempts at definition, it could be argued that given the continuing variation in practice globally, these attempts have not been particularly successful. They do, however, provide a useful starting point in ascertaining what the process typically consists of. de Sousa Santos (1998) initially identified four key principles: (i) participation open to all; (ii) direct democratic rules; (iii) integration with representative democratic rules; and (iv) resource allocation determined through criteria that ensure social justice. The principles identified by Shah (2007) and Goldfrank (2007) retain direct participation and redistribution and add a principle of transparency; however, they dispense with the principles of participation being open to all and with the component they label 'representative democracy'. Wampler (2012) built on Shah (2007) and Goldfrank (2007) adding deliberation.

Similarly, one of the most widely cited set of criteria as to what a participatory budget features was provided by Sintomer et al. (2008). This lists six key features: (i) participation by non-elected citizens; (ii) discussion of the budget; (iii) involvement of the municipal level of government; (iv) a repeated process with more than one meeting; (v) that some form of public deliberation is included; and (vi) that some accountability over the outcomes is part of the process. As we suggest (below) when we examine PB globally, these criteria imply that what is 'branded' as PB may not be PB according to the commonly accepted set of key features. Arguably, the variation in these principles is reflective of the practice, where processes of representative democracy and participation open to all have made way for more deliberative practices. Debate at the conceptual level also indicates the normative dimensions of questions of definition within practices of local democracy across a plurality of settings.

Nevertheless, declaring that PB necessarily entails foundational concepts such as 'representative democracy' and 'participation' and, in the case of Fung (2006) and Wampler (2012) 'social justice' begs questions concerning what these authors mean in their use of these terms. It is to these questions that we now turn.

Context: Theory and Practice of Participatory Budgeting

To place PB in context and engage with the broader literature and local government practice – particularly democratic practices in local government – we derive Figure 1 from the discussion by Haus and Sweeting (2006).

Examining Figure 1, it represents the practices of local democracy (at centre) comprised of four principal types – or what Haus and Sweeting (2006:267) refer to as 'non-exclusive components', namely 'representative' (at left), 'participatory' (at right), 'user-pays' (bottom), and 'network' (top). For their part, Haus and Sweeting (2006:267) offer a concise definition of democracy:

> We take democracy as the idea to promote a common good under circumstances where there is no strong pre-existing agreement on what this common good is, what it entails and how it can be promoted – with the significant qualification that this promotion is not imposed on society by force or manipulation, but is subject to public justification ... Democracy is thus intimately linked with the question of what is 'good' for the members of a political community, and considering local democracy implies that local government, like governments at upper levels, has a process of collective self-determination as its normative core.

While it may seem trite to offer up such a cursory definition of a concept that has been profoundly reflected upon, this definition highlights both the contestable nature of the common good *and* that collective determination is the 'normative core' of democracy – that is, it acknowledges the importance of both outcomes and the value of processes (see Dollery and Grant 2011:9). This is particularly important in discussions of PB.

Haus and Sweeting (2006) engage in a sustained discussion of each of their

Figure 1. Types of Democracy in Local Government
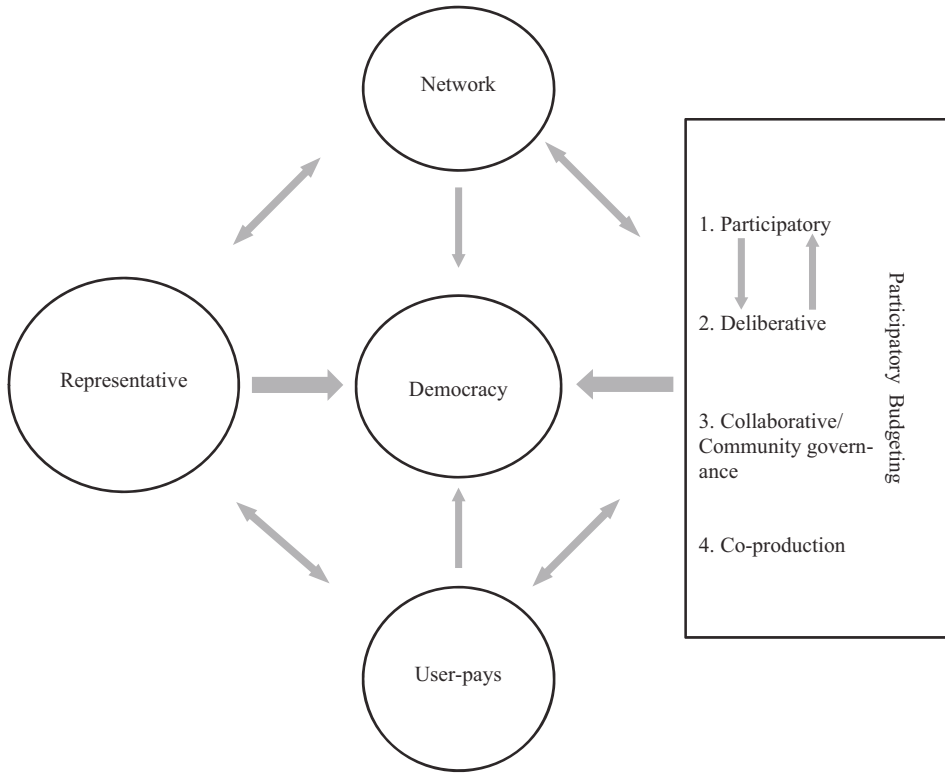
Source: Adapted from Haus and Sweeting (2006) and Grant et al. (2014:7–8).

'non-exclusive components' of local democracy. For our purposes they can be concisely defined. First, for 'representative' democracy (at left) they cite Sharpe's (1970:168) assertion that 'some form of election seems essential' for decision-making by representatives of the electorate. Within this component, they point to representation in the form of strong personal leadership; 'parliamentarisation' at the local level (which historically has not been a salient feature of local government in Australia – see Halligan and Paris 1984:62; Power et al. 1981:105) and a tendency to value decentralisation within discussions of local democracy (Haus and Sweeting 2006:273–275; Shah and Shah 2006). Second, 'user-democracy', which 'recommends a marketisation of political relationships' and is specifically utilitarian in that it involves 'measuring (but not evaluating) individual preferences' where votes are directly analogous to money and government responds to supply and demand in a context characterised by competition. Third, 'network' democracy, characterised by cross-jurisdictional activities by highly mobile and decisive leaders who nevertheless remain accountable on the basis of their visibility (and, we would add) their dispensability (Haus and Sweeting 2006:281–283; see also Grant et al. 2014; Stoker 2004, 2006, 2011). Fourth, 'participatory democracy' grounded in a robust belief that 'it is active citizens ... who know best about the common good' and as such ought to be placed to contribute to decision making.

This broad definition of participatory democracy includes conceptions of democratic practice that emphasise either participation generally (see, eg Fung 2006; Fung and Wright 2003; Pateman 2012) and devolution of authority to the lowest possible level

as an element of participation (Mansbridge in Fung and Wright 2003:176) alongside deliberation defined against the mere aggregation of preferences (Ansell and Gash 2008:543) and the intrinsic rewards of deliberative processes (Dryzek 1990; Hartz-Karp 2012; Morrell 2010; Smith 2011; van Aaken et al. 2004). It also includes the concept of collaborative or community governance, which recognises the legitimacy of decision-making outside traditional sites of local government (Aulich 2009:45) co-production, which Alford and Yates (2016:159) concisely define as 'the contribution and effort to the *delivery* of public services by service users and citizens, promoted by or in concert with public sector organisations' (see also Voorberg et al. 2015). PB as we have defined it above can also be placed here.

Figure 1 achieves two *broad* aims. First, it locates PB as an element of the four principal components of local democracy. However, there is an important qualification in that the four types are both 'non-exclusive' and are identifiable in the literature as cooperating *and* competing elements of local democratic practices. For instance, it is frequently claimed that PB involves some type of *representation* (eg by a randomly selected/generated sample of citizens) with the implication that as a process it *leads* decision making in a form that is additional to (Fung 2006:66) or indeed superior in type to decision making through electoral processes (see, eg Tormey 2012:59–82).

Second (and notwithstanding the claims to the contrary (see Fung 2006:66)) participatory and deliberative practices – indeed all types in the participatory quadrant – are defined *against* representative electoral processes. Drawing on the work of Barber (1984), Fishkin (1991), and Pateman (1970), Haus and Sweeting (2006:278) assert that for this component of local democracy '[s]ome form of representation may be a *necessary evil* . . . [b]ut citizen participation must be granted whenever it is demanded' (emphasis added). This concisely reflects the deliberative turn generally and in local democracy in particular in the context of a 'democratic deficit' (Norris 2011). There is a substantive body of theoretical work that explores and advocates deliberation as a superior

form of decision making on both instrumental and ethical grounds (see, eg Dryzek 1990; Morrell 2010; Smith 2011) and that, as Fung (2006:68) notes, echoes the work of Habermas (1984, 1989). Nor is this view limited to local democracy (see Goodin 2008). This work has been accompanied by a sustained critique of representation at both philosophical (see, for example, Rorty 1991:1) and theoretical levels (see Saward 2010; Tanasescu 2014; Tormey 2012). We ought to recognise as well that there is a certain type of historicism in some of these latter arguments. Thus, for example, Tormey (2012:59) asserts that: 'Representation is . . . a discourse associated with modernity and the creation of nation states'. Otherwise stated, representation is regarded as *passé*.

Figure 1 also achieves two tasks *specific* to the 'participatory' quadrant. First, it recognises the conflict therein. Thus, for example, Pateman (2012:8) states inter alia that '[t]he current *fashion* for deliberative democracy began with political theory' and that 'the prevalent view, albeit not always made explicit, seems to be that deliberative democracy has now overtaken and *subsumed its predecessor*' (emphasis added; see also Fung and Wright 2003). Pateman (2012) takes issue with this presumed ascendency of deliberative over participatory democracy, although it is worth noting that some view the two as complimentary (see, eg Haus and Sweeting 2006; Thompson 2012). Nevertheless in Figure 1 they are represented as antagonistic. Added to this complexity is that both participatory democracy and deliberative democracy theorists are incorporating the language of collaborative governance into their theory and practice (see eg Emerson et al. 2012; Nabatchi 2010; Nabatchi and O'Leary 2005; Newman et al. 2004).

Second, Figure 1 demonstrates that despite the plurality of types and the conflict therein, PB is valued *across the types* – indeed some individual types *lay claim to* PB. For her part, Pateman (2012:10–11) criticises deliberative democracy for being overly concerned with process and juxtaposes this with the more outcome-orientated participatory processes, pointing to the PB process in Porto Alegre as exemplary in this regard.

Alternatively, from the deliberative perspective Hartz-Karp (2012:2) argues: 'Participatory budgeting is a powerful tool for achieving more effective democracy, particularly so if it is more *intentionally deliberative* than usually practiced' (emphasis added). Arguably, PB conforms to definitions of both participatory governance and co-production.

Also noteworthy is that the theorisation across both participatory and deliberative types reaches a further level of detail when directly concerned with the implementation and normative defensibility of particular projects. For instance, Fung's (2006, 2015) 'democracy cube' discerns three variables in the design of public engagement: (i) who participates; (ii) how participants communicate with each other and make decisions; and (iii) how decisions of the deliberation are linked with policy or action. Fung (2006) presents each of these three variables as a spectrum and posits different engagement mechanisms, or strategies, along the three variables. This is used as a basis to explore the democratic values of legitimacy, effective governance, and justice in the context of specific projects (see also Emerson et al. 2012; Sintomer et al. 2013).

Turning to the practice of PB, in this context it is possible to make four general observations with respect to PB globally and in Australia. First, whereas PB has been championed as the panacea for corruption and inefficiencies in developing countries (see, eg, Shah 2007) arguably it has been championed as the way for local government to engage with disaffected and apathetic communities and deal with the wicked problem of how to manage municipal budgets that are experiencing austerity pressures in established Western democracies (see, eg, Lerner and Secondo 2012; Pinnington et al. 2009; Sintomer et al. 2013; Traub-Merz et al. 2013). Second, as demonstrated by Table 1 and the examination of case studies of PB in the Australian local government context below, compared with other parts of the world, Australian local governments have been late adopters of PB, with the first documented process occurring in 2012.

Third, to date Australian practices closely resemble those in Europe, presumably due

to commonalities such as being established democracies looking to rebuild trust in response to claims about a 'democratic deficit' (see, eg, Chambers 2003; Hindess 2002; Norris 2011). Fourth – and we will assert, rather than argue this point in this context – PB practices in Australia are still being shaped and administrators are grappling with the principles it prioritises over others or what it chooses to adopt and what it chooses to adapt.

Participatory Budgeting in Australia

We now examine six PB processes completed by Australian local governments. By outlining the key features and significance of each of the processes, we can see how the practice is being implemented, from which we abstract and posit several critical observations and questions. A synoptic overview of the key features of all the case studies is presented in Table 1.

Canada Bay, New South Wales

Located in Sydney's inner west, Canada Bay covers an area of approximately 20 square kilometres and services a population of over 80000. Reportedly tired of poor turnout at public meetings, in 2012 the mayor agreed to an alternative approach to engaging the community through use of a deliberative panel (Thompson 2012:4). The panel consisted of 32 randomly selected demographically representative citizens who met for a total of 45 hours across five Saturdays in a 3-month period. Overseen by a third-party organisation and independently facilitated, the panel was tasked with determining Council's service priorities, levels and funding for a 4-year period subject to final approval by council (City of Canada Bay 2014:38). The panel presented their report to council in November 2012, which made over 80 specific recommendations across all service areas and included a recommendation for a rate rise (Thompson and Riedy 2014). One year later, the council received a follow-up report that investigated the recommendations not yet implemented as well as options for additional savings and income generation. Council has and is

responsible for implementing the recommendations and the reporting of these was incorporated into the organisation's 2014 Annual Report (City of Canada Bay 2014,[2] see Table 1).

Arguably, the Canada Bay PB experience is significant for several reasons. First is the use of a representative deliberative panel. While this practice is becoming increasingly prevalent, particularly as a mechanism aimed at attempting to solve the 'wicked problems' that governments face (Weymouth and Hartz-Karp 2015; Head 2007), deliberative processes are a considerable departure from the traditional community engagement practices of most local governments such as public meetings and surveys. The benefits of deliberative processes are widely espoused (Weymouth and Hartz-Karp 2015) and in Australia they are becoming a preferred method for PB. While this is not an unreasonable pairing, consideration must be given to what risks this generates, which we go on to discuss. The second key reason the Canada Bay experience is important is its success in increasing local rates. Such a decision typically provokes outrage from the community. However, in this instance when the decision was made by a group of randomly selected residents it was received as wise and reasonable by the wider community (Hartz-Karp 2012:11; again, see Table 1 for a comparison across categories).

Melville, Western Australia

The City of Melville is located in Perth's south and covers an area of approximately 50 square kilometres, servicing a population of just over 100000. In 2012 the Council allocated $100000 for a participatory community grants program that would see the community vote on a series of community-initiated projects costing between $1000 and $20000. The process was led by a youth advisory group that developed the process as well as a marketing and communications strategy centred on the Robin Hood theme (International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Australasia 2014). Following a series of 'place-making workshops' over a 2-month period designed to assist community members in identifying suitable projects to pro-

pose, 50 applications proceeded to the voting stage. An online budget allocator tool was implemented to allow community members to distribute their virtual budget of $100000 during a 2-week period in June/July 2014. A total of 1379 community members voted and the first 12 projects were funded. The project returned in 2015, albeit it with half the budget (City of Melville 2012).

Compared to Canada Bay and the other examples following, Melville appears as an altogether different type of PB process. However, using the basic definition provided by Goldfrank (2007:92) where PB is defined as people participating in a decision-making process determining how to spend all or part of a government budget, it conforms. It bears a much closer resemblance to traditional PB processes where a public vote is used and ultimate decision-making authority has been handed over to the community without qualification. While not deliberative, it the only process amongst the examples to be repeated, suggesting that it is easier to implement and sustain.

Geraldton, Western Australia

The City of Greater Geraldton is the result of an initial amalgamation in 2007 of the City of Geraldton and Shire of Greenough and a subsequent amalgamation in 2011 with the Shire of Mullewa (Grant et al. 2012). It is located on the coast of Western Australia approximately 400 kilometres north of Perth and is nearly 13000 kilometres in area and services a population of approximately 40000 residents. In its short life, the council has built a reputation for regular and effective engagement with its community in public decision-making with a focus on building a deliberative community centred on collaborative governance (Grant et al. 2012; Hartz-Karp 2012). Building on the work of the community strategic plan commenced in 2009, '2029 and Beyond,' in 2013 the Council undertook two consecutive PB processes. The first was conducted in late 2013 and consisted of a deliberative community panel of 28 randomly selected community members to determine the priorities for the 10-year, $68 million Capital Works budget. The panel met for four full

days during the month of November 2013 and concluded by presenting a list of 138 capital works projects prioritised by both community and city desirability (City of Greater Geraldton 2013). The second process was undertaken in early 2014 with a remit of recommending the desired range, level, and priority of services for the council's $70 million annual services budget. Once again a deliberative panel was used, this time comprising 37 people who were briefed in December 2013 and then met over seven Saturdays during an 8-week period. The group made recommendations about which services should be increased, decreased, refocused and those that ought to remain the same (City of Darebin 2014a).

While Geraldton's PB processes share similarities with those undertaken earlier at Canada Bay, particularly with the use of representative randomly selected deliberative panels, arguably they have greater significance than just being another example. This resides in the larger framework of engagement and governance practiced by the city. The international award winning '2029 and Beyond' project piloted a deliberative collaborative governance approach that included a central community strategic plan supported by a number of interrelated initiatives and plans that were all collaborative with the community (Grant et al. 2012; Hartz-Karp 2012; Weymouth and Hartz-Karp 2015). Not only has this broader approach to a different way of working with the community been more ambitious, it has also been successful, with Gollagher and Hartz-Karp (2013:2353) reporting that the processes 'have resulted in plans and actions that are more far-reaching than local decision makers had ever envisaged'. The collaborative culture between the council and its community became so assumed that the impetus for the PB processes came as a response to a council decision to raise rates with minimal engagement with the community. It is interesting to note that PB was identified earlier during the '2029 and Beyond' project but was decided to be too risky at the time, as it was determined a higher degree of trust was needed amongst community, staff, and the organisation for such a process to have the best chance at success (Hartz-Karp 2012).

Thus far, Geraldton is the only Australian local government to place PB within a larger framework of deliberative collaborative governance (Gollagher and Hartz-Karp 2013:2354).

Darebin, Victoria

With a population of over 140000 people and an area of 53 square kilometres, the City of Darebin covers Melbourne's gentrifying northern suburbs. In 2013/2014 the council introduced a ratepayer-funded infrastructure fund to cover the costs of a new community facility with the provision that the community could decide how the fund would be spent in future. Consequently, a citizens' jury was tasked with determining how to best spend $2 million on infrastructure over a 2-year period. A public submission period preceded the jury, for which 49 submissions were received. These submissions, along with data from the annual state-wide satisfaction survey and council's own quarterly community surveys, were given to the 44 jury members to be included in their deliberations that were conducted over four Saturdays over a 4-month period. The group was expected to reach consensus on their set of recommendations, or if not a supermajority of 80% was deemed acceptable. Council's promise to the group was to accept the recommendations on an 'all or nothing' basis (City of Darebin 2014a). The eight recommendations presented to the mayor in August 2014 were unanimously accepted by the Council. Two of the eight recommendations had come from the earlier public process.

While Darebin followed suit with the deliberative approach to PB adopted by Canada Bay and Geraldton, it was more conservative in scaling down the budget and budget timeframe available to the community for decision making. It can be argued that the process conformed more closely to the citizen jury format by encouraging public submissions beforehand.

Melbourne, Victoria

As noted in our introduction, Melbourne is Australia's second-largest city, covering an area of 36 square kilometres and while it is home

to over 100000 residents, it is estimated that around 805000 people use the city each day and that it hosts over 1 million international visitors each year. The decision to undertake a PB process lay in response to how the city could remain liveable while responding to future challenges such as economic uncertainty and population growth (Reece 2015). Melbourne's methodology consisted of both broad community engagement followed by a deliberative process. The broad engagement involved over 600 people utilising online budget tools, workshops and 'pop-up' events; the results of which were used to a create a summary report to the 'people's panel'. The panel was comprised of 43 randomly selected residents, business owners and students who met for 6 days over a 4-month period. The panel delivered 11 recommendations to council with the promise they would be incorporated into the '10-year Financial Plan' to the maximum extent possible. Nine of the 11 recommendations were adopted with one of the recommendations covering avenues of advocacy for the council, mostly directed towards the state government. The other, a proposal for a rate increase above CPI, was unable to be responded to due to the introduction of rate capping in Victoria by the state government.

It can be argued that the importance of Melbourne in the evolution of PB in Australia resides principally in how it has raised the profile of the PB. As the first capital city to deliver a PB process with the largest aggregate budget to be decided to date; also as the process that resulted in a recommendation for raise rates, it is reasonable to assume that other Australian local governments are looking to this example. The Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) has held workshops on how to run PB following the Melbourne and Darebin experiences. This corresponds with the VLGA's strategic action to 'expand the understanding and uptake of PB by local Councils' (VLGA 2014). In addition to this increased profile, the following processes are underway: South Gippsland in Victoria is allocating $1.6 million for infrastructure projects in four towns (Gray 2015; South Gippsland Shire Council 2015); Penrith City Council in New South Wales is

asking a community panel to help determine service and infrastructure levels in 2015/2016 and beyond (Penrith City Council 2015) and Kingborough in Tasmania has resolved to consider PB models that may be suitable for them (Kingborough Council 2015).

Critical Issues for Future PB in Australia

While the number of PB processes in Australia thus far can be assessed as modest, the high profile of the Melbourne example, along with workshops led by peak bodies and reports of PB processes in the pipeline (see, eg Penrith City Council 2015; South Gippsland Shire Council 2015) would suggest that PB will enjoy an increased degree of popularity. This conforms to Cabannes' (2004:45) observation that 'after participatory budgets cease being "trendy", it is likely that a growing number of cities will adopt and adapt this methodology'. Given the relative novelty of the practice in the Australian context, it is not feasible to attempt to tie all the themes together to make a succinct comment on the future directions of Australian PB. Instead, we pose a series of questions to consider how PB might develop in Australia.

What Is the Role of Deliberative Practices in Australian PBs?

In the six PB processes discussed above, five of the case studies utilised deliberative methods of community panels, or citizens' juries, where the participants were randomly selected to ensure they represented a microcosm of the wider community. The benefits of deliberative democracy in PB are well documented and researched (Gollagher and Hartz-Karp 2012; Lerner and Secondo 2012; Nabatchi 2010; Weymouth and Hartz-Karp 2015) including the Geraldton case study by Hartz-Karp (2012). Any PB process requires participants to understand information and data that they then utilise to make a decision. Deliberative processes are (arguably) well suited to this task as they provide space and time for participants to test assumptions, question sources, set criteria, and deliberate responses. The result of these processes is a well-considered series of

recommendations from the group, rather than a public vote. The shifts towards deliberative processes rather than popular vote illustrate alignment with the contemporary PB principles such as those defined by Wampler (2012).

