Local Democracy at Work: An analysis of local government representatives and democracy in New South Wales, Australia

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Su Fei Tan, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

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

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Abstract

Data from the 2016 report from the Australian Election showed that between 2007 and 2016 the percentage of people who said they were not satisfied with democracy increased dramatically - from 14% to 40%. This level of dissatisfaction calls for a considered examination of Australian democracy and the efforts being made to address its perceived deficits. This research focusses on one important, yet often neglected, aspect of the Australian federal system, local government. Since the 1990s local governments across Australia have been undergoing a process of reform. The main stated objective has been to strengthen local democracy and make local governments more effective and efficient in order to ensure their financial sustainability and their ongoing capacity to provide services to the community. The central foci of this study are local representation and democracy. It uses Bourdieu's theories of habitus, field and capital together with Habermas's conceptualisation of deliberative democracy and its constituent parts, to investigate the role of locally elected councillors in the Australian state of New South Wales. Drawing on 28 semi-structured interviews with councillors and general managers, this study investigates elected members' motivations for running for office and the consequent implications for local democracy. It examines the role of the councillor and compares their responsibilities and functions as described in the legislation with councillors' actual understanding and experiences. In this regard the role and power of the general manager is also examined as this position is pivotal within the local government system. Finally, the processes of councillor decision-making are examined, with a particular focus on the volume of material that elected members must consider when trying to identify the best options for their communities. The study concludes with a discussion of suggestions for further research and comments on the utility of using the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu and Habermas in consideration of the question of local democracy and how councillors view their role.

Glossary

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CWA	Country Women's Association
GM	General Manager
IP&R	Integrated Planning and Reporting
LGA	Local Government Area
NPM	New Public Management
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
P&C	Parents and Citizens Committee
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Chapter 1
Why local democracy?

Why local democracy? A rationale

Pippa Norris' (2011) seminal work, *Democratic Deficit: Citizens Revisited*, examined the question of democratic deficit, finding that "in many countries today, satisfaction with the performance of democracy diverges from public aspirations" (location 237). This gap between performance and expectations is evident today in Australia. The 2016 report from the Australian Election Study provides a long-term perspective on stability and change in the political attitudes that Australians hold. Data from this report demonstrates increasing levels of frustration and distrust among the electorate with regard to the state of democracy in Australia. Table 1.1 below shows that according to this research a substantial proportion of citizens are not satisfied with democracy, do not sense that people in government can be trusted, feel that politicians do not know what ordinary people think, and it does not make a big difference who people vote for. Crucially, these attitudes have intensified significantly since 2007.

Table 1.1 Australians' perceptions of democracy

Percentage of respondents who said:	2007	2016	% change
They are not satisfied with democracy	14%	40%	+26%
People in government can be trusted	43%	26%	-17%
Who people vote for won't make any big difference	13%	20%	+7%
Politicians don't know what ordinary people think	35%	52%	+17%

Source: Cameron & McAllister (2016)

It is within this context of increasing public cynicism about the efficacy of the democratic system that this research is situated. Arguably, the data presented in Table 1.1 above, calls for a considered examination of Australian democracy and the efforts being made to address its perceived deficits. It is in this vein that this thesis focusses on one important, yet often neglected, level of the Australian federal system, local government.

Since the 1990s local governments across Australia have been undergoing a process of reform. The main stated objective has been to make local governments more effective and efficient in order to ensure their financial sustainability and their ongoing capacity to provide services to the community. Local government reforms have endeavoured to

address the administrative, financial and technical capacity of local councils. But these reforms focus on only one role of local government, service delivery, they do little to enhance local representation and democracy. "More than a decade of managerial reforms to local government has led to a number of problems, including amalgamations at the expense of community focus and local democracy" (Sawer, Abjorensen & Larkin 2009, p. 275). The democratic role of local government has been 'comparatively neglected' in local government reform processes (Grant & Dollery 2014) despite the fact that reform has significantly changed the role of councillors. A review of the literature on local representation found very little scholarly research on the role of local elected representatives (with some exceptions, see for example, Haidar & Spooner (2017); Pullin & Haidar (2004); Spooner & Haidar (2014)). Overwhelmingly, the weight of research on local government in Australia has focussed on the institution (e.g. organisational size and configuration) and the service delivery aspects of the sector.

Related to the literature on local government, there has been growing interest in the potential of deliberative approaches to strengthen and reinvigorate democracy particularly at the community level (Bovenkamp & Vollaard 2019). While there has been some scholarly research on deliberative democracy in the Australian context, this has tended to focus on increased citizen involvement in decision-making through the use of approaches such as citizen's juries and participatory budgeting (see for example, Christensen & Grant 2016). Little work has been done on the use of deliberation by elected representatives, and I could find no research on Australian local councillors' use of deliberation in their role as decision-makers. Also, not much is known about locally elected members' motivations for running for office, how they conceptualise democracy, their representative role and the potential for a more deliberative approach to strengthen local democracy. This research addresses these gaps.

Research questions

There are four key research questions which guide this study:

i. What are the motivations of councillors for standing as locally elected representatives?
ii. What are the implications for democratic governance of representation, particularly descriptive representation, and its impact on deliberative

democracy? This question, together with question i. above, is the focus of chapter five.

iii. How do councillors perceive their role and function within the local government system? Chapter six of this study examines differences between what councillors perceive their role to be and how it is described in the legislation, particularly as it pertains to changes in the role as a result of local government reform processes. The chapter explores the implications of these differences between perceptions and reality for the functioning of local democracy.

iv. How do councillors perceive local democracy? This question examines democracy and the challenges of decision-making. This is the focus of chapter seven which presents the legislation which governs decision-making and then examines the councillors' practice with regard to this important function.