Despite this, deliberative processes are not without their weaknesses, the greatest of which is inclusion (Chambers 2009; Lafont 2015). While in some instances the participants of Australian deliberative processes have all been selected to be demographically representative (Canada Bay and Melbourne, eg), it is nevertheless difficult to ensure they are inclusive of varying views; further, the process is only open to those with an invitation rather than the whole community (Ganuza and Francés 2012; Pateman 2012). Moreover, while most of the Australian examples presented have incorporated wider community processes along with their selective deliberative processes, it is no doubt difficult to marry to the two together, particularly giving the varying 'depths' of the two conversations. In addition, deliberative processes require more time than traditional engagement methods used by local governments such as surveys, alongside requiring skill sets that may not be present in the organisation. Arguably, attempts to overcome the time and skill requirements are likely to risk failure.

What Is the Likely Longevity of PB in the Australian Context?

With over 25 years of PB practice globally, one of the salient features is the precariousness of PB in some contexts: While in some instances the practice has become embedded in institutions and is repeated regularly (see, eg Hilden, Germany (Sintomer et al. 2013:18); Guelph, Canada (Sintomer et al. 2013:51); Chicago, USA (Lerner and Secondo, 2012)) if not annually, in other cities it disappears after a short period (see, eg Montreal, Canada (Sintomer et al. 2013:44); Essen Germany (Sintomer et al. 2013:50); Pieve Emanuele, Italy (Sintomer et al.:45)). Perhaps ironically, PB often proves durable when the practice is implemented by a central government, such as in Brazil (Cabannes 2004; Goldfrank 2012:11) and when the practice is required as part of a

funding agreement with agencies such as the World Bank (Goldfrank 2012:11). However, in the face of political change, the practice is often abandoned, such as in Porto Alegre Brazil where the original model proved unsustainable (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014).

In their analysis of the fragility and volatility of Portuguese PBs, Alves and Allegretti (2012) reported that only one-third of the projects initiated were still in existence and argued that PBs are more likely to be sustainable if decision-making power is transferred to citizens and is adaptable in shape and scope to address the needs of participants. Many of the Australian processes have longer timeframes and hence do not require annual repetition, with only one council, Melville, thus far committed to a subsequent process (City of Melville 2012).

How Ought Organisations and Leaders Adapt for PB?

The question of how enduring PB processes are hints at a further issue – that of how prepared and equipped organisations and their leaders need to be to implement PB processes. Arguably, even an uncomplicated straightforward participatory process requires considerable resources (time, money, and skills) and PBs conform to this, particularly when processes include wide-reaching engagement and/or deliberative processes – and we have seen that many of the Australian examples have. In addition to these more tangible resources, organisations, their leaders and decision-makers need to have a level of understanding and capacity about what PB is, what it can achieve, and where it sits as an element of democratic decision-making processes.

The question of organisational readiness is one that emerged during the Geraldton experience. Hartz-Karp (2012:5) noted that although PB was initially planned as part of the earlier '2029 and Beyond' project, and that 'it was considered to be too high a risk, especially because there was distrust between the community and administration, and elected officials were very wary'. Limited support from employees within the organisation has also been identified as a key risk in delivering PB, with instances of

staff becoming oppositional to community decisions and slowing down the process reported (Pinnington et al. 2009:476). Without a willingness and capacity to provide information and relinquish decision making, PB processes may risk failure.

Impact of PB upon the Roles and Responsibilities of Local and State Government

PB in Australia has focused on governance and the distribution of basic services, in particular those associated with capital works. This has resulted in participants of Australian PBs requesting changes to legislation and legislative powers that lie outside of the realm of local government. Examples include the following: transport infrastructure (City of Darebin 2014a; City of Melbourne 2014), changes to planning legislation (Canada Bay Citizens' Panel 2012; City of Melbourne 2014), provision of schools (City of Melbourne 2014), calls for higher developer contributions (Canada Bay Citizens' Panel 2012; City of Melbourne 2014), and provision of community services (City of Melbourne 2014). In response to these calls, councils usually offer to take an advocacy role to facilitate change in these areas.

Of particular interest is that in the cases of Canada Bay and Melbourne, both groups achieved consensus that it was necessary to raise council rates (Canada Bay Citizens' Panel 2012; City of Melbourne 2014). As we have already emphasised, in the case of Melbourne, this recommendation contradicted the recently introduced rate-capping policy of the new state government and was therefore unable to be implemented.

There are three significant considerations arising from these 'out-of-scope' requests. The first relates to the integrity of the process: If participants cannot have an influence where they desire, they are likely to become frustrated and not participate and should engagement continue, it is likely to be viewed as tokenistic. The second relates to the relationships local governments have with their respective state governments and in some cases, the federal government. In a climate of constant reforms

and amalgamations, many of which are acrimonious in nature (see, eg Ryan et al. 2016:3–5), it is conceivable that local governments will pay a price for advocacy. Third, the recommendations to raise rates by Canada Bay and Melbourne were accepted by their respective wider communities. Advocates of deliberative methods champion this as an example of how communities place higher trust in groups other than representatives they have elected. However, there is a risk that elected representatives will interpret these outcomes as a way to raise to raise rates without voter backlash. If participants are led towards this assessment, then PB risks being viewed as tokenistic.

What Should Be the Roles of Various Actors and Who Decides?

The variation in PBs across Australia means that the roles and responsibilities of the actors involved have also varied. The role of participants in the Australian example has typically been to make recommendations to the elected representatives. Design and facilitation of the process and recruitment of participants is usually coordinated by the organisation and implementation rests with the organisation. To a degree, these differences are reflective of the different legislative landscapes across Australian local government jurisdictions (see, for example, Grant et al. 2011). Notable is that in five of the six Australian examples discussed here a third party intermediary was engaged to either design, facilitate, recruit or oversee the process or a combination of these (see Table 1). The third party ensures a public commitment from the council that recommendations are adopted where possible. While the use of third parties might be promoted as a means to ensure impartiality and ensure trust, it begs the wider issue of why local administrations are less trusted and where guardianship for democracy lies.

How Does the Design of Australian PBs Demonstrate Democratic Values?

At one level, namely what in the discussion above we have denoted as the debate confined

to the right quadrant of Figure 1, the issue of whether PB fosters democracy can be partly answered through the application of frameworks such as Fung's 'democracy cube' (2006, 2015): Thus, the first variable, that is 'who participates' varies in Australian practice, with the deliberative processes utilising random selection and the Melville example open to the wider public making them more inclusive on the spectrum of participant selection. On the variable of 'communication and decision making', the deliberative methods use more intense modes whereas the Melville example demonstrated a less intense mode where participants are invited to develop, and then express preferences. When measured against the third variable of 'authority and power', all Australian examples sit midspectrum as the participants advise and consult rather than have direct authority, the degree of influence available is limited, in most instances by the legislation. The value of Fung's (2006) 'democracy cube' is that it provides a reference point for considering how the design of participatory processes such as PB can facilitate the democratic values of legitimacy, effective governance, and justice.

However, in the discussion above we have deliberately cast the net broadly, choosing to view PB as a component of local democratic practices generally. In this regard it is possible to view it as a high-profile compliment to other arrangements – those for 'user-pays', 'networked', and (in particular) representative arrangements. Yet to do so is complacent for two reasons. The first is that representative arrangements in the local government systems in Australia are highly variable. For instance, voting is not compulsory in local government elections in Western Australia, South Australia, and Tasmania (Tan and Grant 2013:65–66) and participation rates in these jurisdictions at the most recent local government elections were 27.76%, 31.99%, and 54.58%, respectively (Electoral Commission of South Australia (ECSA) 2014; Tasmanian Electoral Commission (TEC) 2014; Western Australian electoral Commission (WAEC) 2014). As such the robustness of representation ought not to be taken for granted. This entails, second, that to assume that more PB equates to more

democracy is misleading, despite the salience of the literature that both theorises and advocates the elements of the 'participatory' quadrant in Figure 1 *and* the critique and problematisation of representation mentioned above (see also Dollery and Grant 2011). In short, PB only enhances democracy if the other elements are in place.

Conclusion

The democratic values of effective governance, legitimacy, and justice, as identified by Fung (2006, 2015) serve as useful points of reflection upon the critical issues identified above. If the incidence of PB continues to increase in Australian local governments, the opportunity exists to enhance these values. Australian PB has been able to demonstrate effective governance through the use of effective decision-making process, namely deliberative processes. By providing the space for people to question, consider, and reach consensus, the outcomes are more likely to be robust and sustainable. Legitimacy is being contributed to by the inclusion of community members in the creation of the budget with the willingness to support decisions, such as increasing rates, enhanced by the use of everyday citizens. Arguably as well, justice (see, in particular, Fung 2006) is being enhanced by ensuring equitable access to the opportunity to be involved in the process.

Despite these encouraging indicators, the values are at risk of being misinterpreted as processes are designed. Three indicators of this can be identified. First, the proportion of budget available is crucial (see Table 1 for a comparison). If small, there is a risk a PB will be seen as tokenistic; second, the authority available to participants to make a decision. Merely making recommendations rather than decisions may also result in a PB being seen as tokenistic. In this sense, the terms of engagement are weighted heavily in favour of traditional arrangements (Head 2007). Third is the issue of inclusivity. While demographically representative groups give Australian local governments a good indicator of the wider sentiment, they may also exclude people who may wish to

participate. Nevertheless, we think it is reasonable to assume that more local government administrators will seek to test the waters of PB and developments so far indicate that the 'adopting and adapting' (Wampler and Hartz-Karp 2012:12) is likely to continue.

Endnotes

1. The People's Panel recommendation to increase rates was the first of the 11 recommendations. It read: 'the People's Panel 2014 acknowledges that rate rises are required in order to meet both operating and capital budget requirements. The Panel recommends that rates be increased by CPI plus up to 2.5% pa for the next 10 years' (City of Melbourne 2015: 6). The other recommendations concerned (2) issues of environmental sustainability; (3) marketing the city; (4) the selling of non-core assets; (5) the redevelopment of Queen Victoria Market; (6) an endorsement of debt finance for growth infrastructure; (7) infrastructure to encourage the use of bicycles; (8) a swathe of issues for which the City assume a strong advocacy role, inclusive of greater control of developer contributions; (9) the maintenance of community services at current standards; (10) the targeting of a one percent efficiency dividend in operating costs; and (11) a reduction in capital works spending of 10% over the 10-year budget period (City of Melbourne 2015).

2. Canada Bay Council was unable to implement some recommendations due to legislative constraints; for example the recommendation to increase Developer Contributions levies, which are capped by the state government (City of Canada Bay 2013:198).

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I certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated in the Certificate of Originality.

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Outsourcing local democracy? Evidence for and implications of the commercialisation of community engagement in Australian local government

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ABSTRACT
Participatory governance practices are enjoying popularity, not least in local government. This is driven by legislation that requires councils to undertake some of these processes; also by communities *and* practitioners – parties that derive income from participatory governance. An industry is emerging: one characterised by demand and supply, with frameworks, strategies and processes, training and conferences. This industry warrants investigation so that its impacts upon local democracy can be understood. Following a theorisation of local democracy and community engagement, the paper describes the community engagement industry, presenting evidence about council activities, providers and professional associations to establish that the commercialisation of engagement is a significant phenomenon in Australian local government. Possible risks to local governance and local democracy are explored.

1. Introduction: from local democracy to a community engagement industry?

Australia's 537 general-purpose local governments (DIRD 2017) are increasingly characterised by direct community involvement in their decision-making processes. This has seen the introduction of mandatory requirements for engagement in the planning and reporting regimes of state and territory governments (Christensen 2018b; Grant and Drew 2017, 217–264; Tan and Artist 2013). It has been driven by demand from communities themselves (Bishop and Davis 2002; Herriman 2011; Pillora and McKinlay 2011). It has been buoyed by broad normative support, specifically under the banners of *inter alia* 'networked community governance' (Stoker 2004; 2006) and 'participatory governance' (Aulich 2009). And it has been justified on instrumental grounds using the argument that closer consultation with the community results in better policy outcomes (Head 2007, 243). This expanded community involvement in decision-making, widely known in Australia as 'community engagement', is now considered a fundamental element of the public-local government democratic relationship (Aulich 2009; Bell and Hindmoor 2009; Shipley and Utz 2012; Jacobs 2014; Dean 2016; Quick and Bryson 2016).

Arguably, in its current form community engagement appears as different things to different stakeholders. To council employees it appears as legislative requirements, the focus of the latest state government or organisational initiative, position descriptors and trainings that in many instances have to be complied with (see, for instance, DLG [NSW] 2013; DLG&C [WA] 2016; DP&C [Tas] 2013; LGASA/GoSA 2015; Victorian Government 2018). To the community, it appears as opportunities to 'have your say' on various policies and plans in the form of surveys, online discussion forums, pop-up events, community reference groups and letterbox flyers (Rowe and Frewer 2005). To these stakeholders, and taking up the recommendation of Hendriks and Carson (2008, 308) to 'watch this space' in their examination of the commercialisation of deliberative practices at that time, we can add the market, or what in our discussion we are denoting as the community engagement industry. For this stakeholder, community engagement appears as products and services, designed to assist in facilitating local participatory democracy, which are manufactured and offered up by private providers to be procured by local governments. It has previously been recognised that the relationship between community engagement and the market is an uneasy one (Hendriks and Carson 2008; Lee 2015; Lee, McNulty, and Shaffer 2015). However, it can also be argued that the relationship warrants continued and careful scrutiny, particularly when viewed from a perspective that assumes the good in local democracy, both in and of itself, and also as an element of Australia's – indeed any polity's – broader democracy.

The commercialisation of community engagement is an issue which has gained some attention in recent years in the international literature. In the United States, Lee (2015, 128–92) argued that 'engagement practitioners are consistently preoccupied with managing the relationship between their civic passions and their clients' business interests', also suggesting that consultants 'market' community engagement as holding a sacred social value that rejects political and economic logics as 'fossil values', despite the commercial motivations at play when trademarking deliberative processes such as 'twenty-first Century Town Meetings®', 'Choice Dialogues™', 'Deliberative Polling®' and 'Fast Forum Opinionnaires®' (Lee, McNulty, and Shaffer 2015, 130). Similar observations have been made about practice in Quebec (Bherer, Gauthier, and Simard 2017b), Italy (Lewanski and Ravazzi 2017), France (Mazeaud and Nonjon 2017) and the United Kingdom (Chilvers 2017). Frequently identified is the 'secondary industry' of support products, such as software for coordinating engagement and stakeholder databases, software and websites for online engagement and specialised facilitation materials (see, for example, Hendriks and Carson 2008, 297; Leighninger 2011).

Contributions to the debate from Australian scholars have thus far included Hendriks and Carson's (2008) discussion of the 'deliberative democracy market'. This examined 'an Australian inventory of 80 Deliberative Participatory Processes (DPPs) convened between 1975 and 2006'; of which 60% [$n = 48$] were 'organised by a consultant' and of which 'over 36' were conducted for the Western Australian state government by one consultant in particular (Hendriks and Carson 2008, 299–300). Alongside providing a critical and comprehensive examination of the possible effects of the commercialisation of deliberative democracy, Hendriks and Carson (2008) depicted practitioners as being driven by business imperatives on the one hand and being champions of deliberative democracy on the other. They argued that commercialised practice had not, at that time, had a deleterious impact upon deliberation at the micro, or procedural, level and that those

commercially engaged in deliberative democratic practices 'are more akin to a "community of practice" (CoP) … rather than a marketplace' (Hendriks and Carson 2008, 304). Yet on a less sanguine note, they also conceded that there could be possible negative implications of commercialism for democratic governance, including fostering elitism, homogenising public deliberation, reducing the meaning and practice of public deliberation, depoliticising public deliberation and detracting from more systemic, or 'sustained', practices internal to a variety of organisations – public, private and non-profit (Hendriks and Carson 2008, 307–308).

This article contributes to the discussion in three main ways. First, we 'set the scene' by placing community engagement in the context of the democratic practices of Australian local government more generally. Second, we explore the extent of commercialisation of community engagement as an element of Australian local government, taking up the aforementioned challenge of Hendriks and Carson (2008, 308) to 'watch this space', but with a remit beyond deliberative practices to include a broader range of participatory practices and across a range of local government jurisdictions in Australia. Third, we extend Hendriks and Carson's (2008) discussion of possible risks to local democracy by taking a critical and strategic approach to investigating the phenomenon in local government, rather than looking merely at deliberative practices.

This article is divided into four main parts. First, local democracy is conceptualised to serve as a foundation for the discussion. Second, we place the practice of community engagement within this conceptualisation. Third, following from Hendriks and Carson (2008) we present evidence about the 'demand' side of the industry – engagement practices as an element of local government operations – drawing on a survey of four of the seven local government jurisdictions – New South Wales (NSW); Queensland; South Australia and Victoria. We also provide evidence from the 'supply' side of the industry – providers of community engagement goods and services – utilising data from a survey of community engagement practitioners, and examine the professional associations that support them. Fourth, we examine the potential risks for local democracy arising from commercialisation, standardisation and a diminution of governance and community capacity.

2. Setting the scene: conceptualising local democracy

The political theory of local government and, by association, local democracy, are active fields of scholarly inquiry, even though scholars have long commented that it has been neglected in Australia (Halligan and Paris 1984; Grant and Drew 2017; Smith 1996; Johnson 2001). Contemporary scholars (see, for example, Hindess 2002; Pratchett 2004) are frequently led to the liberal canon on the topic, in particular, the work of J. S. Mill (1865) in *On Representative Government*. Both Hindess (2002) and Pratchett (2004) concur that Mill (1865) advances two fundamental justifications of local democracy. First, local government frees up the central government from local issues, ensuring that local matters are handled by those actually interested in or affected by them, such that the central government can concentrate on affairs of state. Second, both authors concur that for Mill (1865, 271) local representative bodies can be 'school [s] of political capacity and general intelligence' for local leaders who then rise to higher tiers of government.

Both these arguments see the justification for *local* government as residing principally in its benefit to *central* government – or what Chandler (2008, 355) refers to as 'the triumph of expediency over ethics'. Alternatively, Haus and Sweeting (2006, 267) provide a succinct *ethical* foundation for local democracy:

> We take democracy as the idea to promote a common good under circumstances where there is no strong pre-existing agreement on what this common good is, what it entails and how it can be promoted – with the significant qualification that this promotion is not imposed on society by force or manipulation, but is subject to public justification … Democracy is thus intimately linked with the question of what is 'good' for the members of a political community, and considering local democracy implies that local government, like governments at upper levels, has a process of collective self-determination as its normative core.

This definition highlights the normative ideal of democracy: one which values both process and outcomes. It also calls attention to the contested nature of the common good.

Haus and Sweeting (2006) continue by asserting that local democracy can be conceived in terms of four often overlapping types: 'representative', 'user', 'network' and 'participatory', as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 is relatively self-explanatory in depicting Haus and Sweeting's (2006) four-part typology of local democracy: While conceptually discrete, in practice, the four types overlap. Nevertheless, it is useful to flesh out these types as this demonstrates the intricacy of local democratic practices and allows us to place the commercialisation of community engagement within a broader context in the ensuing discussion. In Figure 1, the local democracy of the representative type (at left) is exemplified in voting in elections for
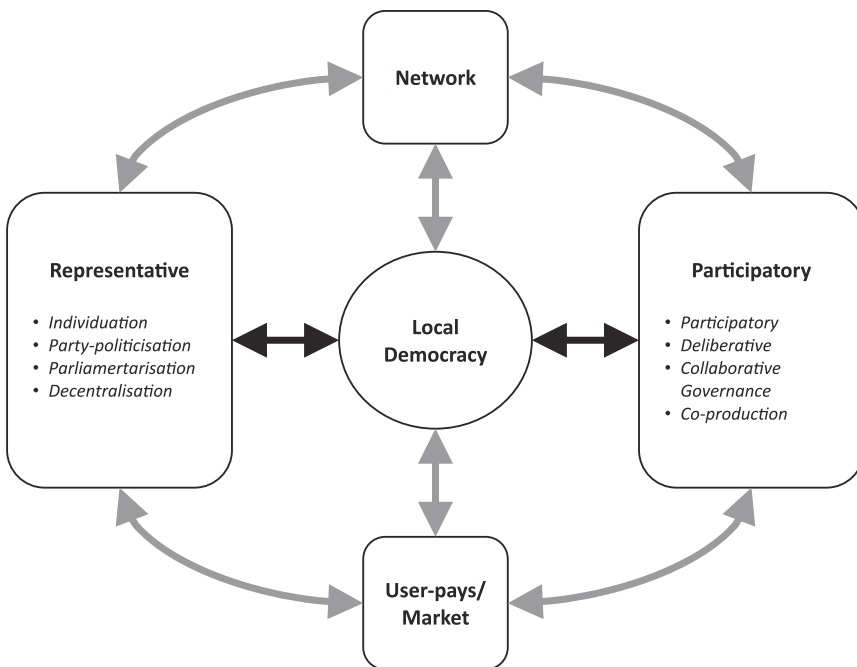
Figure 1. Types of local democracy. *Source*: Adapted from Haus and Sweeting (2006), Christensen and Grant (2016) and Sweeting and Copus (2012).

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local representatives. In Australia, participation in a representative democracy is highly variable. Voter turnout is weak in the states where voting is not compulsory – 27.5% in Western Australia (WAEC 2014), 31.99% in South Australia (ECSA 2014) and 54.58% in Tasmania (TEC 2014) in the most recent elections. Haus and Sweeting (2006) also identify no less than four more finely granulated representative types. First is where individual political leaders hold greater weight than political groups (for instance, mayors are directly elected in Queensland and in all Australian capital cities – see Sansom 2012). The second type is where party politics carries greater weight than individuals. In the Australian local government, this type has been latent historically – see Halligan and Paris (1984). Third is where local governments follow the logic of parliamentarisation, with a 'government' and an 'opposition' characterised by machinations to achieve power, as depicted in the documentary 'Rats in the Ranks', which examined Leichardt City Council in Sydney, Australia in the lead-up to the 1994 mayoral election (Anderson and Connolly 1996). The fourth type is the 'decentralisation' of representation, where territorial subunits are allocated decision-making authority. While historically not a key feature of Australian local governments, some councils utilise special committees, precinct committees and advisory committees to perform aspects of this function; see Bolitho (2013).

Returning to Figure 1, the 'network' form of local democracy (at top) has emerged in response to increasing complexity in governance, institutions and networks, and it embraces the idea of collective decisions across a range of actors, not just those who have been elected, thereby recognising the complexity of multi-level governance (see Stoker 2004; 2006; Sweeting and Copus 2012). In practice in Australia, network democracy typically appears as partnerships with community leaders, private business, community organisations and other government institutions, in particular, other local governments and state associations for service provision and advocacy (see Gooding 2012).

At the base of Figure 1 is 'user-pays' or 'market' democracy, which for Haus and Sweeting (2006) has arisen influenced by New Public Management (NPM) (Diefenbach 2009; Head 2011) and public choice theory (Adams and Hess 2001; Johnson, Headley, and Jensen 2003). For this type, marketisation and economic efficiency are regarded as optimal criteria to determine the common good and how it will be produced. The 'citizen' then becomes the 'consumer' or the 'customer', empowered to choose the service or product they desire. In practice, this is reflected as organisational values focused on customer service and service choice. The central idea underpinning this type is that local government is the site of aggregating and sorting individual preferences, which decide the *provision* of services desired by the local citizenry. Yet local government need not *produce* these services, which ought to be allocated to the most cost-effective provider, including (for instance) the private sector, a hybrid entity (again, see Dollery and Johnson 2005) or, in the case of co-production, the citizenry (see Alford and Yates 2016).

At the right of Figure 1 is 'participatory' democracy, which is generally juxtaposed against the 'representative' type, but (again) is internally disaggregated into 'participatory', 'deliberative', 'collaborative governance' and 'co-production' (see Christensen and Grant 2016). It is with this quadrant of Haus and Sweeting's (2006) schema that this article is centrally concerned. Nevertheless, it is worth underscoring that, while Haus and Sweeting's (2006) account is useful, they do not discuss the commercial element of participatory practices as an element of local democracy, by which we mean the commercialisation of services and products that facilitate local democracy, and to which we turn our attention

directly below. Arguably, this disregard is common amongst discussions of democracy generally. For instance, Keane's recent (2009) articulation and exploration of 'monitory democracy' neglects the commercialisation of participatory practices. Other key theorisations – for instance, of participatory democracy (Pateman 1970, 2012) and of discursive democracy (Dryzek 1990) – are also silent on the topic of commercialisation *per se*. Instead, as Hendriks and Carson (2008, 295) noted, these accounts exhibit a tendency to present the market and deliberation as 'contrary worlds', where 'the market is seen as something that represses or even corrupts the public sphere'. Our discussion argues that existing conceptualisations of local democracy need to broaden to incorporate the commercial element, as evidenced in the existence of the community engagement industry discussed below.

3. Community engagement as an element of local democracy in Australia

We use the term 'community engagement' to include all activities where the local government invites or partners with the community, including deliberative methods. The phrase 'community engagement' has been selected over other variations due to its prevalence in the local government sector and despite there being a multiple of variants (see, for example, Head 2007). Reflecting this ambiguity in nomenclature, even a cursory glance at the local government acts of Australia's local government jurisdictions demonstrates that the terms 'public consultation', 'community participation' and 'public participation' are deployed interchangeably with each other and with the term 'community engagement' (*Local Government Act 2009 (Qld)*; *Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)*; *Local Government Bill 2018 (Vic)*; *Local Government Act 1999 (SA)*; *Local Government Act 2017 (NT)*; *Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)*; *Local Government Act 1993 (Tas)*; *Local Government Act 1995 (WA))*. Regardless of the term used, a widely accepted definition is 'the involvement of the community in decision-making' (Rowe and Frewer 2005, 253; IAP2 2016). While this definition seems relatively straightforward, it is ambiguous: Who are the community? What types of decisions? How much involvement? However, in this context, we place these considerations to one side (see Aulich 2009 for a discussion) to examine the commercialisation of community engagement and its implication for local democracy.

4. Evidence of the Australian local government community engagement industry

As noted in our Introduction, the state and territory governments have, perhaps inadvertently, been the most significant proponents of the local government community engagement. Australian local governments are required to adhere to an increasing number of statutes, ranging from land-use planning to health to the environment, long-term strategic plans and road closures, as stipulated by ensembles of legislation across all local government jurisdictions and not least of which are the local government acts (for overviews, see Christensen 2018b; Grant and Drew 2017, 217–264; Tan and Artist 2013). Regardless of the varying levels of prescription contained in the statutes across Australia's seven local government jurisdictions, the volume of engagement requirements placed on local governments has expanded (Aulich 2009).

Here, following from Hendriks and Carson's (2008) examination of 80 Deliberative Participatory Projects (DPPs), we examine three components of what we are labelling the 'community engagement industry', namely demand for engagement services, supply of these services and the continued growth in professional associations of these services.

4.1. Demand for engagement: census of local government community engagement

Estimating the actual number of engagement processes as an indicator of the demand for them is methodologically problematical for several reasons. First, as we have already flagged, the definition of what precisely constitutes community engagement is fluid. Second, while local governments, as democratically elected statutory corporations are more, rather than less, accountable to their sovereign state parliaments and their communities, this by no means entails that as organisations they are completely transparent: individual councils, and individual public servants within them, can choose to exercise some discretion in what they publicise, particularly over time. Third, because community engagement processes can be delivered by a party external to the local government, there can be a degree of obscurity when it comes to documenting the detail of specific instances of engagement.

To address these issues, a 'census' of community engagement activities in local government was developed and conducted in April 2017. It asked councils in NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria 14 questions pertaining to their community engagement practices. A total of 175 responses were received from the 352 councils invited to participate, a response rate of 49.7%. Four principal results relevant to our discussion were gleaned from the survey. First, the (self-reported) mean number of engagement processes per annum was 29.4 per council, with this number being higher for capital city and metropolitan councils (44.1) and lower for other council types – regional, rural and remote – as defined by the Australian Classification of Local Governments (DIRD 2017). Second, the most commonly used engagement methods reported can be considered as traditional: in the previous 12-month period 82.3% of respondents reported that their councils used public submissions; 73.7%, online surveys; 70.3%, advisory/community reference groups; 69.1%, public meetings and 67.5%, drop-in sessions and open houses. Third, half of the councils reported not having any dedicated community engagement staff, with numbers lower in rural and remote councils. Fourth, only 22.9% of councils reported undertaking 'all' of their own planning, delivery and engagement activities; 62.3% reported planning and delivering 'two-thirds or more' of these activities themselves; 10.3% reported undertaking 'about half'; and 4.0% reported undertaking 'about one third' of these activities. This indicates that a significant, although not definitive, component of all community engagement activities are outsourced, albeit based upon a self-reporting survey. Nevertheless, 175 responses across four jurisdictions is a significantly more robust cohort than the 80 instances of DPPs qualitatively interrogated by Hendriks and Carson (2008).

4.2. Private supply of community engagement: practitioner survey

To examine the principal focus of Hendriks and Carson's (2008) work, namely the 'supply' side of the community engagement market, a community engagement 'practitioner

survey' was developed and deployed in August 2017 as an online survey, promoted through professional associations and social media networks. It was open to all Australian residents who self-identified as community engagement practitioners. The sample was self-selecting and, as such, the exact size and distribution of people undertaking community engagement activities as part of their activities were not estimated by the survey. Moreover, it would be difficult to estimate the population utilising other methodologies. For instance, there is neither a direct career path nor compulsory accreditation or licensing processes for community engagement practitioners (Hendriks and Carson 2008).

A total of 375 responses were received. Of the 373 who were employed, 58.4% self-reported as local government employees; 12.3% as state government employees, 2.67% as being employed by a not-for-profit organisation and 0.5% as being employed in higher education. A total of 24% stated that they were self-employed, owner-managers or private-sector employees charging a fee for undertaking this activity.

Practitioners were asked what methods they had designed and delivered in the previous 12 months, the current 12 months and those they were intending to use in the future. Online surveys dominated (56.8% for past use, 69.6% for present use, 52.8% for intended future use). Other popular methods included small (30 people or fewer) workshops and summits (48% for past, 55.5% for present, 42.1% for intended future); advisory/community reference groups (53.9% for past, 54.4% for present, 43.2% for intended future use); public submissions (45.3% for past, 53.1% for present, 38.9% for future intended use); and public meetings (51.7% for past, 50.9% for present, 38.9% for future intended use). There was no significant difference between respondents from the public or private sectors, suggesting that skill sets of public practitioners and private consultants may not vary. Four of the five most prevalent methods used by practitioners in this survey (online surveys, advisory/community reference groups, public submissions and public meetings) matched those from the Australian local government community engagement census discussed above.

Practitioners were asked about their experience or exposure to different sectors, as either a public or a private practitioner. The findings suggest a degree of transience in the population. Most of the community engagement practitioners had experience in public institutions: 82.1% in local government, 45.9% in state government, 14.9% in federal government, 38.4% in not-for-profit and 32% in the private sector. The results by industry type were similarly varied: 25.3% for infrastructure, 22.1% for planning, 21.6% for environment, 14.9% for health, 13.3% for disaster and emergency response and 9.1% for higher education.

When asked about the approximate number of community engagement processes they had been involved in the last 12 months, participants responded from nil to 250 (presumably for those in large organisations in oversight or assistance roles), totalling 5,619 processes in the previous 12 months for all respondents.[1] The average number of processes across all respondents was 15.74. However, the average for *private* sector practitioners was higher, at 23.86.

4.3. Professional associations for community engagement practitioners

We now turn to the third element of the growth of deliberative consultants investigated by Hendriks and Carson (2008) and apply this to community engagement in Australian local

government, namely the professionalisation of the industry. It is worth underscoring that professional associations are responsible for structuring and regulating occupational practices through activities such as training and education, identifying competencies and standards, and sharing information (Christensen 2018a; Noordegraaf 2007). In the community engagement industry, the growth of these activities, many of them attracting a fee for service to members, serves as evidence of their success. It also demonstrates their role in encouraging community engagement. In response to 'the rising global interest in public participation' (IAP2 2016) the International Association of Public Participation Practitioners (IAP3) was formed in 1990. The following year it commenced the publication of a biannual periodical and the year after that the first conference was held in Oregon with the organisation's membership having reached 300 (IAP2 2016). In 1996 the organisation dispensed with the last 'P' ('Practitioners') from its name to reflect its broader membership base, in 1998 the Australasian chapter began operations and in 1999 the organisation launched a five-day certificate course. In 2004 the Association's periodical was replaced by the *International Journal of Public Participation*, which was spruiked as designing to 'serve as a medium through which academics and practitioners would exchange information and ideas about public participation' (Beavis 2016).[2]

Since these relatively recent beginnings, the IAP2 membership, trainings, conferences and events have increased and the 'Core Values', 'Public Participation Spectrum' and 'Code of Ethics of Public Participation Practitioners' are widely referenced and known by practitioners, and are cited as exemplary in the academic literature (see, for example, Head 2007; Nabatchi 2012). As shown in Table 1, international membership has reached over 4000, with more than half of these members from Australia and New Zealand. As of February 2016, the Australasian membership stood at 2795. Almost 29% (*n* = 799) identified as members of the local government sector (IAP2 Australasia staff member 2016, per comm 25 February). It is fair to assume that those members who identify as being part of the private sector conduct business with local government as clients, indicating a high level of involvement by private community engagement practitioners in Australian local government, the international membership figures for which are provided in Table 1.

Updating and expanding upon the discussion of Hendriks and Carson (2008, 303–304), the popularity of IAP2 membership in Australasia is also evidenced by the take-up of training run by the organisation. In the 2014/2015 financial year, the organisation declared that 1981 people participated in 137 courses (IAP2A 2015), a number that has steadily increased since the courses were first offered. In addition to the training courses, annual conferences regularly attract over 200 participants and are where the best practice 'Core Value Awards' are presented. In 2014 and 2015, 9 of 21 of these awards were given to local governments or local government partnerships (IAP2A 2014; 2015). In addition to

Table 1. Membership of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

	Australasia	Canada	Indonesia	Italy	Southern Africa	USA	Total
2011	1124	350			62	401	1937
2012	1338	467	28	51	42	511	2437
2013	1454	551	42	61	63	492	2663
2014	2062	587	56	64	46	451	3266
2015	2577	625	35	45	65	758	4105

Source: Adapted from IAP2A (2015).

the annual conference, there are symposiums, masterclasses and leadership forums. The annual income for the organisation in 2014/2015 totalled over A\$1.9 million, of which A\$1.5 million was attributable to training courses (IAP2A 2014, 2015).

While IAP2 is one of the most salient professional associations for community engagement practitioners, there are others. With a focus on the skill of facilitation, the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), formed in 1994, is a professional association that sets standards, provides accreditation, releases a newsletter, publishes the journal *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal* and runs conferences and events for members in over 65 countries (IAF 2016). Additionally, the Australasian Facilitators Network (AFN) is an informal self-organising group with regular network events, an annual conference and an active discussion list with over 800 participants (AFN 2014). 'Engage2Act', which commenced in 2013, describes itself as a 'collective of individuals committed to progressing citizen engagement practice' (Engage2Act 2016). The purpose of this paper is not to map all the professional associations that are driving the practice of community engagement in Australian local government, but to draw attention to the proliferation of these activities. The role of professional associations and commercialisation, in general, has unexplored implications in the standardisation of community engagement and local democracy.

5. Discussion: risks to local democracy from the community engagement industry

While a community engagement industry clearly exists, whether the commercial interests of practitioners are putting local democracy at risk is still a matter for debate. As we have noted, Hendriks and Carson (2008) depicted deliberative democracy practitioners as simultaneously driven by business imperatives and yet champions of deliberative democracy. They argued that commercialised practice had not, at that time, had a deleterious impact upon deliberation at the micro, or procedural, level and that those commercially engaged in deliberative democratic practices 'are more akin to a "community of practice" (CoP) … rather than a marketplace' (Hendriks and Carson 2008, 304). Yet they also proffered two ideal scenarios. In the first – an idyllic one – commercialisation leads to healthy competition between private providers of deliberative products and processes, drives down prices and fosters innovation and excellence, alongside a proliferation of these through communities of practice and associated training *and* healthy secondary markets. In the second – dystopian – one, the label of deliberation is appropriated by 'various sectors' where bad deliberative practice undermines not only the efficacy therein, also of the profession *writ large,* of deliberation and of democracy more broadly. Moreover, Hendriks and Carson (2008, 305–306) suggested that elements of *both* of these scenarios were then evident, and that there might be no less than five possible negative implications of commercialism for democratic governance. These are: first, the fostering of elitism by professional associations exercising market closure, thereby undermining deliberative democracy – a situation of profound irony; second, 'homogenisation', where 'off-the-shelf' solutions are inappropriately applied at the expense of due diligence of the particularities of individual situations; third, a reduction in the intrinsic richness, or 'meaning' of deliberation per se; fourth, a 'depolitising' of issues (federalism, class, gender) inside banal (our word) deliberative frameworks; and fifth, a detracting from more systemic, or

'sustained', practices internal to a variety of organisations (public, private and non-profit) (Hendriks and Carson 2008, 307–308).

These observations are of considerable interest. However, the work of Hendriks and Carson (2008) in relation to deliberative practices – and noting that their sample had an over-representation from (Western Australian) state-sponsored deliberative process – is by no means directly transferrable to the focus of our discussion, namely the impacts upon local government if the community engagement industry *writ large* continues to commercialise. Moreover, the broad schema of local democracy *and* its place in intergovernmental relations put forward in Section 2 of this article must be kept in mind if we are to take a strategic approach to understanding the phenomenon. Conceived as such, the three areas of commercialisation, standardisation and strategic capacity now fall into focus.

5.1. Commercialisation: balancing democracy and profit?

In this article, we have established that a considerable portion of engagement activity undertaken by Australian local governments now consists of councils buying community engagement commodities from private providers. It can be argued that this phenomenon – by no means absolute, but tangible – renders the service more cost-effective than local governments providing their own practitioners. As such, it conforms to tendencies in public sector organisations to outsource, thereby providing greater flexibility in operations, particularly in terms of budgets. This is especially the case for local government, where financial capacity is highly variable across different types of local government (metropolitan, rural, remote). However, this confluence between the market and democracy is widely recognised as uneasy (Hendriks and Carson 2008; Cooper and Smith 2012; Lee 2014, 2015; Bherer, Gauthier, and Simard 2017a; Grant and Drew 2017), predominately for the reason that commercial providers may risk undermining the democratic purpose of participation in the face of maintaining client satisfaction. Cooper and Smith (2012) and Hendriks and Carson (2008) believe that non-profit producers, such as academic institutions, are less likely to compromise the democratic process and outcome in the face of clients' wants. Yet this view naively assumes that academic institutions are less concerned with commercial outcomes. Notwithstanding different motivations for different types of providers, commercialisation does pose the potential risk of the interests of the client over-riding those of the community. Moreover, any attempt to mitigate against this risk by way of oversight from (for instance) local government managers or elected officials might stymie the *raison d'être* of both community engagement – to elicit the views of the community in comparatively unmediated forms – and the operation of the market, in that private providers would be obliged to conform to one or more reporting regimes.

5.2. Standardisation: raising or lowering the bar?

Standardisation of community engagement practices is occurring across all of the dimensions in our discussion. It would be erroneous to assert that legislative requirements in local government acts are uniform; rather, they exhibit some characteristics of being both 'place-based' and 'path-dependent'. First, for example, community engagement as

an element of strategic planning is less a requirement in Queensland than it is in NSW and WA, for instance. Moreover, in South Australia and Tasmania, the respective state-based local government associations take a more proactive role in providing and facilitating community engagement as part of both the activities of local governments and the sector as a whole (see Grant and Drew 2017, 217–264; Tan and Artist 2013). Yet, *at precisely the same time*, the way that council-generated 'community strategic plans' comprise an element of several jurisdictions' overall planning frameworks is decidedly similar in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia (again, see Grant and Drew 2017, 217–264; Tan and Artist 2013). Second, the growth and what we will denote as the 'institutional hardening' of professional associations around community engagement suggests – in line with the literature on professionalisation generally (see Noordegraaf 2007) – that these organisations are moving to position themselves to exercise market closure around membership. Third, the training offered by these groups, while not proscribing innovation within these practices, cannot fail to offer standardised approaches to engagement. Fourth, commercialisation of community engagement products and services by practitioners is moving the industry toward 'off-the-shelf' engagement processes, such as the trademarked methods discussed above, a point made by Hendriks and Carson (2008, 307) in their discussion of deliberative practices.

The argument in favour of standardisation is that it ensures a degree of 'best practice' which encourages accountability and accessibility, as well as providing common language and values which enhance legitimacy (Lewanski and Ravazzi 2017; Mazeaud and Nonjon 2017). However, arguments against standardisation include that processes will become less responsive and even limiting, given the various contexts where it occurs (Hendriks and Carson 2008; Lee 2014) and that more 'place-based' forms of engagement are delegitimised, risking elitism and exclusion (Lee 2014, 2015; Bherer, Gauthier, and Simard 2017b). Using Haus and Sweeting's (2006, 267) definition of democracy, the 'process of collective self-determination' risks becoming inflexible and ultimately unresponsive to the needs of the community; as we have already noted, in their discussion of deliberative practices, Hendriks and Carson (2008, 307) suggested an irony that standardisation and elitism entail.

5.3. Capacity: governance, community and democracy

The third area of concern for local government centres on the issue of capacity. Within the international literature concerned with the devolution of state power to sub-national (and in particular local) government it is commonplace to point to the desirability of both financial and (in particular) governance, or 'administrative', capacity if these governments are to play their roles (for an overview covering a range of polities, see Shah 2002). However, it is a mistake to think of governance capacity as merely an issue for local governments in polities labelled as 'developing' – on the contrary. For example, a core focus of the work undertaken by the (then) Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government (ACELG) was for much-needed capacity-building, centred particularly on workforce issues *alongside* community engagement, as twin elements in regional, remote and very remote local governments in Australia (see, for example, Pillora and McKinlay 2011; Bolitho 2013). Moreover, it is commonplace to point out the dual roles that local government employees play in terms of capacity, in both enhancing their own organisations and supporting

communities in non-metropolitan (and particularly rural and remote) areas by, for example, being involved in local civic associations, sending their children to local schools and contributing to aggregate demand more generally (see, for example, Dollery, Wallis, and Akimov 2008). As such, on the grounds of both local government capacity and community capacity in rural and remote areas, there are reasons to be cautious in endorsing an approach to community engagement and its practitioners that is not grounded in local government organisations and their communities. Additionally, one of the most profound defences of local government *per se* is that it provides for the government of not just a local area, but governing with what we will describe as the *wisdom of place* as discussed by J. S. Mill (1865) Harold Laski (1967, 411–412) and Michael Lyons (1997), for example, and which forms the moral and economic foundation for the principle of subsidiarity (see Shah 2002, 5). On these grounds – that is, on the grounds of both government *and* community capacity – it makes little sense to endorse a 'fly-in, fly-out' model for community engagement practitioners, wherever those local governments may be.

An additional, capacity-related argument against the commercialisation of community engagement can be identified. Returning to the heuristic of local government depicted in Figure 1 based upon Haus and Sweeting (2006), we noted that participatory democracy forms elements of only one quadrant of the four-part model of local democracy. As such, it might not particularly matter if the other elements of the model (i.e. 'representative', 'user-pays' and 'network') remain more, rather than less, 'in play' in the local democracy 'mix' and in defensible forms. However, in situations where this is not the case – where (for instance) participation in representative procedures is low (as it is where it is not compulsory in Australian local government jurisdictions in Tasmania, South Australia and WA), or alternatively where 'participatory governance' assumes a heightened moral value (as suggested by Aulich 2009) to the extent that other democratic practices are eroded – the issues associated with a move to the market provision for community engagement assume increased importance.

Community engagement can be the means of collective self-determination to assist in local governance and local democracy. However, the 'community engagement industry' will, in all likelihood, continue to propagate. These developments warrant continued and careful scrutiny.

Notes

1. Some processes may be counted twice if different respondents are recounting the same process. The survey also included people practising community engagement in other levels of government beyond local government.
2. The *Journal of Public Deliberation* has since absorbed the *International Journal of Public Participation*. The journal promotes itself as a journal 'with the principal objective of synthesising the research, opinion, projects, experiments and academics and practitioners in the multi-disciplinary field of deliberative democracy' (JPD n.d).

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PART 3

Chapter 6 – Christensen, H.E. 2018. 'Community Engagement and Professionalisation: Emerging Tensions.' *Research in Ethical Issues in Organisations*, 20: 117-113. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-209620180000020010

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Helen E. Christensen,

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CHAPTER 8

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONALIZATION: EMERGING TENSIONS

Helen E. Christensen

ABSTRACT

An increase in community engagement by governments across Australia's three-tiered federal polity conforms to international trends. It represents a multidimensional institutionalization of participatory democracy designed to involve the public in decision-making. Increasingly, it is a practice which displays the markers of professionalization, including (self-described) professionals, professional associations and a code of ethics. The individuals who design, communicate, and facilitate community engagement are placed in a unique position, whereas most professions claim to serve both their client or employer and a greater public good, community engagement practitioners play these roles while also claiming to serve as "guardians" of democratic processes. Yet the claimed professionalization of community engagement is raising some questions: Is community engagement really a profession – and by what criteria ought this be assessed? What tensions do community engagement practitioners face by "serving multiple masters," and how do they manage these? More pointedly, how can ethics inform our understanding of community engagement and its professionalization? This chapter examines the case for the practice of community engagement as a profession using Noordegraaf's (2007) pillars of pure professionalism as a guide. It then explores some practical examples of the tensions

practitioners may experience. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the future direction of community engagement given its positioning.

Keywords: Community engagement; community engagement practitioners; public participation; public participation professionals; facilitators; professionalization; professional ethics

INTRODUCTION

In the past half-century, public participation, also labeled community engagement in Australasia (see Bell & Hindmoor, 2009), has emerged as a near-ubiquitous feature of public-state relations globally (Dean, 2016, p. 213) and as a social, economic, and political force, both inside and outside of governments (see, e.g., Head, 2011). Activities range from salient, legally mandated processes, such as public hearings and submissions (Fung, 2015; Innes & Booher, 2004) through to participatory innovations such as collaborative governance (Aulich, 2009; Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary, 2005) and participatory budgeting (Christensen & Grant, 2016; Fung, 2006; Pateman, 2012). Although the spectrum of activities that can be considered community engagement is broad, the binding attribute is that they involve communities and stakeholders in decision making, or at least in making contributions to decision-making processes, around policies, plans, or programs (Quick & Bryson, 2016).

As community engagement has become established, so too have those who practice it. The roles of public participation practitioners have recently gained scholarly attention (Bherer, Gauthier, & Simard, 2017a, 2017b; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Grant & Drew, 2017; Hendriks & Carson, 2008; Lee, 2014, 2015; Lee, McNulty, & Shaffer, 2015) as observers have begun to recognize that these practitioners, who often deploy the label of "professional" in their self-descriptions (see, e.g., Bherer et al., 2017a; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Lee, 2015) are not merely one variable, or input, in a democratic process, but that potentially *they* are the people who conceive, legitimize, facilitate, and profit from the process (Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2013).

The claim of being "professional" by practitioners might be considered as a step toward establishing the practice as a "profession"; bringing with it status and recognition. However, the concept of a "profession" is one which is much contested (Evetts, 2013; Sciulli, 2005; Tapper & Millett, 2015) and has important ethical dimensions (see Tapper & Millett, 2015 for a detailed analysis). Throughout this chapter, the term "profession" is used in the broad sense, articulated by Evetts (2013, p. 781) as "essentially the knowledge-based category of service occupations which usually follows a period of tertiary education and vocational training and experience." Consequently, "professionalization" is understood as the process designed to achieve the status of profession, and "professional" is understood as denoting a member of a profession. The concept of professionalism is critically explored as it pertains to the practices of community engagement and the claims to professionalization associated with these.

It is, however, worth noting that there are more nuanced conceptualizations of the term "profession," such as Tapper and Millett's (2015) exploration of the concept. They highlight the "formal" element of the concept as "employing dangerous (or potent) knowledge in pursuit of a public good by people of good character who behave ethically in the use of that knowledge" (Tapper & Millett, 2015, p. 16). The "formal" sits opposed to the "material" element which varies without changing the nature of the concept (Tapper & Millett, 2015, p. 12). These concepts will also be deployed in my critical discussion of community engagement as a profession.

Arguably, the putative professionalization of community engagement practitioners is itself relatively mundane, given that "the labor force as a whole is in one way or another becoming professionalized" through increasing specialization, standardization, regulation, monitoring, and certification (Wilensky, 1964, p. 137). However, what is significant is the unique placement of community engagement practitioners, whether they be private sector providers – paid consultants – or public sector employees, as intermediaries between communities and public institutions as facilitators of democracy. In other traditions, "professionals serve clients and employers and, ostensibly, society as a whole through [their] service" (Kultgen, 1988, p. 4). Community engagement practitioners serve clients and employers; yet they are also required to directly and overtly serve society so that the claim of directly enhancing democracy can be substantiated (Hendriks & Carson, 2008; Lee, 2015). Arguably, the work of community engagement can comprise the very nexus between the community on the one hand and the polity (particularly the local polity) on the other. Crucially, those who practice community engagement for financial remuneration are also seeking either remuneration for their services (in the case of public sector employees) or to establish a credible "fee for service" relationship (in the case of private consultants), accompanied by the range of issues that characterize principal-agent relationships (see Lane, 2005). Thus, community engagement practitioners are often simultaneously the service provider, the financial beneficiary, the designers of democratic process and principles and, the guardian to these processes.

These multiple roles and the tensions they create have been acknowledged, in part, by recent research. In their chapter "Who's the client? The sponsor, citizens, or the participation process" Bherer et al. (2017a) discuss how practitioners seek to reconcile tensions between commercial interest and the need to remain impartial. In their discussion of the commercialization of deliberative democracy, Hendriks and Carson (2008, p. 309) conclude that commercialization has not yet had a negative effect upon processes or outcomes. However, Lee (2014, p. 495) argues that practitioners "seem to be actively struggling with tensions and glossing over them at different moments in their work." This line of enquiry has been developed in later work (Lee, 2015; Lee et al., 2015) where it is emphasized that democratic participation is no longer a "do-it-yourself" proposition for the citizenry such as the grassroots activism from the late 1960s was; rather it is facilitated by bureaucratic systems and community engagement practitioners (see also Grant & Drew, 2017, pp. 254–257).

The roles of designer and of guardian of democratic process and democratic principles (see, e.g., Bühlmann, Merkel, & Wessles, 2008; Held, 2006; Hyden, 1997) places the community engagement practitioner in a precarious, yet ultimately privileged position and it is one that has democracy and its normative principle of participation as a cornerstone. At the level of normative theory, participation is frequently praised as an element of democracy, with some observers arguing that it brings significant benefits and that more is needed (see, e.g., Hindess, 2002; Norris, 2011). Proponents for the affirmative often commence their case with an account of classical Athenian democracy (see Held, 2006, pp. 11–28) then trace through theories such as Rousseau and May's (2002) rejection of representative democracy and his aspiration for a *volontè general*, or "general will" of the people, and de Tocqueville's (2009) advocacy of the democratic skills, political efficacy, and collective problem-solving solutions that result from participation.

Yet doubts continue to haunt the principle of participation as evidenced by a number of trends: the ideological appeal of minimal or no participation to some individuals and political parties; technocratic public administration trends such as New Public Management (NPM) which provide limited budgets for public participation (Martin, 1998; Mulgan, 2006); and, a lack of clarity about where public participation fits within regulatory and statutory contexts that are primarily geared toward representative practices (Christensen & Grant, 2016). Moreover, there is an ongoing debate about whether community engagement practices are responding to a perceived "democratic deficit," or if they themselves are creating the demand for their services (see Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2017). For instance, in their empirical research of Italian practitioners, Lewanski and Ravazzi (2017) suggest that most practitioners are seeking to address the democratic deficit by rebuilding trust; regaining legitimacy and providing transparency rather than shifting political power away from representatives. Alternatively, for their part, Grant and Drew (2017, pp. 254–257) question the normative ascendance of participation over representative arrangements and the roles of private providers in this, suggesting that the de-politicization provided by community engagement practices serves the interest of both the providers and politicians. Moreover, Aulich's (2009, p. 44) comment that citizen participation has "almost universal acceptance" is telling, for it is the "almost" that indicates a lack of certainty concerning the place of participation in democracy. Because community engagement is an, as yet, underscrutinized practice, an exploration of its putative professionalization is opportune.

There are four main parts to the chapter. First, a concise account of how professionalization has been understood is provided, focusing principally on work by sociologists. This includes a framework of professionalism by Noordegraaf (2007) which serves as a foundation for the second part of the chapter, discussing whether the practice of community engagement is a profession. Third, a series of short vignettes is presented which serve as practical examples to illustrate the tensions community engagement practitioners may experience. The concluding discussion focuses on the three questions raised in the abstract: Is community engagement really a profession? What tensions do community engagement

practitioners face by "serving multiple masters"? And, how can ethics inform our understanding of community engagement and its professionalization? While these questions are not addressed definitively, reflections are made with the intention of beginning a larger conversation.

PROFESSIONALISM

Writings on and conceptualizations of professionalism have been dominated by sociologists since the 1920s. Contributions have included those that can be broadly cast as adopting a functionalist perspective, wherein the professions are viewed as a positive and stabilizing force for society (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Tawney, 1920). In the 1950s and 1960s, the "checklist" or "trait" approach became common (Greenwood, 1957; Millerson, 1964; Wilensky, 1964). While this approach has been subject to numerous criticisms, such as its inability to consider the causal relationship between traits (Martimianakis, Maniate, & Hodges, 2009) or an inability to explain the appeal of professionalism and why some occupations have more power than others (Evetts, 2006), it remains popular in practice, with evidence of it found in most professional associations (Martimainakis et al., 2009). These criticisms were responded to in a third approach, a major shift, grounded in social constructionism and neo-Weberian theories, which sought to examine how professions "carve[d] out their privileged location in the division of labor," thus introducing a political economics to the study of professionalism (Martimianakis et al., 2009, p. 832). Research began to explore critically the political and economic goals of professional organizations and institutes seeking professional jurisdiction and legitimacy and examined how they sought and affected market closure (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1986; Larson, 1977). This work was followed by a focus on social and cultural inequalities (see e.g., Beagan, 2001; Witz, 1992). Recent research in professionalism has seen an emphasis placed on the role of organizations in professions and their interactions with changing management approaches (Evetts, 2011; Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2015). For instance, Muzio, Hodgson, Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, and Hall (2011) argue that traditional "collegial" professionalization is making way for a new "corporate" professionalism.

One of Noordegraaf's (2007) conceptualizations of professionalism, which serves as a useful framework for this discussion, is "pure" professionalism. "Purified professionalism," argues Nordegraaf (2007, p.771) is one which adopts the traditional understanding of professionalism and uses a clear definition. The framework outlines two "pillars": First, what professionals know and do (i.e., "content"); second, the associations that give them privileges (i.e., "control").

Examining Fig. 1, the "content" pillar is supported by the knowledge and skills individuals have acquired, many of which are codified to ensure exclusivity (Wilensky, 1964). Knowledge and skills are portrayed as traditionally being sourced from intense tertiary learning, where students learn the approach of their profession. The knowledge can be abstract, general or esoteric and the professionals make inferences and use standardized skills to treat cases (Noordegraaf, 2007).
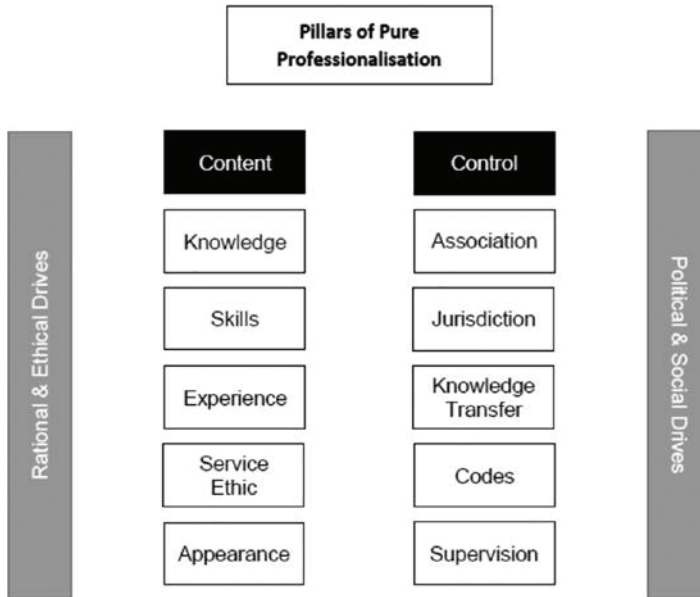
Fig. 1.   Noordegraaf's (2007) Pillars of Pure Professionalism.
Source: Adapted from Noordegraaf (2007).

The knowledge is codified to assist the professional; also to create a barrier to market entry to practice, hence creating occupational, as well as social closure (Weber, 1946) or exclusivity. Through practice, individuals gain experience and learn how to behave and demonstrate the appropriate service ethic so they know how to react and respond in their role. Alternatively, the "control" pillar refers to institutional control exercised by professionals (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Thus, one form of control is professional associations, which exercise regulatory and institutionalizing functions over the profession, such as selecting and rejecting members, introducing standards and codes and establishing mechanisms for communication. Jurisdiction is then created using laws and licensing which all act to standardize knowledge and skills as well as the training and selecting of members and enforcement of codes of conduct (Abbott, 1988). Knowledge is transferred through training as well as other professionalization activities, including conferences, journals, and magazines and codes which allow professions to set rules and deal with those who transgress. The professions are supervised with reward and punishment practices, such as complaint policies for poor practice, and advanced membership standings such as "fellows" and "ambassadors." These codes also act as guards of a normative value systems (Evetts, 2003). Noordegraaf (2007, pp. 767–768) argues that these pillars and their features are underpinned by a series of "drives": a rational drive for professionals to be better at their work; an ethical drive to guard values within the professional industry; a political drive to strengthen ideologies and gain power, privilege, and status; and, a social drive to create a community and social closure among professionals.

IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT A PROFESSION?

A thorough survey of all community engagement practices to reach a definitive answer as to whether or not it does indeed constitute a profession is a task well outside the scope of any one paper. Nevertheless, in this context we can critically consider the field of community engagement against the theory of professionalism using Noordegraaf's (2007) pillars of pure professionalism as a framework. A useful entry point to so-doing is provided by the June 2014 "Special Issue" of the *Journal of Public Deliberation*, where writers were asked to assess the state of the field of public deliberation, with their responses including reflection upon the more profound question of "is there a field?" (Black, Shaffer, & Thomas, 2015, p. 1). While Black et al.'s (2015) avoidance of the term "profession" here is perhaps indicative of an implicit wish to not engage with both the issue of professionalism and, as such, to place explicitly normative considerations to one side, they nevertheless deduce three main points. First, while there are shared beliefs and purposes among practitioners (Black et al., 2015, p. 1), there is no consensus about the purpose of public deliberation. Second, community engagement work is often "dismissed" by those with power and authority – or as Black et al. (2015, p. 2) state, "perhaps the stickiest challenge is that people with positional authority (e.g., policy-makers) and structural advantages (e.g., the wealthy) can easily disregard our work." Third, that there is lot of potential for the work of community engagement to address large and complex societal issues utilizing public deliberation, but that it has not yet lived up to this promise, with "larger implication[s] … not well understood or articulated outside of our sphere" (Black et al., 2015, p. 5). These reflections are relatively recent and can (arguably) reasonably be shared beyond public deliberation and into public participation, dialogue, or community engagement. While this example suggests that the field, or profession, does not yet appear "fully formed" (my phrase) in the entrenched senses explored by the professionalism literature discussed above, it does suggest that that there is what I will describe as some *semblance* of a profession. This in turn suggests that there is also some semblance of a *professional*.

Noordegraaf's (2007) pillars, illustrated in Fig.1, provide a robust framework to reflect on this emerging field of community engagement and reveal the multi-dimensional, if ambiguous, nature of its professionalism. Examining Fig.1, the *content* pillar identifies what professionals know and do: namely, the features of knowledge, skills, experience, service ethic, and appearance. Specialist knowledge provides the basis upon which professionals exercise their ability to decide, analyze and advise, or, the ability to apply theory. Professionals undertake the tasks of deduction, analysis and advising, and evidence, reasoning and skills are used to do this. In the field of community engagement, however, there is a distinct lack of a cohesive body of knowledge, including substantial empirical evidence, with common terminology only being used from the 1970s and relevant research scattered through the journals of a number of disciplines, including political science, public administration, social work, community development and planning and environment (see, e.g., Bingham et al., 2005; Eversole, 2012; Innes & Booher, 2004). In their study of professionalism in public relations Breit and Demetrious

(2010, p. 24) came to a similar conclusion, arguing that public relations knowledge is both general, rather than specialized, and "thin" or experiential. Breit and Demetrious (2010) concluded that this makes the public relations profession vulnerable to other professional groups wanting to acquire access and influence. Arguably, similarities can be drawn with community engagement and other associated disciplines, such as communications. It is this lack of a cohesive body work that is the most significant barrier to the field being deemed a profession, at least using Noordegraaf's (2007) pillars.

While the body of knowledge used by community engagement practitioners is elusive, there is stronger evidence to suggest that there is a common set of skills and experience, the subsequent elements in Noordegraaf's (2007) pillars. Those most often referred to include: process design skills; communication skills; and most significantly, facilitation skills (Chilvers, 2017; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Lee et al., 2015; Mansbridge, Hartz-Karp, Amengual, & Gastil, 2006; Mazeaud & Nonjon, 2017; Quick & Sandfort, 2017). In a study of UK practitioners, Chilvers (2017, p. 122) argued that expertise, while informed by theories, "is fundamentally grounded in personal experience, learning by doing, and an ethical commitment to empowerment" and that facilitation is perceived as a "learned art, craft, or skill." The feature of a "service ethic" refers to a shared motivation to provide a public good, a feature which, although poorly documented, is likely present in community engagement professionals, given its activist roots (Floridia, 2017). In these practices of skills, experience, and service ethics, community engagement appears to have stronger claim to be considered a profession.

The final content feature of "appearance" refers primarily to behaviors, speech, and dress, a feature that has not been commented on in research specific to community engagement practitioners. According to Noordegaaf's (2007) framework, this pillar is underpinned by the rational *and* ethical motivations of professionals themselves, the rational being the desire to problem-solve, provide better service and better outcomes, while the ethical component is exemplified in the drive to guard the service ethic and certain values. This aspect is discussed in more detail below.

Again examining Fig.1, the second pillar –"control" – consists of association, jurisdiction, knowledge transfer, codes, and supervision. Noordegraaf (2007, p. 767) defines associations as those that control and regulate practice either formally or informally. Professions typically do this by establishing professional associations which set codes of ethics and competencies. They then determine how these codes and standards will be achieved and maintained; admitting *and* denying entrance based upon licensing and admission procedures and investigating complaints and issues of incompetence (Evetts, 2014, p. 43). The largest association for community engagement practitioners in Australasia is the regional affiliate of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) which comprises 2,795 members (IAP2 Australasian staff member 2016, personal communication, 25 February). There are other related organizations, such as those for facilitators, as well as "Engage 2 Act," a newly formed community engagement "collective of individuals committed to progressing high quality community engagement

practice" (E2A, 2017). However, IAP2 is arguably the most well-established professional association for community engagement practitioners in Australia and New Zealand. IAP2 has established a popular training program; it has partnered with the US-based Deliberative Democracy Consortium (DDC) to produce the *Journal of Public Deliberation;* it has produced a list of "Core Values" which are used to judge best practice process awards in affiliate regions and globally; and promoted a Code of Ethics for practitioners (IAP2, n.d.). However, while there is evidence of quality assurance standards from the Australasian affiliate (IAP2A, 2015) of the Association, there is no evidence that there are features in place that would ensure its control and regulation of the sector. This suggests that when assessed against this element of Noordegaaf's (2007) framework, the practice of public participation is not a profession.

There is also little evidence that the field has established a discrete jurisdiction and has established restrictions concerning the transfer of knowledge. Knowledge transfer has been regarded as tantamount to professional control (Abbott, 1988) and includes the ability to legally, and socially, restrict those who practice a profession, thus exercising social closure as described by Weber (1946). When discussing his professional systems model, Abbott (1988) explains that traditional professions gained jurisdiction by specializing in abstract and esoteric knowledge and have constantly refined the boundaries of this knowledge to ensure survival. Yet beyond the creation of a certified professional program recently established by the United States IAP2 affiliate (IAP2USA, 2017), which could be considered a first step to exercising Weberian closure, there is little evidence that the community engagement field has engaged in acts of jurisdiction making and closure. For instance, in a recent exploration of the participatory democracy market in France, Mazeaud and Nonjon (2017, p.47) argue that the market is "fragmented and competitive" and made up primarily of consultancies who offer public participation services as an additional "a la carte" offering to their primary consulting services. Without detailed empirical data it is difficult to assess whether or not the situation is the same in Australia, although it has been alluded to in some research (see, e.g., Hendriks & Carson, 2008).

On the contrary, the idea that community engagement services are being provided as a "secondary service set" to other disciplines, such as planning, engineering, and public relations, would suggest that there is not a professional jurisdiction for community engagement. While there are training programs, there are not dedicated higher education pathways that exist in other professions that are required for admission into a professional association. For instance, in their 2009 purposive survey of 345 predominantly North American-based public deliberation practitioners, Lee and Polletta (2009) found that practitioners hold advanced degrees and certificates in a variety of disciples, including education; conflict resolution, public administration, communications, business, and law. Following on from this, Lee (2015, p. 44) reports that many practitioners "maintain footholds in other types of consulting" (see also Bherer et al., 2017b), thus supporting the point of Breit and Demetrious (2010). Training programs include those provided by IAP2. In 2015/2016, 155 courses were conducted for 2,479 participants in Australian and New Zealand (IAP2A, 2016).

Lee and Polletta (2009) identify a number of other training programs in the field, of which most are skill or technique-specific. Again, this evidence suggests that the practice of community engagement is not a profession when assessed against this criterion.

Also listed in Noordegaaf's (2007) "control" pillar is the feature of "codes" which refer to informal and formal codes such as codes of ethics. As with many professions and communities of practice, a code of ethics exists for community engagement practitioners, although its use and prevalence is unknown. The "IAP2 Code of Ethics" (IAP2, n.d.) provides members with principles to guide how individuals should practice community engagement. It also provides members with a list of "Core Values" (IAP2, n.d.), a set of principles which set out what a good community engagement process is.

The final feature of Noordegaaf's (2007, p. 76) "control" pillar in Fig.1 is that of supervision, which speaks to procedures for "dealing with complaints and punishing members" and supporting members to negotiate their practice and their ethics. In many professions, codes of ethics serve as the rulebook which, when applied, highlight shortfalls in practice (for a discussion, see Breit & Demetrious, 2010). For community engagement practitioners, there is no supervision or repercussion for not adhering to a code of ethics, beyond market repercussions. Given that community engagement practitioners are not compulsorily accredited in any way and membership appears open to all, this feature is noticeably absent. This pillar is underpinned by the political drive of practitioners to gain power and status as well as social drives to form communities and create social closure, as shown in Fig.1. Noordegraaf (2007, p. 768) states that these drives, along with the rational and ethical drives, "balance each other," although this is not always the case, with imbalances resulting in unprofessionalism – however, ambiguously defined this is.

It is worth underscoring the limitations of Noordegraaf's (2007) framework, something he does himself. Frameworks such as the "pillars of pure professionalism" fail to answer a number of conceptual questions in the context of knowledge societies with flexible specializations. Questions such as: Where does professionalism in the public sector fit? How does it work with bureaucracies? What about the increasing importance of the organizations? What about the priority of efficiency and austerity? In seeking to address these questions, Noordegraaf argues that three types of professions can be identified: "pure" (as outlined), "situated" and "hybridized." Situated professionalism is defined by broadening professionalism from traditional professionals to include experts, while hybridized professionalism is a reinterpretation where reflective practitioners require links to the outside world (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2015). While the field of community engagement does not align with the "pure" type of professionalism, it may align with the "situated" or "hybridized" approaches. Even so, we ought to be aware that this broadening of the criteria for what constitutes a profession serves the interests of those fields of practice that do not fit the "pure" type, in that the claim to the label allows them to exercise forms of Weberian closure discussed above.

TENSIONS

While the discussion of professional status is likely to persist for the years to come, practitioners have a more pressing concern: how to manage the emerging tensions that professionalization is bringing. To illustrate this point, three vignettes are presented. I then explore how professional ethics might assist in broadening understanding.

1. A consultancy is appointed to design and deliver a potentially contentious project for a government client. The job is assigned to the principal and a junior consultant. At the same time as winning this job the consultancy wins a number of other jobs, limiting the time the principal can spend on the project and the bulk of the work falls to the junior consultant. Toward the end of the delivery of the project, the junior consultant realizes they have forgotten to identify and engage with a major stakeholder group. It is likely the input from this group would significantly alter the project outcome and it would also make a large amount of the costly technical work done to date void. The contract is due to end in two weeks. The junior consultant is unsure if they should attempt to include this stakeholder group at this late stage as there would be a cost to both their consultancy and the government organization as well the risk that the other stakeholders would become disgruntled at having spent a great deal of time working toward an outcome only to have it change.
2. A practitioner based inside a government organization is in the final weeks of a large deliberative process which has spanned several months. Participants constitute a "mini-public" and together they have developed three options and have also been tasked with selecting the final outcome. The elected representatives have seen these options and have a strong preference for one. The elected representatives know they have declared they will support the option the group chooses, but they are keen to see if there is some way that their favored option could be chosen. The practitioner values the relationship with the elected representatives and is wanting to build the profile and budget allocation of engagement within the organization.
3. A consultant is appointed to design and deliver an engagement process for a large public service organization. The contract is for a significant sum of money. In the early weeks of designing the engagement process, there are some changes to the project and the consultant realizes that there is no influence available for the community about to be consulted thus making it more of a communications or public relations exercise. They could suggest re-scoping the process to a smaller and less-costly communications exercise or say nothing and receive the larger, and anticipated, financial remuneration while risking disingenuous engagement with the community.

These vignettes illustrate the tensions community engagement practitioners, both internal and external to organizations, may experience in their roles. They touch on issues of neutrality, transparency, commercial interests, personal

interest, supervision, independence, and inclusivity inter alia. This chapter has thus far hinted at how professional ethics may bring some understanding and clarity to these tensions. The themes of public good, good practitioners, and good actions by practitioners are all relevant.

Working with the public to determine what the public good is, is what most community engagement practitioners would espouse as the very essence of their work. Professionals seek to determine who is affected and will then work with those people to assist them in determining what they perceive is their greatest good. Examining the first vignette, to decide about the greatest good for the majority affected without engaging them would not only be inherently undemocratic, but also contradict the claims that community engagement enhances decision making and ensures the sustainability of those decisions. The tension for practitioners, however, is: when should this outcome-focused approach to collective decision making be prioritized over other ethical approaches to decision making such as rights-based approaches? Should practitioners and participants work to an agreed set of moral principles across all decisions? Who decides what the public good is and how it is known? For example, is there is a moral obligation to involve the missing stakeholder group?

The theme of the good practitioner is also pertinent in community engagement practice. What character traits and principles are required to make a good community engagement practitioner? The literature suggests (sometimes inexplicitly) that community engagement practitioners should demonstrate openness, transparency, inclusivity, and probably most significantly, neutrality (Mansbridge et al., 2006; Moore, 2012; Spada & Vreeland, 2013). There is, however, no widely accepted consensus on which virtues should be included and prioritized over others. For example, in the second vignette, should the practitioner prioritize their neutrality above all else – including their strategic (and potentially financially rewarding) relationship with the particular set of elected representatives – and the potential for more work on the basis of being recommended to other elected groups by this particular cohort? For community engagement practitioners, is neutrality a form of self-interest, and if it matches with participants, is it of concern? Do delineations of who commissions and pays for the work change perceptions or is it likely that the work is still associated with the organization responsible for the engagement?

Finally, there is the issue of how to understand good actions by practitioners. Is it unreasonable, or unethical, for practitioners to put their needs above those of the client or the democratic process? Should practitioners be wholly self-interested, wholly altruistic or neither? For example, in the third vignette, should the practitioners act in their own interest or that of the client and community?

As a relatively new and underscrutinized practice, there is little to no guidance for practitioners as they face these dilemmas. As previously mentioned, IAP2 provides members with a Code of Ethics for practitioners and Core Values to guide practice but there is no evidence that they are widely used, especially given the disparity and fragmentation of practitioners.

BROADER OBSERVATIONS

The abstract for this chapter posed a series of questions: Is the practice of community engagement really a profession – and by what criteria is it assessed as such? What tensions do community engagement practitioners face by "serving two masters," and how do they manage these? How can ethics inform our understanding of community engagement and its professionalization? Such large questions would require more time to answer; however, this chapter is an attempt to critically think through these issues.

To the question of whether community engagement is a really a profession –Noordegraaf's (2007) pillars of pure professionalism provide a useful framework to assess the current state of the practice of community engagement. As outlined at the beginning of this section, it is not the intention of this chapter to provide a definitive ruling on whether or not the community engagement field has reached professional status. By discussing elements of professionalism, as outlined by Noordegraaf (2007), a profile of the field can begin to be understood. The discussion has shown that the field has developed in the elements of skills, experience, and service ethics – all "content" features. It is, however, under-developed or only partially developed in the elements of knowledge, appearance, association, jurisdiction, knowledge transfer, codes, and supervision. It is the absence of a cohesive body of knowledge, one which has its own boundaries rather than drawing parts from other disciplines as well as a clearly defined jurisdiction within which to operate, which is the most significant gap using this framework. However, given the presence of the other elements, it can be determined that there is some *semblance* of a profession in community engagement practice. Understood as such, community engagement could be comparable with teaching, where the body of knowledge draws from others yet a strong skill base is required to be effective and a strong service ethic is evident. It is more developed than hairdressing, which also requires skills but does not require a service ethic and commitment to the public good – teaching and hairdressing are the two examples of practices used by Tapper and Millett (2015) in their discussion.

To the question of what tensions community engagement practitioners face: as it is currently undertaken, community engagement practitioners act as intermediaries between communities and public institutions as facilitators of democratic processes. On the one hand, they are required to balance a principal-agent relationship between themselves as service providers and their clients; on the other hand, they are also assumed to be guardians of democratic processes and to advocate for the role of participants and the wider community. The vignettes presented in section four are an attempt to highlight how these tensions manifest, and how they call to question issues around neutrality, transparency, and commercial demands.

Finally, to the question of how ethics can inform our understanding of professionalization and community engagement. By examining collective decision-making models for determining public good, practitioners can consider what ethical approach is the most suitable in any given situation. By examining the character traits and virtues that make a good practitioner, individuals can identify

which virtues should take priority in differing situations. And by examining how to ensure their actions are good, practitioners can consider their motivations and the impacts these may have. Of course, these examinations will not guarantee an ethical practice, but the examinations, and ensuing discussions, will oblige the practice and the practitioners to develop ethical ways to negotiate complexities and conflicts that will inevitably arise in their practice.

To conclude, community engagement practitioners are uniquely placed at a nexus between communities and institutions, with loyalties balanced between their clients (or employer) and democratic principles. There is an opportunity for the field to support practitioners in making good and ethical decisions in the face of the inevitable dilemmas that arise from their position. How to do this is a valuable conversation in itself for practitioners. For instance, they may wish to consider how to build a more reflective practice; what knowledge and skills practitioners need to make ethical decisions; and how these could be provided and integrated. Missing this opportunity is likely to have adverse effects on practitioners, the institutions they serve and democracy.

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Participatory and Deliberative Practitioners in Australia: How Work Context Creates Different Types of Practitioners

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Participatory and Deliberative Practitioners in Australia: How Work Context Creates Different Types of Practitioners

Abstract

Public institutions in Australia are subject to increasing statutory requirements to engage their communities, and consequently the number of practitioners has increased. These participatory and deliberative practitioners design, deliver, and evaluate democratic processes on behalf of public institutions. This article argues that the practitioner body has broadened, where different types of practitioners can now be identified in Australia. This broadening is the result of three main variables: (1) whether practitioners are employed by or contracted to public institutions; (2) whether they are engaged to work on projects with limited or considerable scope; and (3) whether they are focused on limited time frame processes or entire programs. Drawing on the results of a mixed method study, including survey and semi-structured interviews, this article explores the work contexts that shape the contemporary Australian practitioner, drawing lessons that can inform their practice in other contexts.

Keywords

Participatory and Deliberative Practitioners in Australia: How Work Context Creates Different Types of Practitioners

Introduction

Participatory and deliberative practitioners are a group of emerging professionals (Christensen, 2018a) who undertake important tasks in relation to participatory and deliberative processes such as process design, coordination, procurement, internal advocacy, facilitation, information creation and dissemination, reporting, and evaluation (Bherer, Gauthier & Simard, 2017a; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Hendriks & Carson, 2008; Lee, 2014, 2017). In Australia, practice is being driven by extensive and increasing legislative requirements for public institutions to facilitate public participation (Christensen, 2018b; Grant & Drew, 2017). It is therefore reasonable to infer that a significant number of practitioners are employed by or contracted to public institutions. The purpose of these processes initiated by public institutions varies: from the ambitious creation of democratic innovations to address democratic deficits (Bua & Escobar, 2018; Pratchett, 1999; Smith, 2009) to the less ambitious, and at times tokenistic meeting of statutory requirements (Christensen, 2018b; Leighninger, 2014). Examples of the types of processes include everything from participatory budgeting (Christensen & Grant, 2016; Goldfrank, 2012; Pateman, 2012) to collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012; Fung & Wright, 2003).

Practitioners can be employed by or contracted to the public, private, not-for-profit, and, increasingly, academic sectors (see Chilvers, 2013; Kahane & Loptson, 2017 for work on "pracademics"). This article is, however, focused on those who are employed by or contracted to the public sector. While the term "participatory and deliberative practitioner" is employed in this context, others, such as "public participation professional" (Bherer et al., 2017a), "public participation practitioners" (Cooper & Smith, 2012), "public engagement professionals" and "consultants" (Lee, 2014, 2015), "deliberation professionals" (Lee, 2015), and "deliberative practitioners" (Hendriks & Carson, 2008) are used to broadly describe the activities of these individuals. Many Australian practitioners use the terms "community engagement practitioner" or "professional." The term "participatory and deliberative practitioners" is used in this article to encompass all these terms, despite the subtle differences that may exist between them.

Arguably, practitioners occupy an important part of many democratic processes. Not only do they undertake functional tasks to ensure that groups of people come together at the same time to discuss and deliberate in a way that can hopefully affect change, but they can also, sometimes unintentionally, influence the processes itself (López Garcia, 2017; Spada & Vreeland, 2013; Steiner, 2012). Because of this status, it is important to ask what influences their practice. What experiences and contextual constraints inform the decisions they make throughout the process? And, ultimately, what sort of impact do they have on the quality of facilitated democratic processes? This article explores these questions by examining the backgrounds and experiences of practitioners and their work contexts and views on practice.

The article builds on existing literature in three main areas. First, it contributes to the discussion on the influence of practitioners over participatory and deliberative processes with which they are involved with by providing more information about these practitioners and their experiences. Second, it shows how both the practitioners and their practice are broadening to such a point where different types of practitioners can now be identified in Australia. These types are defined by three main variables: (1) whether practitioners are employed by or contracted to public institutions; (2) whether they are engaged to work on projects with limited

scope or considerable scope; and (3) whether they focus on limited time frame processes or entire programs. This suggests that it is more likely that there are "communities of practices" rather than a single "community of practice," as Carolyn Hendriks and Lyn Carson (2008) once claimed. Third, it aligns with findings from Europe (Cooper & Smith, 2012; Escobar, 2015, 2017) that participatory and deliberative practice in public institutions brings unique and significant set of challenges for practitioners.

The article is comprised of five main parts. First, a review of literature relating to the influence of the practitioner, the broadening of practice, and the challenges of public institutions is discussed. Second, an overview of the research objectives and mixed methods approach is outlined. The third section presents the findings, including key quantitative data and qualitative data on what informs practitioners' practice and their perceptions of different types of practitioners. The fourth section presents the three main variables that define a practitioner and relates these back to relevant literature. The final section contains concluding remarks and considerations for future research.

Influence of Practitioners

Recent studies have increasingly focused on participatory and deliberative practitioners (Bherer et al., 2017a; Cooper & Smith, 2012), beyond the earlier cursory mention of them warranting more attention (Burgess & Chilvers, 2006; Chilvers, 2008; Smith, 2009). This attention is an acknowledgement of the pivotal role they play in participatory and deliberative processes, and the literature in this area typically examines the influence they can have on both the quality and outcome of discussion and deliberation. The conclusions of this work are somewhat contradictory. Some scholars, such as Jason Pierce, Grant Neeley, and Jeffrey Budziak (2008) and Martin Carcasson and Leah Sprain (2016), conclude that practitioners are a valuable part of the participatory and deliberative processes as their work can enhance the quality of discussion and deliberation. Others argue that practitioners can influence the attitudes and behaviors of participants (Spada & Vreeland, 2013) and that they can manipulate outcomes through their decisions to censor themselves or others (Humphreys, Masters & Sandbu, 2006). And some, such as John Fulwider (2005, p. 17) arrives at a view somewhere in between, conceding that the impact of a moderator is a "hit and miss."

Indeed, practitioners do play a pivotal role as they can affect the quality of democratic processes, for good or ill. Other studies discuss what informs the practice of the participatory and deliberative practitioner, most of which are focused on the normative principles for practice. Included in this work is Jason Chilvers's (2008) study of participatory appraisals, Emmeline Cooper and Graham Smith's (2012) investigation of how British and German practitioners express democratic principles in practice, and the analysis by Jane Mansbridge, Janette Hartz-Karp, Matthew Amengual, and John Gastil (2006) of facilitator norms. In their introduction, Mansbridge and her colleagues (2006, p. 1) state that "[Facilitators] are also influenced by the professional norms they learned through training and their direct experience as facilitators." This article explores the training and experience of practitioners. Many previous studies have focused on either the facilitator or moderator; in contrast, this study takes a wider perspective by referring to participatory and deliberative practitioners. Many practitioners undertake moderation and facilitation together with a number of other roles such as process design, coordination, procurement, internal advocacy, content creation and dissemination, reporting, and evaluating. While this article agrees that practitioners do

influence democratic processes, it posits that this influence is underway long before the practitioner is in the same room with participants.

Broadening of Practice and Practitioners

With practitioners now accepted as an integral part of participatory and deliberative processes, attention is turning to the context within which they work and how their work differs. Much can be drawn from the writings on professionalization and commercialization in the sector (see Bherer et al., 2017a for a comprehensive account). In their seminal work exploring the growing commercialization of deliberative democracy and the work of deliberative consultants, Hendriks and Carson (2008) concluded that practitioners were operating in a "community of practice" rather than a marketplace as such. The work of Caroline Lee and her associates challenges this view. After conducting a survey of 434 self-identified dialogue and deliberation practitioners, Lee and Francesca Polletta (2009) was able to paint a picture of a group of practitioners from a variety of work and educational backgrounds employed in a number of settings. These empirical findings were built upon in Lee's later work which further highlights the challenges related to the context and professionalization with which practitioners are grappling (Lee, 2014, 2015, 2017; Lee, McNulty & Shaffer, 2015).

The literature on professionalization can be further explored by examining the broadening of roles and types of practitioners. Chilvers (2013, 2017) examined science and technology public dialogue actors in the United Kingdom and identified four main actor types: studying, practicing, orchestrating, and coordinating. This finding allows for a greater understanding of the work of practitioners. Different agencies and groups may work across all or some of the types. For example, "decision institutions," such as the government, primarily operate in the orchestrating space but are also present to a degree in the other three areas. Also relevant is the work of Laurence Bherer, Mario Gauthier, and Louis Simard (2017b) on how practitioners reconcile their impartiality in a commercial context, with findings providing a useful framework for understanding the roles and types of practitioners. Bherer and her colleagues (2017b) classify practitioners along two distinct lines: (1) those who work on politically salient projects (defined as large and controversial) versus those who do not, and (2) those who support the project and those who do not. These two lines create four "personalities" of practitioners: the "promoter" who works on politically salient projects and supports the project; the "militant" who works on less politically salient projects but supports the project; the "reformer" who works on politically salient projects but is less supportive of the project; and the "facilitator" who works on less politically salient projects and is less supportive of the project. These four personalities have different approaches to the type of work they do and a different view of impartiality. Of particular interest is the "promoter," who, rather than conveying impartiality, endorses the position of their client. Bherer and her colleagues (2017a) argue that the market dominance of "promoters" has been accelerated by large organizations that typically offer community engagement services as an addition to their broader commercial activities in engineering, communication, and public relations. They conclude that the "promoter" type has a growing influence and poses the biggest risk to participatory democracy. This study expands the understanding of practitioner groups through an investigation of practitioner cohort and the variables that shape their practice.

Practitioner and Public Institutions

Also relevant to this research is literature which explore the practitioner and their interface with public institutions. Cooper and Smith (2012) studied German and British practitioners by examining their commitment to democratic principles, and identified the constraints practitioners face in their work context, including the failure of organizations (predominately public authorities) to understand the demands of participation, and those that arise from the structure and culture of public authorities. Other relevant research in this area outline the effects of institutional frameworks on practice, such as how process design conforms to frameworks in Italy (Lewanski & Ravazzi, 2017) and how the market arranges itself in response to institutionalization in France (Mazeuad & Nonjon, 2017). Finally, emerging work examines practitioners who are employed in the public sector, such as that of Oliver Escobar (2015, 2017) who concentrates on "official" practitioners (referred to in this study as practitioners employed in public institutions). Escobar (2015, 2017) draws attention to the backstage work of public practitioners and their struggles in navigating politics and public institutions. This study contributes to existing literature in this area by extending the discussion on how public institutions can affect practitioners through an examination of the perceived differences between those who are employed in the public sector and those who contracted to it.

Objectives and Methodology

This research provides an opportunity to gain greater understanding on the influence of practitioners of participatory and deliberative processes and the work they do in the context of Australian public institutions. As such, the primary research objective for this study was to identify actors who practice engagement in Australia and what informs the way they practice, with the view that these findings would then answer the broader question of what impact practitioners have on the quality of facilitated democratic processes. The current research is part of a larger explanatory mixed methods study which consists of a survey, the themes of which were then explored in a series of semi-structured interviews.

Given that the size of the practitioner population is unknown (and feasibly unknowable), the survey was open to all who self-identified as practitioners since sampling techniques were unavailable. The survey was promoted and distributed through email lists of practitioner organizations—the International Association of Public Participation Australasia and Engage 2 Act—and practitioners were encouraged to recruit others in their networks. It was opened to Australian practitioners in August 2017, which included questions related to demographics, practice, and professionalization (see Appendix for relevant questions). A total of 375 complete or mostly complete surveys were received. Microsoft Excel was used for analysis.

Themes from the survey—in this case practitioners' backgrounds and their views on types of practice and practitioners—were then explored in 20 semi-structured interviews. The sample was then narrowed to focus on senior practitioners who were employed by or regularly contracted to public institutions. The purposive sample of practitioners was selected from a mix of five Australian states, gender (15 females and five males), and employment.[1] Interviewees were chosen on the assumption that they would have divergent views to ensure a degree of data saturation. The interviews were conducted between November 2018 and January

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[1] Four were employed by a local government, another four in the state government, and 12 were working in the private sector (four of whom had previous significant public sector experience and all of whom work predominately with public sector clients).

2019, which lasted for 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted in person or via video conference (Zoom), with participants receiving the questions in advance. The interviews were transcribed and the data was analyzed using a qualitative research software (Dedoose) to organize the findings.

Findings

Demographics

Presented below is the demographic of the 375 practitioners in the survey, indicating the characteristics of the practitioner group, particularly their work, training, and educational backgrounds, which form the basis of the qualitative discussions to follow.

Gender. Survey responses predominately came from females. Over three-quarters (77.6%) of practitioners identified as female, with 22.1% identifying as male, and 0.3% identifying as "other." Not surprisingly, this is disproportionate with larger workforce demographics, where females represent 47.5% of the total workforce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). There is evidence of this gender dominance in other polities as well. In a 2009 survey of predominantly North American dialogue and deliberation practitioners, Lee (2015, p. 85) reported that 62% of respondents were female. The domination of female practitioners may be problematic, not only from the point of view of not being reflective of the publics served but from the perspective that participatory and deliberative practice may be viewed as "women's work," thereby bringing with it issues that other gendered professions share (Witz, 1992).
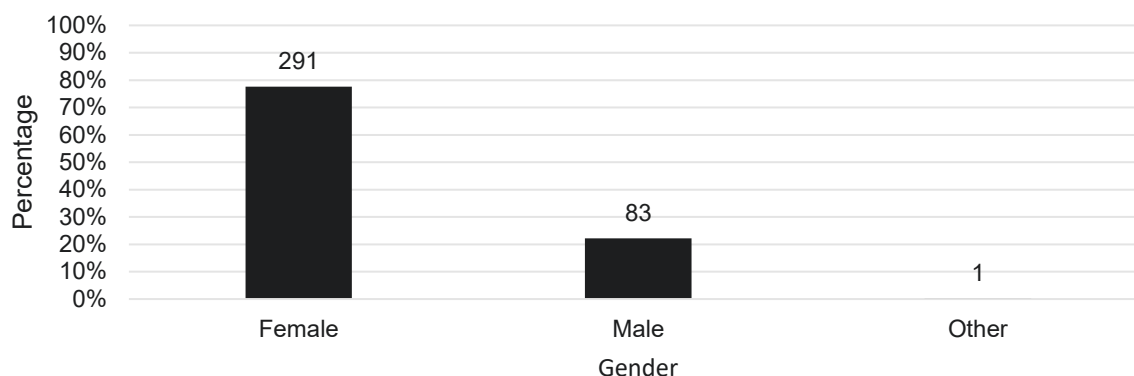
Figure 1. Gender identification of participatory and deliberative practitioners (n=375).

Cultural and ethnic identification. Rather than probing for their ancestry, the survey instead asked practitioners if they identified strongly with any cultural and/or ethnic groups. This question was designed to elicit participants' cultural and linguistic ties and whether they were reflective of the communities with which they worked.[2] Of the 368 responses (98.1% of total respondents), more than two-thirds (70.9%) did not strongly identify with a cultural and ethnic group; 18.9% identified as north-west European (including England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Western Europe, and Northern Europe); and 1.9% identified as Aboriginal and Torres

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[2] In Australia, the category of race is not used for statistical purposes such as the National Census. The National Census collects data and reports on: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification, country of birth, language spoken at home, and ancestry. Nicholas Biddle, Siew-Ean Khoo, and John Taylor (2015) provide a succinct overview of the history of race and ethnicity demographics in Australia.

Strait Islander. All other regions listed were 1.3% or less of the practitioner group (see Figure 2). These data concerning cultural and ethnic identity do not conform to standard practice across Australia since the figures in this study differ from the Australian census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) in three main ways. First, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the census represented 2.7% of the total population. Second, the census showed that after Australia (66.6%), England (3.9%), and New Zealand (2.2%), the top countries of birth were China (2.2% of total population), India (1.9%), and the Philippines (1%). Third, according, to the census, 72.7% of Australian households speak English at home while other common languages include Mandarin (2%), Arabic (1.4%), Cantonese (1.2%), Vietnamese (1.2%), and Italian (1.2%). The census data suggest an underrepresentation of cultural and ethnic diversity in the practitioner group. If the practitioner group does not reflect the publics they serve, it is likely that they are (unintentionally) reinforcing mainstream cultural biases which contribute to marginalization (see Doerr, 2018) and, consequently, the weakening of democratic principles upon which participation and deliberation are based.
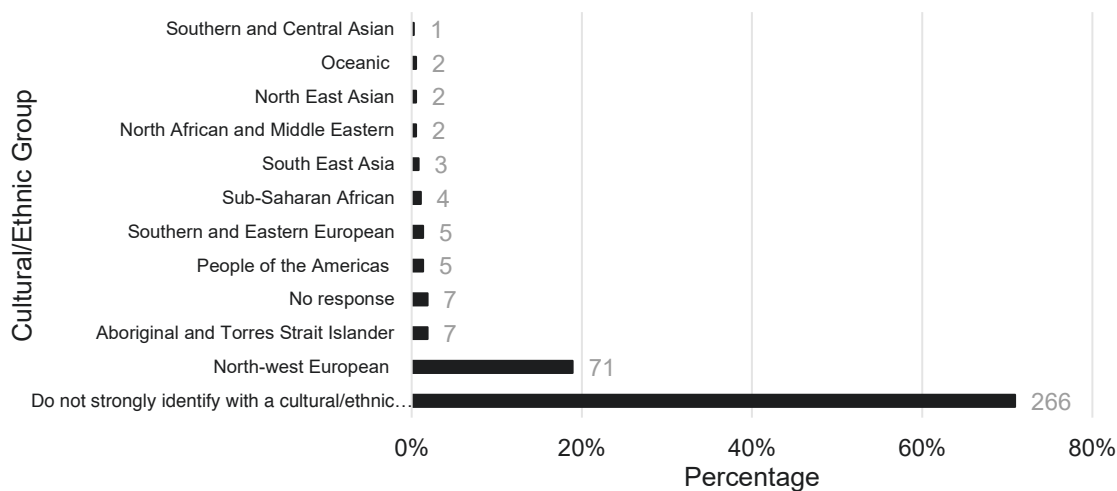
Figure 2. Cultural and ethnic group identification of participatory and deliberative practitioners (n=375).

Employment. The clear majority of respondents (85.9%) worked as employees, followed by self-employed/solo operators (7.2%), owners-managers of private businesses of various sizes (6.4%), and finally those currently seeking work (0.5%) as shown in Figure 3.

Further division into sector of employment showed that over half of the employees were working for a local government (58.4% of all respondents). The next largest area comprised the self-employed and owner-managers (13.6%), followed by state government (12.3%), the private sector (10.4%), the not-for-profit sector (2.7%), federal government (1.6%), and higher education employees (0.5%) as illustrated in Figure 4. For comparison, a recent survey of Australian local governments reported that half of the councils had dedicated community engagement staff and that the average number in these councils was 2.49 staff members (Christensen & McQuestin, 2018).
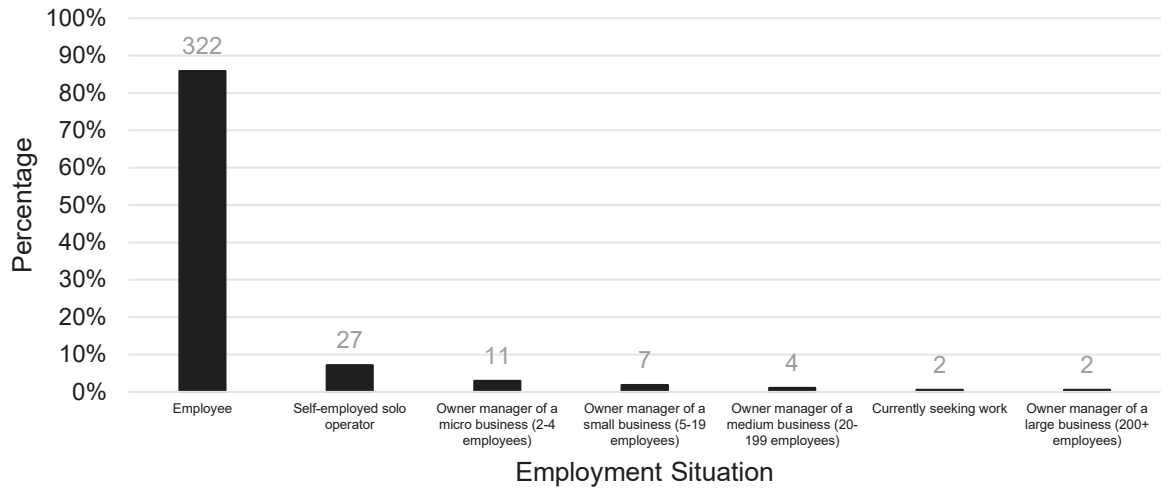
Figure 3. Employment situation of participatory and deliberative practitioners (n=375).
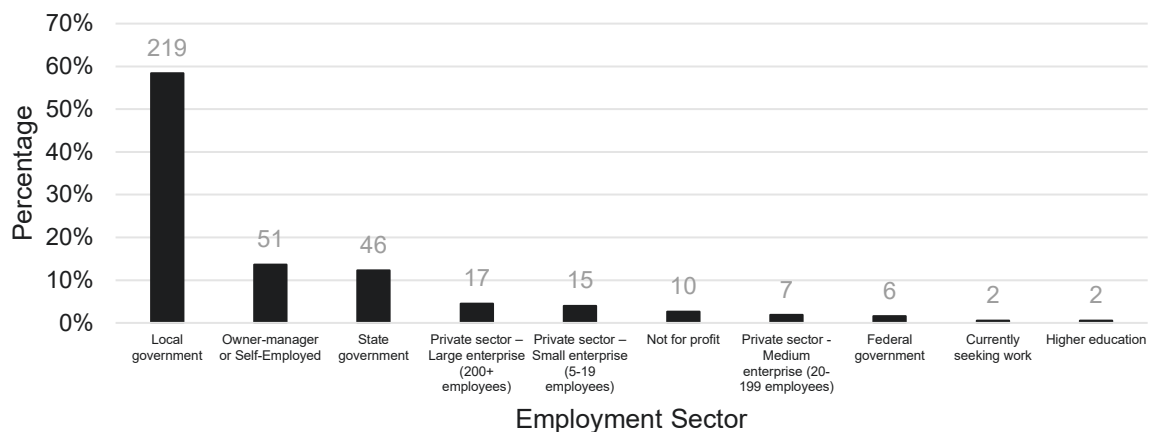
Figure 4. Employer of participatory and deliberative practitioners (n=375).

Training. Without a direct pathway to paid employment, it can be assumed that skills and knowledge are acquired practically and through training and tertiary study units. Survey participants were asked if they attended any training sessions in the previous decade, and were required to identify who delivered these sessions. A total of 334 participants (89.1% of total responses) confirmed they participated in a training or tertiary course, with the average number of courses being 1.78. As Figure 5 shows, the most popular course was the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) module and/or certificate (57.1%). This was followed by training provided by private providers (40.8%), training provided by organizations' employees to their staff (32.5%), tertiary units (23.2%), training provided by not-for-profit organizations (22.9%), and other training (1.6%), which includes those provided by professional associations and networks such as state government departments and local government associations.
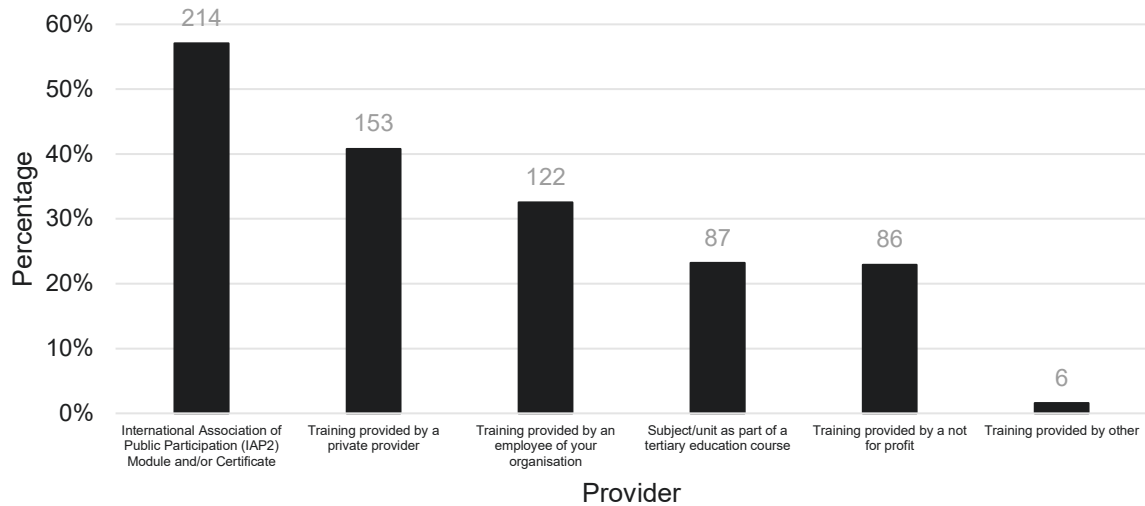
Figure 5. Training and short courses attended by participatory and deliberative practitioners in previous 10 years (n=334).

Sector experience. Practitioners reported that they were unlikely to remain in the same employ and some worked across different sectors, so respondents were asked for which sectors they had designed and delivered community engagement in the previous decade, as either an employee or a contractor. The majority of participatory and deliberative practitioners had experience in the public sector, confirming that the legislative environment is likely a major driver for practice. Reported experience (see Figure 6) was based on employment in the following sectors: local government (82.1%), state government (45.9%), not-for-profit (38.4%), private (32%), infrastructure (25.3%), planning (22.1%), environment (21.6%), federal government (14.9%), health (14.9%), disaster and emergency response (13.3%), and higher education (9.1%). While this question included experience gained either as an employee or a contractor to the public sector, the public sector employee practitioner or "official public participation professional" often undertakes different duties (see Escobar, 2015, 2017).
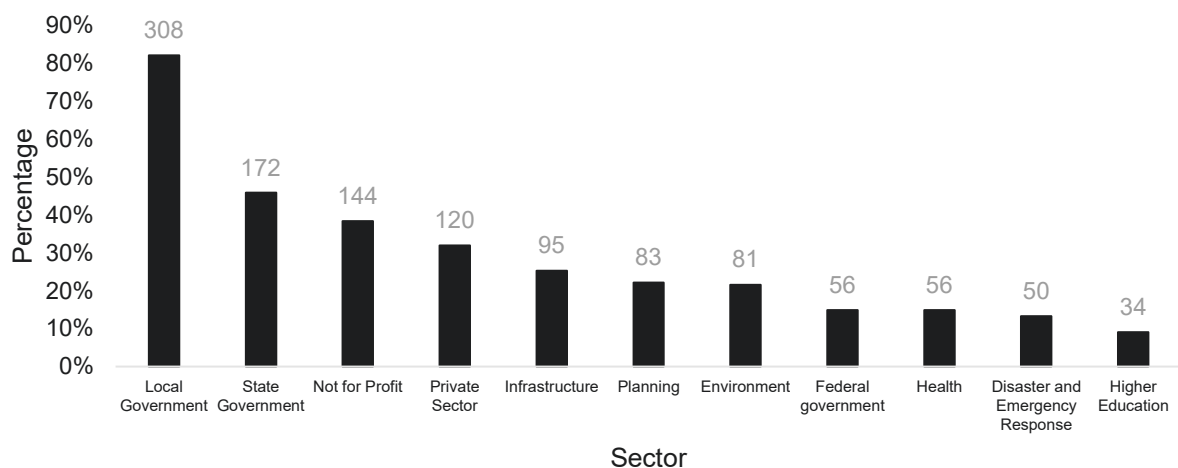
Figure 6. Sector experience of participatory and deliberative practitioners (n=374).

Experience and expertise. Two questions delved further into participants' experience and expertise. First, respondents were asked how many years of experience they had in community engagement. As expected, responses reflected a bell curve ranging from less than one year of experience to more than 31 years, with the median number of 6 to 10 years. The survey question did not elicit whether a respondent had solely focused on community engagement during this time or whether they had occasional or supervisory involvement, and therefore the results are likely to contain both situations. To address this discrepancy, a second question was asked about their level of expertise. Using the scale based on the Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus's (1980) five-stage model of skill acquisition, respondents were asked to rank their level of expertise. Across all years of experience, only 1.3% identified as "novice," 15.7% identified as "experienced beginners," 28.5% as "practitioners," 40.5% as "knowledgeable practitioners," and 13.3% as "experts." Interestingly, those with two or fewer years of experience were most likely to identify as "experienced beginners" rather than novices. For those with between 6 and 31 years of experience, "knowledgeable practitioner" was the most popular identification. The results of both these questions are presented in Figure 7.
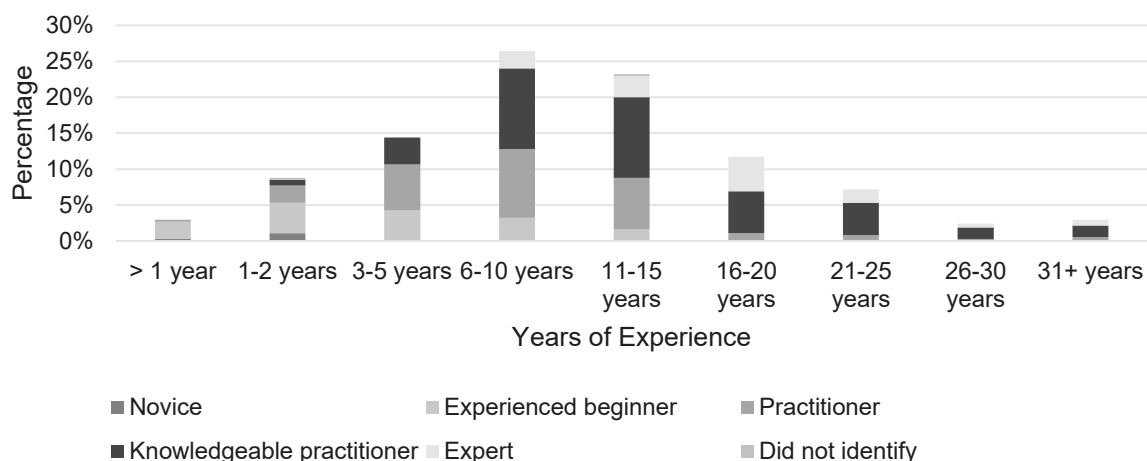
Figure 7. Years of experience and levels of expertise (n=375).

Qualifications.[3] When asked about their highest level of qualification, one-third (34%) of respondents had postgraduate degrees, 30.7% had bachelor degrees, 10.7% had attained advanced diplomas or diplomas, 17.6% had graduate diplomas or graduate certificates, and 7% had certificate-level qualifications (see Figure 8). Participatory and deliberative practitioners had considerable higher educational attainment rates, with 64.4% holding a bachelor or postgraduate degree. In the wider Australian population, 22% hold a bachelor or postgraduate degree (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

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[3] In Australia, diplomas and advanced diplomas are postsecondary qualifications; bachelor degrees are the standard university qualification; and graduate certificates, graduate diplomas and masters are all postgraduate qualifications of increasing duration.
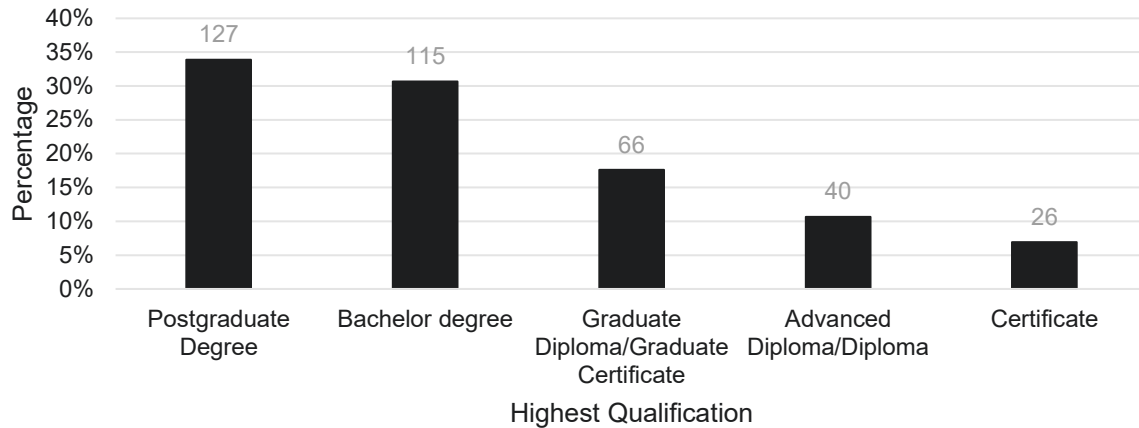
Figure 8. Highest level of qualification of participatory and deliberative practitioners (n=374).

Qualification areas. While the sample was highly qualified, there are no dedicated higher education qualifications for community engagement in Australia (Christensen, 2018a). Consequently, practitioners' qualifications were in other disciplines, and the survey sought to identify these by asking respondents to identify their discipline areas from a list of 17 related fields. A total of 336 respondents (89.6% of the total) indicated they had qualifications in as many as 10 of these fields, with the average number of qualifications areas being 2.7 per person. As Figure 9 demonstrates, the most popular qualification areas were in management (38.1%), communications and media (33.3%), community development (29.5%), social sciences (25.3%), and social/community planning and research (24.4%). Also represented was organizational development/corporate strategy (19.9%), conflict resolution/mediation (18.2%), and public administration/policy (17.6%).

As senior practitioners, interviewees were invited to reflect on these findings. Many were surprised by the number of practitioners who held management qualifications, although a couple of interviewees thought it was reflective of where final decision-making for engagement sits in an organization and how it is understood. One practitioner reflected that a practitioner is often not viewed as an authority figure and therefore advice is sometimes or regularly ignored, with decisions about approaches being made by a management or executive team who are likely to err on the side of caution.
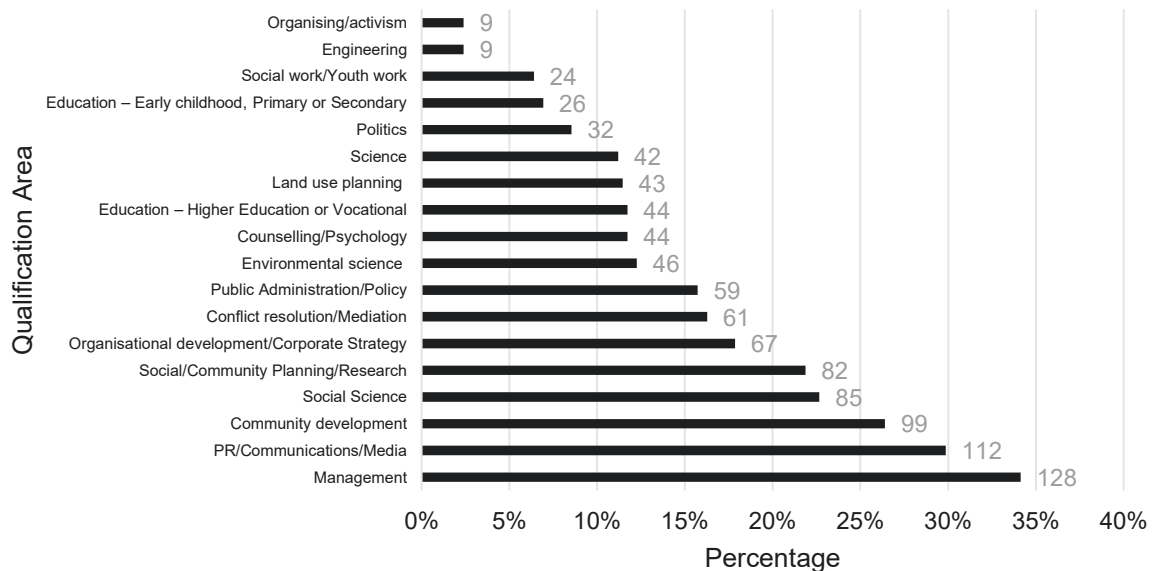
Figure 9. Areas of qualification of participatory and deliberative practitioners (n=336).

What Informs Practitioners' Practice?

As shown above, participatory and deliberative practitioners come to the practice with a wide diversity of knowledge and skills gained through formal and informal learning, as well as workplace experience across different sectors. This differs from other practices, such as teaching, nursing, or accounting, where degree programs, along with the registration requirements of professional associations, result in a core set of knowledge and skills in practitioner groups. It begs the question of whether the diversity in knowledge and experiences of practitioners put community engagement practice (and ultimately democracy) at a disadvantage. Or, on the contrary, is the diversity of knowledge and skills in the practitioner cohort a unique strength? While the answer to these questions is beyond the scope of the research, interview participants were invited to reflect on what has shaped their practice, thereby creating a starting point from which to consider such issues.

Previous experience and personal traits. When asked what influenced their practice, respondents identified two main factors: previous work experience, study, and training; and individual traits such as their capabilities, interests, and personalities. Practitioners spoke of how previous work experience proved useful in their current practice. Examples included grassroots social work in highly disadvantaged areas which built "people skills, communication skills, conflict resolution, counselling," and public sector jobs in policy, public administration, and community development. Most practitioners spoke of how they honed their knowledge and skills on the job, often through a process of learning from mistakes:

> I would say I've done most of my learning by making mistakes and trialing and doing things. There are handbooks and processes out there that you can use as a template to give you that understanding but one size does not fit all.

Many practitioners cited short courses and workplace training in engagement and facilitation as instrumental in their practice. Views of how formal study and qualifications shaped their practice were more divided, with some acknowledging, for example, that their degrees gave them knowledge and skills in areas such as public administration, qualitative data analysis, and

critical thinking. Others who had qualifications in areas such as business and science believed their studies did not prepare them for participatory and deliberative practice. As one practitioner succinctly suggested, "I think [your practice] it is a bit of both (study and experience)... your experience will either align with your study or it will broaden it out."

In addition to previous work experience, study, and training, practitioners also spoke about how their individual traits influenced practice. Some spoke of how participatory and deliberative practitioners are often those who are comfortable with ambiguity and "mess" as opposed to those who prefer structure and certainty (i.e., those available in more technical professions). One practitioner spoke of the positive experience of using psychometric testing to employ practitioners stating, "I see people that have got the best qualifications but have no time management skills, so the engagement will unravel. They need the ability to be flexible – to change course at the drop of a hat." Some practitioners also spoke of how values influence practice—as one said, "I know people that have the community development values... some of them come from professional experience; sometimes it's just about how people are."

Practitioner diversity: A benefit or a disadvantage to the practice? As practices professionalize, it is inevitable that standardization will occur in different areas, such as training, accreditation, or process (see Christensen, 2018a). With practitioners coming to the field with a wide range of experiences, qualifications, and skills, it is fair to assume that variations in practice may result. Some of the practitioners interviewed viewed this diversity as a strength, while others as a weakness. Those who saw it as a strength spoke of how the different backgrounds give their practice greater strength:

> I think it's a really good thing. I find it really exciting that the people working with engagement come from such a range of different background—I think it really strengthens the approach. The work we do generally encompasses a whole range, particularly if you're working with, say, infrastructure projects.

Another practitioner provided more detail:

> The background and qualification area might lead to a different style of doing engagement, and this is making an assumption but the management people might have really great insight in internal decision-making within organizations, so that would be useful. The [communications] people would be presumably really great at sharing information in a way that's appealing to people and makes it easy for them. So, I think all of them bring something special. Social science people will bring a level of understanding around qualitative data and how they manage that. The difference between this and other professions is people come from somewhere else as distinct from other professions: they come through school; they do a course and then they go and practice; and they learn from those people who've had the same journey.

Using a similar logic, the reverse may also be true:

> I think [qualifications and experience] impact on their skills in engagement. So, somebody who's been through a planning degree will have a great understanding of legislative frameworks and planning concepts but not necessarily [have] a great ability to negotiate or to write clear information or present a clear logical argument to somebody. I think it impacts on the skills that you bring to the practice.

These comments suggest that practitioners who operate by themselves or who do not have a

mentor available during their practice may rely more heavily on their previous knowledge and experience.

While practitioners may lack some knowledge or skills, those interviewed were most concerned about biases that previous training and practice may bring:

> One of the things that professional engagement practitioners seek to do is not to color the outcome of the feedback. You don't go in and say "We've got this great project we're going to show you and it's got all these shiny bits on it and it's really great you're going to love it." We go in and say "This project is aiming to do this and these are the benefits that it's aiming to bring to the community and here's the impact." So, you try to have that balanced approach. I think the risk of having people who come from particular areas is they're going to… they may be colored by that. Probably those who come from all the engineering and planning fields—if they think something represents good planning sense, they may be more likely to try and skew their discussion in a certain direction because it suits their frame of reference.

There are also inherent biases which practitioners need to be aware of:

> There are inherent personal biases that you have, and you have to be mindful of them because if you're not, they're going to play out in how you analyze the data. So, it's everything from how you might write up and [frame] engagement to the types of questions and how you write questions. You know, leading questions versus those open-ended questions… the past experiences and skill set of engagement practitioners can sway and change a particular engagement strategy.

The concern with these gaps and biases amongst practitioners is that the practice may be negatively affected, which has consequences for the integrity of the democratic processes being designed and delivered. One interviewee summarized the paradox of diversity:

> I think its strength (diversity) is also its Achilles heel. How do you get that group of people to agree enough that you do become a profession? It's almost as if the diversity is so strong yet the tipping point is that it can make it completely weak because it doesn't bind together… Diversity is great, but you've got to have a home base of what's acceptable, what standard is agreed to. It's no different to medicine. We have GPs [General Practitioners] that want to practice one way and GPs that don't agree … At the end of the day you've got a basic standard that they must adhere to, or their professionalism and their credentials will fall apart. I think that's what we need to have an understanding of with engagement. It's not going to move forward if we don't have some stronger walls around it.

Is a degree of standardization needed? If there is a need for stronger walls, or requirements for standardization, where and what should these be? A couple of practitioners raised the need to be reflective in practice:

> If you're good as a social worker, or a teacher, or other sorts of professions, it's the extent [of] how you think about your role and what you're doing—there are some people who move into facilitation who maybe haven't interrogated themselves that much… I think there's some who don't seem to doubt themselves at all and plough ahead and are not that mindful of the impact they are having on other people.

The need for common knowledge and principles was raised by others:

> I think so long as the people who are working in the area of engagement have some kind of universal understanding of: the core principles, theory of the work, its place in democracy, its social justice [and] human rights underpinnings. And that's my view; someone else might see that quite differently. An engineer… would say it's all about risk. [They] wouldn't even care that much about the human rights element.

The views from practitioners reveal that there is depth and complexity, not only in the work of participatory and deliberative practitioners, but in how they are understood and how they understand themselves and their work. It is an area which warrants further study to determine the factors at play, and how these have impacts on the quality of democratic processes.

Different Types of Practitioners

Given the diversity of professional backgrounds of practitioners and the different influences that shaped their practices, it is reasonable to assume that there are different types of practitioners. In an attempt to increase the depth of understanding of practitioners, this section explores how they differ, rather than categorizing them. The question of whether there were different types of practitioners was posed to the senior practitioners interviewed and, while there were no clearly delineated groups or types of practitioners, there were three identifiable themes to the comments: first was the position of the practitioner (whether they were internal or external to the organization); second was the scope of the engagement processes undertaken by different practitioners (with projects with quite limited scope on one end and considerable scope on the other); and third was the outlook of the practitioner (whether they were focused on one-off projects or were involved in the oversight of ongoing processes and programs).

Practitioner position: Internal–external. During the interviews, practitioners referred to themselves and others using a variety of descriptors such as: "government practitioners," "public sector practitioners," "internal practitioners," "external providers," "consultants," "organization-based practitioners," amongst others. Broadly, these descriptors delineate between practitioners who were employed in a public institution (internal) and those who were contracted by public institutions (external). There were three identified differences between the two groups. First was the acknowledgement that internal practitioners have an additional set of challenges related to navigating bureaucracy. As one previous internal practitioner described, "[Internal practitioners] have to navigate all of that red tape. It's a real challenge. That's why we get [burned-out] and people leave the sector because it's a hard job to do." Second was the identification that the type of work varies, with larger and more complex engagement processes often contracted to external practitioners while "the smaller and less controversial tends to be done in house, project officer kind of thing." Finally—and a likely consequence of the previous difference—is a perception from both internal and external practitioners that external practitioners are valued more. Practitioners gave examples of being internal, where their professional advice was considered but not viewed as authoritative, and how there were often a lot of other people in the organization who would tell them "how to do their job." A juxtaposition to this is the view of external practitioners where "people buy you in as you are, so they always want to get their money's worth and they listen to what you say."

Scope: Limited–considerable. There was a recognition, and also division, amongst those interviewed that some practitioners worked on engagement processes where the projects had limited scope and others worked on processes where there was considerable scope to make change. Limited scope projects include the delivery of infrastructure projects, where strategic

decisions such as the project itself and major decisions such as position or alignment and size had been made, and engagement was now focused on supporting the construction phase. Considerable scope projects include those such as major public policy processes, where participants can assist in shaping major policy decisions such as governance structures and budget spends. As one practitioner rationalized:

> I suspect [the divide between practitioners who engage on strategic policy versus those who engage on planning and construction projects, is] to do with developing things – where there's lots and lots of negotiables …[or]… where there's not many. So there's that bit around strategic engagement processes [with lots of negotiables] and those that are around let's get this built or done [with less negotiables].

Some of the other practitioners conflated the issue of project scope with the level of influence offered to the community, and they made reference to the IAP2 Spectrum (2007), which presents a linear progression of "increasing levels of public impact" with five levels: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower.

> There's always been this divide between the inform/consult end of the spectrum versus the involve/collaborate/empower end of the spectrum.

Technically, very high levels of influence can be granted to the community on limited scope projects, but the "negotiables" will limit the input: for example, the color of a facility versus the decision to build the facility in the first place. Nevertheless, limited scope projects are viewed by many practitioners as a different type of participatory process. One practitioner viewed this conundrum as a split between those who understand that "not every decision can be shaped by the community" but engagement can "provide a platform for the best possible outcome for the community" versus those who "believe in the community shaping every element." A couple of practitioners referred to it as the "communications" versus "community development" divide. Most acknowledged that there was a tension between the two groups.

Outlook: Limited–ongoing. The third theme that emerged was that some practitioners were in positions that focused on processes with limited time frames, while others were in positions that focused on ongoing processes with no definite end. Limited time frame processes included project work and one-off facilitation of methods. Ongoing processes included oversight of multiple projects in the same location and/or for the same organization, and building internal capacity and support. The focus was usually dictated by the practitioner's position of being either inside or external to the organization where they work. Those working on limited time frame processes reported focusing on involving the community to a certain point in time, such as reaching an agreement on a design or construction of infrastructure. In fact, in large organizations, these two outcomes are facilitated by different teams. To quote one practitioner, "They're doing once-off transactional engagement. They're not thinking about engagement at a later date, it's around 'this is our topic and project and we only talking about that stuff.'" Those with a focus on oversight and ongoing processes are required to have skills and knowledge beyond community engagement and into management, capacity building, and education and organizational change, as this participant explained:

> About a year into the job [in a large public institution] I woke up with the sweats and went, "Oh my God, I'm not an Engagement Manager, I am changing this organization. I'm driving organizational change!" I hadn't read or done any kind of theory around change management and in the next couple of weeks I thought, "Right, I'm going to research and find out what this is about," and realized that I was actually changing

people's perceptions and it was around education and awareness and around the value of what we were doing and how you take them on the journey to build their capacity to do it. So that's completely different than just putting in a new system or process and making people do it. To have that, you actually need to drive organizational buy-in, an education process.

Practitioners with program experience spoke of how their approach was more developmental: they tended to support and encourage less experienced practitioners and key stakeholders to slowly improve practice, rather than enforce high standards for all processes. They acknowledged that this was problematic from a practice point of view but necessary to build support for the practice in the organization.

Different Types of Practitioners in Australia

By reflecting on demographics, training and education, work experience of practitioners, and their views of what informs their practice and work context, one view emerges on the different types of participatory and deliberative practitioners in Australia. This research, with its social constructivist lens, finds that there are three defining variables: (1) whether practitioners are internal or external to public institutions, (2) whether the projects which they work on have considerable scope or limited scope for the community to have influence, and (3) whether their work focused on one-off or limited processes or entire programs (see Figure 10). These variables are situational, shaped by their position to the public institution and the type of work the institution does. While situational, practitioners presumably have some autonomy over their choice of position and employer, although they may be motivated by gaining any type of relevant experience and an income, particularly if they are less experienced. While these three variables can total nine different combinations and therefore nine different types of practitioners, it is not my intention to create a typology of practitioners as it would serve no useful purpose except to create categories. In addition, the range for some, such as scope, is often situated on a spectrum rather than at either end. Instead, it is hoped that this typology draws attention to how a practitioner's work context influences participatory and deliberative practice.

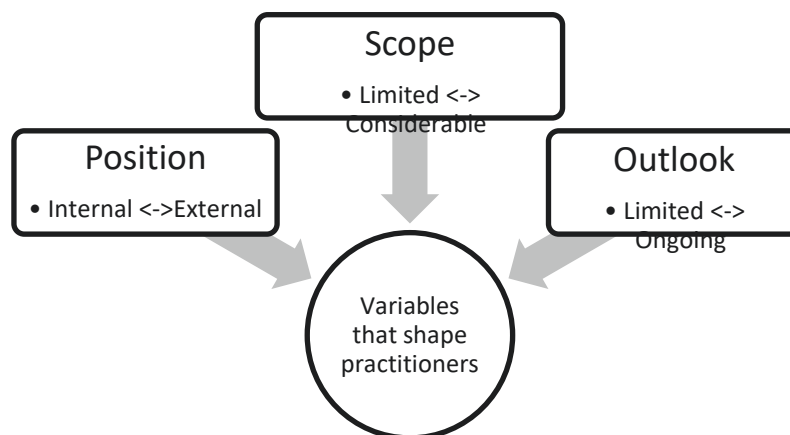*Figure 10.* Three variables that shape practitioners.

When compared with previous research, this study shows similarities, differences, and nuances. There are similarities when compared with Escobar's (2015, 2017) studies of "official practitioners," which align to those who are positioned internally in the Australian context. Escobar discussed how official practitioners are wanted or unwanted, which partially aligns

with the findings here on how internal practitioners are sometimes undervalued, particularly when compared with external practitioners. The difficulties of navigating bureaucracies and the internal advocacy work required by internal practitioners also correlates in the Australian context. There are also some similarities and some nuances when compared with the framework of Bherer and her colleagues (2017b) on practitioner personalities which discusses two variables: whether projects are politically salient and whether practitioners are supportive of the project. While those two lines do not correlate directly with those found in this research, there are some parallels: political salience is closely related to scope, the difference being that Bherer and her colleagues (2017b) described projects that are large and controversial, whereas scope here relates to the quantity and significance of project negotiables. Forthcoming research adjacent to this study has found that Australian practitioners view impartiality differently than those in other contexts preferring to refer to an ambiguous "independence" rather than neutrality as traditionally understood. Nevertheless, the themes of work context are common to all.

Conclusion and Future Research

The findings contribute empirical data on the demographics, education, training, and experience of practitioners, as well as how they understand their work. The study has drawn attention to the work— and what may inform it—that practitioners do in addition to the role of facilitation or mediation. In addition, the findings suggest that the broadening of practice and practitioners means that it is fair to assume that there are multiple "communities of practices" rather than a single "community of practice," and that being internal or external to public institutions is likely to influence how practitioners can effectively do their work. Consequently, this study has confirmed the three themes identified in the literature: the influential role of practitioners; the broadening of practice which has resulted in different types of practitioners now being recognizable; and that public institutions face complex challenges in their participatory and deliberative work.

There are a number of avenues for future research. As highlighted in the introduction, this research is a modest attempt to answer the question of how experiences and contextual constraints inform the decisions that practitioners make in their work on participatory and deliberative processes. This question was designed as a precursor to the larger question of what impact practitioners have on the quality of the democratic processes that they design, facilitate, and coordinate. There is the opportunity to undertake some comparative research between practitioner cohorts, as well as experiments that investigate the decision-making processes of practitioners, how and why they differ, and the effect of these differences on participatory and deliberative quality. There is even the opportunity to explore whether practitioners would benefit from some standardization around core content, skills, and values, which may be needed to serve as a protective factor for democratic practice.

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Appendix

Excerpt – Relevant Questions in the Community Engagement Practitioner Survey

I.   About you

Which decade were you born in?

- 1940s
- 1950s
- 1960s
- 1970s
- 1980s
- 1990s
- 2000s

Which gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Other

Do you identify strongly with any of the cultural and ethnic groups listed?

- Do not strongly identify with a cultural and ethnic group
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- North African and Middle Eastern
- North East Asian
- North-west European (British, Irish, Western European, Northern European)
- Oceanian (South Sea Islander, Maori, Melanesian, Papuan, Micronesian, Polynesian)
- People of the Americas (North, South, Central, Caribbean)
- South East Asia
- Southern and Central Asian
- Southern and Eastern European
- Sub-Saharan African

II.   Your Experience and Qualifications

How many years of experience do you have in community engagement?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–2 years
- 3–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–15 years
- 16–20 years
- 21–25 years
- 26–30 years
- 31+ years

What level of expertise do you have in community engagement?

- Novice
- Experienced beginner
- Practitioner
- Knowledgeable practitioner
- Expert

What is your employment situation? Select all that apply.

- Employee
- Self-employed solo operator
- Owner-manager of a micro business (2–4 employees)
- Owner-manager of a small business (5–19 employees)
- Owner-manager of a medium business (20–199 employees)
- Owner-manager of a large business (200+ employees)
- Volunteer
- Retired
- Currently seeking work
- Other, please specify

Who are you employed by? **(**If "employee" in previous question)

- Federal government
- State government
- Local government
- Private sector: Micro (2–4 employees)
- Private sector: Small enterprise (5–19 employees)
- Private sector: Medium enterprise (20–199 employees)
- Private sector: Large enterprise (200+ employees)
- Not for Profit
- Higher education
- Other, please specify

What is the level of the highest qualification you have completed?

- Certificate
- Advanced Diploma/Diploma
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate
- Postgraduate degree

Please indicate the areas in which you have qualifications and experience.

- Community development
- Conflict resolution/Mediation
- Counseling/Psychology
- Education – Early childhood, Primary or Secondary
- Education – Higher Education or Vocational

- Engineering
- Environmental Science
- Land use planning
- Management
- Organizational development/Corporate Strategy
- Organizing/activism
- Politics
- PR/Communications/Media
- Public Administration/Policy
- Science
- Social Science
- Social work
- Social/Community Planning/Research
- Other, please specify

In the past 10 years, have you participated in any training or short courses to assist in your community engagement practice?

- International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Module and/or Certificate
- Subject/unit as part of a tertiary education course
- Training provided by a not for profit
- Training provided by a private provider
- Training provided by an employee of your organization
- Other, please specify

Which of the following sectors have you designed and/or delivered community engagement for in the last 10 years (as an employee or a contractor/consultant)? Select all that apply.

- Federal government
- State government
- Local government
- Private sector
- Higher education
- Not for Profit
- Health
- Planning
- Infrastructure
- Environment
- Disaster and emergency response
- Other, please specify

Chapter 8 – Christensen, H.E. 2019b. 'Managing Divided Loyalties in the Emerging Profession of Community Engagement.' Journal of Sociology, Online 17 October 2019
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Managing divided loyalties in the emerging profession of community engagement

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Abstract

Community engagement practitioners design, deliver, report and evaluate processes which invite the community to influence decision-making. It is a unique role, with practitioners serving two masters: the organisations that employ or contract them and the communities whose views they are engaged to elicit. In balancing these interests, practitioners experience a number of tensions in their work, and employ a variety of methods to address them. This article draws on a series of 20 semi-structured interviews with senior practitioners and finds that these tensions mainly relate to: the need to serve both the community and the engagement sponsor, their position in either the public sector or as a private consultants to the public sector, and the constraints and behaviours of public institutions. They way in which they manage these is relatively ad hoc, although it is often informed by principles and position.

Keywords

community engagement, practitioners, professionalisation, professionals, public participation, tensions

It stands to reason that between Australia's multitude of public institutions – over 500 local governments as well as the departments and agencies of its federal government and those of its six states and two mainland territories – a multitude of community consultation and engagement processes are being undertaken. The use of these processes by public institutions for decision-making has become commonplace in recent years (Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2017; Bua and Escobar, 2018; Fung, 2015), not only in Australia (Grant and Drew, 2017), but internationally (Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2017; Bherer et al.,

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2016; Lowndes et al., 2001; Michels and De Graaf, 2010; Nabatchi and Amsler, 2014; Nabatchi and Leighninger, 2015; Pateman, 2012; Wampler, 2010; Wang, 2001).

These processes are designed, coordinated, facilitated, evaluated and managed by public sector employees, not-for-profit employees, private sector employees and consultants, who self-identify as having the required skills to undertake these tasks. Such practitioners are a relatively recent phenomenon (Christensen, 2018a). The roots of this emerging profession are often attributed to community activism (Aulich, 2009) but the commercial engagement of practitioners on behalf of public institutions to run community engagement processes has only been seen in its current form in the last 30 years (Hendriks and Carson, 2008; Lee, 2015, 2017).

The work of these practitioners does not confirm to standard arrangements of service. Freidson (1989: 429) highlighted that professional work differs and the markets in which it operates differ: '[S]ome professions command bodies of knowledge and skill that serve the needs of individual clients while others serve the needs of institutions, organisations or aggregates of individuals'. In the case of community engagement practitioners, the knowledge and skills are simultaneously serving the needs of a client or employer, which is an institution or organisation, while at the same time serving the 'aggregates of individuals', understood to be the community and other stakeholders. Both parties must be satisfactorily 'attended to' (Moore, 1995: 118) lest practitioners risk losing their income and livelihoods and/or the democratic process they are managing is viewed as a sham by communities and stakeholders. This is the case for practitioners who are employed in or, alternatively, contracted by public institutions – the focus of this research (henceforth public practitioners and consultant practitioners). In managing these divided loyalties, practitioners face a multitude of tensions.

This article builds on previous studies (Bherer et al., 2017a, 2017b; Chilvers, 2017; Cooper and Smith, 2012; Escobar, 2017; Hendriks and Carson, 2008; Lee, 2014, 2015, 2017; Lewanski and Ravazzi, 2017; Mazeaud and Nonjon, 2017) but is unique, as it is the first to focus on the tensions that practitioners experience. By identifying these tensions, a more complete picture of the role of the practitioner and their influence on democratic processes can be understood. The research undertaken here focuses on Australian public practitioners and consultant practitioners working on behalf of public institutions. In this context, the practitioners are commonly known as community engagement 'practitioners'. However, members of this group have also been referred to as public participation professionals (PPPs) (Bherer et al., 2017b), public participation practitioners (Cooper and Smith, 2012), deliberation professionals (Lee, 2015), deliberative practitioners (Hendriks and Carson, 2008), public engagement professionals (Lee, 2015), public engagement consultants (Lee, 2014) and other similar terms.

To explore these tensions and how practitioners manage them the article is arranged in five sections. First, a brief review of relevant literature as it pertains to practitioners and professional tensions is conducted. Second, an overview of the research methodology is provided. The third section explores the common tensions identified by those interviewed. These tensions have been themed into four areas: those that arise from loyalties divided; those that arise from being a public sector practitioner; those that spring from the constraints and behaviours of public institutions; and those that come from the community. The fourth section explores how practitioners manage these tensions and the

final sections consider the findings, how they relate to existing theory and how they can assist in future development of the practice. Finally, there is a concluding discussion.

Literature review

Increasing attention has been given to practitioners in recent years and two relevant themes can be identified. First, how do practitioners negotiate the balance between commercial and community interest? One of the most significant contributions in this area is Hendriks and Carson (2008), who, after discussing the supply and demand of the deliberative market, track the growth of deliberative consultants in Australia and conclude that consultants are more akin to a 'community of practice' than a marketplace. This is a position Cooper and Smith (2012) agree with. Lee (2014, 2015, 2017) is more critical, concluding that practitioners balance 'democratising' and 'bureaucratising' logics by being both entrepreneurial and projecting the 'right' identities (Lee, 2014). Lee (2015, 2017) also explores the expansive network of economic drivers for professional engagement, such as commodification, and concludes that the focus on professionalisation may have come at the cost of actually addressing the democratic deficit. Bherer et al. (2017b), who explore the issue of impartiality in the context of commercialisation, conclude that practitioners can be defined by four professional identities based on the level of commitment they have to impartiality and commercial support for the project: promoter, reformer, militant and facilitator.

The second theme in the literature is a focus on how practitioners are often constrained by the nature of public institutions. In their account of practitioners in Britian and Germany, Cooper and Smith (2012) argue that the structure and culture of public authorities often hinders the effectiveness of participation as authorities fail to understand what is involved in engagement processes. Using an Italian case study, Lewanski and Revazzi (2017) discuss how the use of institutional frameworks designed to promote and regulate practice, can affect practice, for example, through the standardisation of approach. Mazeaud and Nonjon (2017) report a similar situation in France, which they assert has led to a fracturing of the market. Meanwhile, Chilvers (2017) presents evidence from the United Kingdom that while public participation was designed to overcome technocratic practices, professionalisation has led to engagement becoming technocratic and institutionalised. In his study of practitioners employed by public institutions, also in the United Kingdom, Escobar (2017) discusses how these practitioners have additional challenges to face because of the political environment in which they are situated.

There is also relevant scholarship which has examined the tensions in professional practice writ large, including how market mechanisms adversely affect professional practice. For instance: Fawcett and Hanlon (2009) study human service workers in an environment of New Public Management (NPM); Gardner et al. (2001) compare journalists and genetic scientists in the face of technological innovation; and Sawyer et al. (2009) researches nurses in the NPM context. All conclude that the market adversely impacts upon professional practice in these diverse settings. Also evident in this broader literature is a concern with how the nature of public institutions can adversely affect practice: for example, Glennie et al. (2018) study government scientists and Lewis et al.

(2003) examine general practitioners in their quest for autonomy. This broader research suggests that the challenges of community engagement are not unique.

Methodology

This article explores themes that relate to the tensions that practitioners face and how they manage them. In order to reflect on changes and trends in the practice, senior practitioners, defined as those with more than 10 years' experience, were targeted, creating a purposeful sample. The disadvantage of focusing on experienced practitioners is that this study does not identify how less experienced practitioners perceive and manage tensions. In selecting the sample, efforts were made to ensure there was a mix of public sector employees and private consultants to the public sector, and a mix of genders and locations. Efforts were also made to seek participants who had differing views so that a degree of data saturation was achieved (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted between November 2018 and January 2019 (see the Appendix for details). Interviewees were located in Australia's six states and the interviews were conducted in person or via video conference (Zoom), they ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in length. Participants were provided with draft questions before the interview and an information sheet explaining the study in more detail. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. After the interviews, Dedoose was used to collate and code the transcripts in order to explore themes.

The findings in this article present data from the survey and the qualitative responses were drawn primarily from three interview questions, namely: What is making it difficult/challenging to deliver good engagement? What types of tensions or dilemmas do you face in your work? How do you manage these?

Tensions

The origins of practitioner tensions emerged as four-fold. First, participants underscored that they experienced tensions from having the employer or client on one side and the community on the other. A second source of tension arose from whether their role was based inside a public institution, making them a public practitioner, or whether they worked for a private company, making them a consultant practitioner. Third, participants identified constraints and behaviours of public institutions that were often outside the control of practitioners but were frequently at odds with the processes and principles of community engagement as another source of tensions. Fourth, participants, somewhat indirectly, identified tensions that arise from their work with the community itself.

Employer vs community

The most pronounced source of internal and external tension for community engagement practitioners was reported as residing in the divided loyalties between the groups practitioners are expected to simultaneously attend to. Participants were earnest in their efforts to deliver meaningful engagement processes while satisfying the needs of their employer or client as well as the communities they were consulting. At the same time many practitioners,

although not all, indicated a desire to do this, while at the same time appearing loyal to *neither* party, placing the engagement process or the project as paramount (see Polletta, 2016). Practitioners were adept at describing this conundrum:

> You are almost in between that rock and a hard place . . . you are being paid by an organisation to get a community's view to influence the decision. So, on the one hand you want to do your best by the community but occasionally there's that niggling voice at the back of your head telling you not to upset your employer and to toe the line.

A similar sentiment was evident with consultant practitioners, with one participant saying '[the tension] is absolutely the serving of two people: the client that pays your contract as a consultant – as a consultant you want to do a good job because you want their business – but equally you've got to be true to the community'.

Whose side are you on anyway? While practitioners' loyalties were commonly identified as owed to both client and community, there were risks if a careful balance between the two was not achieved, as one public practitioner described: 'personal integrity is a dilemma that they [practitioners] face. Their personal safety inside an organisation, their ongoing employment and even more broadly their reputation as a provider of good advice.' The advice that practitioners were dispensing was generally to organisations – be they the employer or client. It included advice on community engagement policy and strategy – such as defining the parameters of a process, the development of questions to ask the community, identification of suitable methods for engaging, and interpreting community sentiment and feedback. Some participants recounted that, when they offered this advice, they were frequently perceived as working against the greater aims of the organisation or the project. Conversely, some practitioners spoke of how communities could be suspicious of a practitioner's motives, assuming them to be aligned with the organisation that has engaged or is paying them. As one practitioner described it: 'The toughest thing is that everybody thinks you're on the other side . . . and the worst thing is when it's your own work colleagues and you're just innocently giving the perspective [of the community].'

Independent from? It is widely acknowledged in the international literature (Mansbridge et al., 2006; Moore, 2012; Spada and Vreeland, 2013) that, when playing the intermediary between public institutions and the community, practitioners see neutrality or impartiality as necessary to maintain integrity. The conversations with practitioners in this study differed in two ways. First, there was a tendency to use the term 'independent' rather than 'neutral' or 'impartial'. Second, it was often unclear which party they were seeking independence from. The desired goal was viewed as *either* independence from the employing organisation *or* independence from the project/subject matter under consideration. In speaking about how to demonstrate independence from the organisation, one participant stated:

> I often say if they [the community] trust us [the practitioners] we can help them trust you [the organisation]. But if they're to trust us we are going to question you [the organisation] publicly.

> We are going to go with them on some things and then we can question them and go with you . . . you need to prove yourself to be independent.

Independence from the subject matter was viewed as a defining feature of engagement by most, as one practitioner explained:

> There's an independence from the technical work which is critical. If I'm an engineering practice and I'm doing engagement, it's in my interest to drive an engineering outcome that suits my engineering company . . . it actually changes everything around the strategic approach that might be applied. It changes the questions that they [the engineering company] ask, the information that's presented and the way in which they [the engineering company] receive information.

This quote also highlights that the practitioners interviewed did not necessarily identify a need to be independent from the community. On the contrary: many saw their role as being community advocates. Such a view illustrates the tension of balancing client (and commercial) interests with those of the community. One stated: 'I'm doing my job on behalf of the community and that's hard when you're telling your client that's paying you something that they don't want to hear.' The interpretation of the role of practitioner as community advocate was shared by many but not all. One practitioner employed by the public sector explained:

> I've heard a lot of my colleagues say our job is to advocate for the community. I see that as a growing belief or stance from a lot of engagement staff – that they believe that's what their job is. . . . I think what my colleagues are saying is that we need to make sure the community really does have a voice and does genuinely get the opportunity to say what they think. My understanding is that is the context in which it's being used but if you talk about being an advocate for the community, it can tilt to a really dangerous territory, you can be almost become part of the community against the project.

Some of the confusion around independence and neutrality may arise from different understandings of the roles of community engagement practitioner and that of facilitator, with some practitioners believing them to be the same, while others see them as complementary but separate, with neutrality being more strongly associated with the role of a facilitator (see Chilvers, 2017).

Public practitioners vs consultant practitioners

The practitioners interviewed acknowledged differences and challenges in practice arising from whether they were employed by a public institution or were private consultants. Public practitioners reported internal barriers to delivering good processes and some reported concerns for job security. Internal barriers included resistance from other staff at equivalent levels in their organisation, often those in technical professions (town planning; engineering) that were hesitant about having the community involved in their projects. Resistance was also reported at the senior management, executive and decision-maker levels. As one public practitioner explained:

> I think it does take a certain type of engagement practitioner to work in government. It really, really does. . .. It's hard, the things we have to do, the hoops that we have to jump through and the crap that we have to do to get things over the line and hold true to our process as best you can, it's really hard.

Some public practitioners reported that their compliance was linked to their desire for job security, with one explaining, 'With government engagement staff the survival stuff can often take over. You have to appease your master or they'll get someone else to.' The consequence of facing barriers regularly prompted some practitioners to describe how they 'pick their battles':

> Sometimes you try and push the boundaries in planning your community engagement but your thing gets shot down so many times that the next time you do a project with the same organisation you basically go for that simple option that you know will get past the decision-makers.

Given this example, it would appear the lack of autonomy for public practitioners could be resulting in substandard processes.

When consultant practitioners were asked what tensions they experience they were more reserved in their responses. However, they did speak in general terms of the need to balance the client relationship with their commercial interests. One consultant practitioner succinctly described the conundrum: 'Are they going to pay me for coming up with the wrong answer?' There was a perception among some consultant practitioners that working outside of public institutions was easier in many ways. Arguments for this included that the organisations had already recognised the need for engagement and therefore internal resistance was often resolved or minimised. Second, without long-term ties to the organisation or the community, it can be easier to remain impartial:

> It's much easier to be objective when you're a consultant and you're just brought in. Here's the project, I want you to go and engage this community on it. And so you go out, you know it's not your project, you're not wedded to it and you don't have any particular allegiance to it. You go and do a good job, you represent the project fairly, you represent the community fairly. . .. I have worked on other projects longer term and you start to feel a sense of ownership for that project. It is much harder to maintain your objectivity around that project the longer you're with it and the longer you see it evolve.

Interestingly, many practitioners viewed other types of practitioners (private, public, large organisation, small organisation) as more compromised than themselves. For example, and conflicting with the previous quote, one public sector practitioner believed their position allowed them to remain neutral about engagement outcomes.

> My perspective is that I'm not here to defend. So it depends on how you see your role I guess. I understand my role as being to develop and deliver opportunities for people to have their say. I guess it depends on where your dollars are coming from. And that's why I work for government because I couldn't work for private industry and try and push a particular perspective.

Some practitioners believed practitioners in large organisations – whether they be large consulting firms or large public institutions – were more likely to be compromised.

If you're an employee of an organisation and you're engaging around a project, you are compromised in that your job is to get this project done for the organisation. . .. Referencing the project over the group is a really tough position that people get put into.

Taken together, these findings suggest that practitioners see their work as challenging at times, but that they favour their own environments over other types.

To date, studies that have looked at public and consultant practitioners have tended to focus on one or the other, or both together (Bherer et al., 2017b; Hendriks and Carson, 2008; Lee, 2015; Mazeaud and Nonjon, 2017). In 2017, Escobar published research on 'official', or public practitioners, which discussed their unique context and the nature of their work, which was often defined by internal activism and burnout. Those findings, along with the ones presented here, suggest that public practitioners experience unique challenges, and that this changes the nature of their work to the role of 'internal advocate and system navigator', a role that lacks security in an increasingly political environment.

Constraints and behaviours of public institutions

Whether public or consultant practitioners, the constraints and behaviours of the public institutions which practitioners were employed in or contracted to were viewed as contributing to the tensions they faced.

When a practitioner agrees with a community. Practitioners reported that there were often instances where the community opposed the decision reached at the conclusion of an engagement process. It was a tension for practitioners when they felt that the community was justified in this response.

Sometimes a decision either has been made or is going to be made that the community might not like and when you're an engagement practitioner out there talking to the community and they're saying, 'I don't want that to happen, I think it should be something else', we might agree with them but we're employed by the organisation and the decision is out of our hands. So we kind of have to say, 'Well sorry that's the way it is.'. . . I guess that puts us in the sticky position in the middle.

Examples like this were raised by both consultant and public practitioners, with all of them pragmatically concluding that the reality is that the organisation or project interest prevails over community interest.

When practitioners lack authority. Within public institutions, the loyalty a practitioner feels to an organisation can also have an impact upon the delivery of project, with practitioners expected to 'toe the company line' in what is ultimately a political environment. If the practitioner is not operating with a degree of authority, interaction in the engagement process can be impeded. A practitioner gave this example:

[It's difficult] when a community member asks you a very straightforward question and you want to answer with a very straightforward answer but you can't because your manager is in the room or there is an elected member or there is a board member.

The lack of authority results in practitioners being conflicted over their ability to demonstrate values such as integrity, honesty and openness.

When the engagement is tokenistic. Tokenistic engagement was understood by practitioners as engagement where the community has very little or no influence over the decision or project. Many practitioners reported being frustrated when working on projects with limited influence available to the community, with some viewing it as the nature of the work and others actively avoiding it. When talking about projects where there was no opportunity for the community to influence the outcome or decision, one public practitioner stated: 'I'm conflicted when I know that the community engagement will not have one iota of influence on the decision.' Another public practitioner described it as: 'practitioners are in a really difficult position . . . where they [are] often told go and engage and there's not a hell of a lot to engage on because the decision has already been made'. At a greater extreme, one public practitioner stated: 'They're often put in the position of doing the cover up and that really goes against the grain of the practitioner that's sitting there going: "This is not genuine engagement and I've been asked to basically lie."' Practitioners spoke of how, in some instances, organisations chose to engage on smaller aspects of a project, either because the larger decision has already been made (typically by state and/or federal government) or because the commissioning organisation was reluctant to give influence to the community on the larger decisions.

> We're asking the community how big they want the wall to be and what colour they want to paint it and we know that they don't actually want the wall. So we're not consulting with them on the things they care about and are impacted by, we just consulting or engaging on the add-ons that have no value and it's a hard tension to reconcile.

Practitioners also spoke of how the influence available to the community changes as the result of related political, financial and policy decisions. One public practitioner told the story of a large project wherein the community had been informed that there would be an opportunity to influence the outcome. Yet not long after making this message public, the adjacent funding agency declared that they did not want to undertake any community engagement. The practitioner reported that they advocated internally for some community involvement, motivated by good practice and attempting to meet the expectation their organisation had already raised with the community. They conceded that any involvement was likely to be minimal. Additionally, practitioners spoke of being 'rushed' in undertaking engagement, with one public practitioner stating: 'I think because government is such a focal point for the community . . . we have to quickly do something. So the speed in which it moves and the decision-making is a reaction to the community. They want to engage but they make it impossible with the speed in which they act.'

When the bureaucracy and the decision-makers aren't aligned. While the decision to undertake community engagement processes in public institutions is often dictated by legislation (see, for example, Christensen, 2018b), in many instances it was considered good practice. Regardless of whether the process is mandated or not, participants in this study observed that there could be differences of opinion between the public servants who

design and deliver or contract the engagement process, and the elected representatives in how the engagement should be undertaken. Tensions were viewed as arising for the practitioner when these two parties are not in alignment. One consultant practitioner spoke of how the staff in organisations who contracted them were eager to run good engagement processes, with it then becoming apparent that the elected representatives are either reluctant or in opposition to engagement. One participant gave the example of a mayor who dissuaded other councillors from voting against a proposal to appease a close friend, despite an extensive engagement process.

When decision-makers are not fully committed or understanding of the process. Community engagement processes are designed to consider community views and give the community (varying levels of) influence over decisions. The processes are often different from more traditional decision-making processes and in some instances they require the decision-maker to hand over some of their power. Some practitioners interviewed spoke of how decision-makers are keen to 'be seen' to be more participatory by their communities, but struggled with the reality of participatory processes and handing over a degree of decision-making power. Practitioners reported that in these instances they were required to support the decision-makers and build their capacity, lest the engagement processes were put at risk. Speaking about an organisation that undertook a more participatory process than they would usually undertake, one practitioner stated:

> It was a very disempowering process for some of the older [decision-makers] who really struggled and we had to work very hard to try and keep these people supportive of the process. . .. There was a whole extra job on the sideline of keeping particularly three or four older members in close to us because that could have derailed the process. On the other hand we had . . . people who were very dismissive of the organisation and of the [decision-makers] and the quality of the [decision-makers].

In these instances, the practitioner must manage expectations of both parties often in an environment of mutual distrust between decision-makers and community.

When senior public servants and political advisers interfere. The outcomes of community engagement processes are not known until the engagement process is complete. This uncertainty can make stakeholders anxious. When practitioners were questioned about whether there was any interference in engagement processes, many answered that it was most likely to come from senior and executive public servants and political advisers, rather than decision-makers. For instance: 'There is some interference because the people who are generally reporting to the politicians don't want to give a bad account of their project so there's a bit of push and shove around what those reports look like.' Another practitioner gave a more specific example of when an idea suggested by a participant was in opposition to government policy. The practitioner was told that the recommendation reached by the engagement process would be removed by a senior government adviser, upon which they informed the adviser, 'If this happens I've got no credibility and I think I'd have to walk out . . . because you've actually just walked away from the process. Government doesn't have to do the things they said [rather] it's an idea to consider.' These examples hint at senior civil servants' desire to manage risk and reputation, which

result in the community engagement practitioner defending the process and the involvement of the community.

When public institutions are unsure how to balance community and expert views. Practitioners work alongside subject matter experts, such as land use planners, engineers, policy specialists and scientists. While participants in this study frequently reported experiencing a tension, and needing to be independent from these experts, as discussed earlier, they also expressed the view that public institutions were often unsure about how to balance the needs of communities and experts. Experiences seemed to vary, with some organisations interpreting the objective of community engagement as incorporating as much feedback as possible, relevant or not, from the community, with some going so far as to create a Key Performance Indicator to report on this. Other participants were protective of the experts, as one stated:

> The challenge is still around the expert. . .. The reflection is, 'It's the science!' For me the tension that we try to hold is absolutely recognising and valuing that role [of the expert] but let's not forget about the role and the value community have and the expertise they have.

Presumably some aspects of projects or decisions are best left to experts, some best left to community, and others a negotiation, but in the absence of clear direction, community engagement practitioners are left to mediate.

When the engagement is finished and the outcomes need to be implemented. Some practitioners spoke about how they were often concerned with how organisations implemented the outcomes of the engagement they delivered. One consultant practitioner articulated this as having to 'know how to implement it internally so it continues to have a life'. They described how getting to the decision is often the easy part, compared with it then being implemented, an aspect which they feel is often out of their control as a practitioner, more so if they are a consultant. Another consultant practitioner expressed frustration in instances when organisation does not act on the outcomes:

> the decision-makers say, 'No, we're not going to do that' or 'Our priorities have changed and we might look at it in five years time if we've got budget' . . . [and we want to respond]

A public practitioner expressed the same concern and added that often they are unable to communicate to the community the reason why a particular project has not gone ahead. They did not indicate if this was because they themselves were unsure of the reasons or if they had been directed to not inform the community of the reasons for the project being halted. The practitioners tended to frame their frustration on behalf of the communities who participated in such processes but it was also apparent that it was frustrating from the perspective of a practitioner.

Tensions from the community

The vast majority of tensions identified by the practitioners interviewed related, as shown above, to the role of the practitioner and the institutions they are working for and on

behalf of. Tensions arising from the community and the actual process of facilitating engagement with the community, were given only a cursory mention by most, such as 'well there are lots [of tensions] when you're in the detail of a process, but . . .', or as a root of a tension which is mismanaged, causing tension for the practitioner. For example, one interviewee noted that there is a 'heightened sense of expectation from the public to know things quickly' and continued to explain how, in the face of this demand, public institutions are too risk averse to be able to respond quickly and honestly. While the community was not identified as a major source of tensions by those interviewed, the cursory mentions suggest that the work with community is perceived as justifiably difficult and expected, whereas the other tensions presented were not.

Managing tensions

In probing how participants sought to manage these tensions, this study found that the effectiveness of a practitioner and the processes they deliver were dependent on how they reconciled or manage tensions such as those described. Three main strategies were identified among the practitioners interviewed. First, was the strategy of avoidance. Several consultant practitioners mentioned that they avoided working with some client organisations in instances where they thought, or knew from experience, that the work would be very difficult or not in alignment with their principles or the type of work they were building their profile on: 'I choose my clients pretty carefully.' The preferred tactic in these instances was to claim they were unavailable. Notably, public practitioners are often unable to choose which work to do. Second, was the strategy of prevention, which generally consisted of communicating and building capacity at the beginning on what to expect and what was required by the organisation as well as the community. As one practitioner succinctly states, 'It's always about making sure that our processes are bulletproof, so when they are attacked, we can defend them.' How practitioners signalled what to expect and what was required included structured approaches such as agenda items at project commencement meetings about how to work together, the questioning of project teams, regular communication about what to expect, and including the International Association of Public Participation Core Values and Code of Ethics as part of tender documentation (IAP2, n.d.). Third, was the strategy of managing the tension. Many of those interviewed spoke of having honest but difficult conversations with the sponsor of the engagement. Practitioners spoke of how issues with community expectations and organisational expectations were very common. In addition, other strategies identified by practitioners interviewed included partnering with a third party who then acts as an intermediary. Also included was the tactic of deferring to participants about the way forward and escalating issues to more senior staff.

Consultant practitioners spoke of how, if these strategies were unsuccessful, they would consider terminating their involvement as they spoke about being prepared or willing 'to walk away'. In the examples given, practitioners' frustrations were directed towards the organisation rather than the community, typically in situations where the organisation was not taking advice on process from them, or where the organisation became reluctant to involve or give influence to the community despite earlier promises to do so, or where the organisation was not making information or outcomes publicly

available. With walking away being a less viable option for public practitioners, they instead described how they 'make the best' of it. Arguably, this developmental approach to improving engagement practice is a just response to the contextual complexities described earlier.

Principles

Principles were identified as serving as a guide to many practitioners for how to recognise when their process or practice was at risk of being compromised. Approximately half of those interviewed referred to the importance of principles or values in their practice and how they have served as a foundation of their practice, as one practitioner stated: 'How do you manage it [the tensions]? You come back to principles. That's what I find I constantly do is go to the principle. . .. What would be the best ethical choice if transparency is our goal?' Integrity was explicitly mentioned by some practitioners; as one explained: 'I think engagement is very much a values-based science/profession. And really that's integrity. I think it's something that I see with a lot of practitioners. Integrity of process, integrity of who they are, integrity around access and inclusion and what's right fundamentally right for people.' Adherence to these principles not only assists practitioners in recognising the limits of where they are willing to go with their practice but, as one practitioner described, also allows them to manage the tensions. They explained:

> We've gotten to a stage where we feel we can say . . . that would go against our principles . . . this doesn't sit well, we can't possibly go forward. More often than not you're able to negotiate a way through that. Give them [the client] a shock and then they go, 'Ok, now that makes sense.'

Position counts

The use of the phrase 'gotten to a stage' in the last quote assists in making the final point of how practitioners manage tensions and that is – position counts. How experienced the practitioner is, how confident the practitioner is, their position in the hierarchy, their relationship with senior leaders and decision-makers and even the profile and understanding of community engagement in the organisation all impact how practitioners perceive and manage tensions. Many of the practitioners interviewed acknowledged that with more experience they have felt more comfortable 'pushing back' against the stated wishes of their clients, although many prefaced those comments with a need to 'pick your battles'. Several practitioners stated that the more complex and challenging processes provided the greatest learning. Those interviewed for this study were senior practitioners; therefore it is important to note that less experienced practitioners may perceive and manage tensions differently and may be less confident and secure in challenging senior leaders and decision-makers to ensure certain standards in practice. As one practitioner explained:

> I'm old enough now and wise enough now to know whether it's right or not. . .. I feel confident that I can challenge now because I can round out my reasons why I'm challenging them now.

> With 16 years of facing the same battles I'm confident enough now that I can turn around the senior managers. . . . When I was just starting I certainly wouldn't have that confidence to challenge them on things.

This situation may have further consequences for the quality and effectiveness of engagement processes.

Concluding discussion

Returning to the literature, the two themes of how practitioners negotiate the balance between commercial and community interest and the constraints of public institutions are present here. With respect to the tension surrounding commercialisation, previous research is divided, with some concluding that practitioners were evenly balanced between democratic ideals and the market (Cooper and Smith, 2012; Hendriks and Carson, 2008) and others stating they were considerably more compromised (Lee, 2014, 2015, 2017). These findings suggest the truth is somewhere in between, with the reality likely to be considerably more nuanced, for it is not a case of whether practitioners are driven by commercial or democratic ideals but how they are perceived by their clients, employers and communities, and consequently how they position themselves. Regarding the challenges faced when working in and with public institutions, the findings that suggest public institutions may be (unintentionally) hindering democratic ideals (Chilvers, 2017; Cooper and Smith, 2012; Lewanski and Revazzi, 2017) are mirrored here. Also mirrored are Escobar's (2017) findings on the additional work of public practitioners. Where these findings differ, and make their contribution, is in: the greater exploration of the commercial and community interests balance and the tensions practitioners face as a result of the constraints and behaviours of public institutions. Also, the article discusses the ways that practitioners manage these tensions – an important consideration given the role they play in protecting the democratic integrity of the processes they design and deliver.

As for the future, increasing professionalisation is expected to occur, bringing with it additional tensions for practitioners to manage. From a theory point of view, the parallels in findings with other studies indicate that a comparative study may be useful, along with greater exploration of exactly how practitioners affect democratic process. And, from a practice point of view, the field may want to consider the important role that principles could play in improving standards and providing guidance (also noted by Cooper and Smith, 2012).

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Author biography

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Appendix 1. Interviewee details.

No.	Gender	Sector	Position	Years' experience
1	Male	State government	Senior staff/middle management	16 years
2	Female	Private consultant	Lead medium/large firm	20 years
3	Female	Private consultant	Lead medium/large firm	18 years
4	Female	Private consultant	Solo/lead small firm	19 years
5	Female	State government	Senior management/executive	21 years
6	Male	Private consultant (significant public sector background)	Senior management/executive	15 years
7	Female	Private (significant public sector background)	Solo/lead small firm	20 years
8	Male	Local government	Senior staff/middle management	10 years
9	Female	State government	Senior management/executive	20–25 years
10	Male	Private consultant	Solo/lead small firm	18 years
11	Female	Private consultant	Solo/lead small firm	15 years
12	Female	Local government	Senior management/executive	20 years
13	Female	Local government	Senior staff/middle management	10 years
14	Female	State government	Senior management/executive	20 years
15	Female	Local government	Senior staff/middle management	14 years
16	Female	Private (significant public sector background)	Solo/lead small firm	28 years
17	Male	Private consultant	Solo/lead small firm	22 years
18	Female	Private consultant	Solo/lead small firm	20 years
19	Female	Private (significant public sector background)	Solo/lead small firm	25 years
20	Female	Private consultant	Solo/lead small firm	15 years