A common thread throughout the thesis is an examination of the potential of more deliberative approaches to decision-making amongst councillors themselves and between councillors and their communities to improve decision-making and strengthen local democracy.

Structure of the thesis

This chapter, chapter one, provides an overview of local government in Australia generally and in New South Wales (NSW) in particular. It also outlines the main features of the reform process which has resulted in local government's current configuration. I illustrate how these reform processes have shaped the role of the councillor. Chapter two reviews the literature relevant to this study. The topics reviewed include, justifications for local government, the deliberative turn in democratic theory, and ideas and debates around representation. Chapter three describes the theoretical frameworks and concepts I use to facilitate my analysis. In order to better understand councillors, their motivations, experiences and conceptions of local democracy, I use Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital. I also draw on Jürgen Habermas and his conceptualisation of deliberative democracy and its constituent parts to analyse the local government system as a whole with a particular focus on the institutional arrangements for councillor decision-making. Chapter four maps out the methodology I used to carry out the research. These first four chapters constitute part 1 of this thesis which sets out the scholarly landscape within in which the

research takes place (chapters one and two) and then describes how I intend to carry out the study (chapters three and four). These elements being established in the first part of the thesis, I then move on to the analysis of the data, the in-depth interviews. The first chapter in part two, chapter five, analyses councillors' motivations for running for office and the implications of these findings for local representation and democracy. Chapter six, discusses, councillors' experience of relating to the other two constituent parts of the local democratic system: the bureaucracy through the general manager (GM) and the community. The last analysis chapter, seven, examines the various ways councillors conceive of democracy with an emphasis on the process of decision-making. The final chapter, chapter eight, discusses the implications of the findings for both scholarly research and for policy-makers and makes suggestions for future research.

Australian local government

Legislation and responsibilities

I begin by setting out the national context for local government in Australia. The Commonwealth Constitution establishes Australia's governmental arrangements, which is a dualist federal system. This means that powers and functions are allocated exclusively to the federal and state levels of government (Twomey 2012). The Federal Parliament passes laws which affect the country as a whole. The Constitution defines 40 areas of responsibility for the Federal Government, including foreign relations, trade, defence and immigration (Robinson & Farrelly 2013; Ryan & Woods 2015). Under the Constitution, state governments are responsible for everything not listed as federal responsibilities, which typically include education, health care, conservation and environment, transport, public works, agriculture and fishing (Koutsogeorgopoulou & Tuske 2015; Parliament of New South Wales no date). Figure 1.1 below presents a map of the Federation showing the six states and two territories which make up the Commonwealth of Australia.

Figure 1.1 Map of Australia

Source: Geoscience Australia (2005)

Although all states and territories (except for the Australian Capital Territory) have a local government system, the Federal Constitution makes no mention of local government. "Local government is the creature of the State Parliaments. The Australian Constitution contains no recognition of local government at all" (Kelly 2011a, p. 1). Local governments have no independent constitutional status; instead they are accorded state constitutional recognition. As a result, they derive their functions and powers from state legislation (Siriwardhane & Taylor 2014). Each state government defines the powers and geographical areas of its local governments (Ryan & Woods 2015). In general terms, however, local government's core functions and responsibilities can comprise:

- Infrastructure and property services (e.g. roads, bridges, footpaths, drainage, waste disposal)
- Recreation facilities (e.g. parks, sports facilities, halls, camping grounds etc.)
- Health services (e.g. water and food inspection, immunisation services, toilet facilities, noise control, animal control etc.)
- Community services (e.g. child care, aged care)

- Building services (e.g. inspections, licensing, certification, enforcement)
- Planning and development approval
- Administration of facilities (e.g. airports, cemeteries, parking)
- Cultural facilities and services (e.g. libraries, art galleries, museums)
- Water and sewerage services in some states
- Other services, such as abattoirs, sale-yards, and group purchasing schemes (Australian Local Government Association 2019)

The importance of the local government sector within the Australian governmental structure is often underestimated. Local government in Australia plays a significant role in two important respects. First, it gives voice to local aspirations for decentralised governance, as locally elected members are supposed to represent the voice of residents, guiding decision-making and setting the long-term strategy for the community. Second, it provides a mechanism for the efficient delivery of services to local communities (Aulich 2005). There are approximately 537 councils across Australia (Australian Local Government Association 2019).

Representation and size

In terms of representation, local government councillors, make up a significant proportion of elected members across all levels of government. Table 1.2 below shows the number of elected members by level of government and by jurisdiction. In 2015, there were approximately 5,060 local councillors in Australia (this number has since decreased as a result of amalgamation processes in NSW) while state level representatives numbered 558 and Federal Members of Parliament only 150.

Table 1.2 Elected representatives in 2015

	Population 2018	Number of Elected Representatives		
		Federal	State	Local
New South Wales	7,988,241	48	135	1,494
Victoria	6,460,675	37	128	631
Queensland	5,011,216	30	89	530
Western Australia	2,595,192	15	55	1,252
South Australia	1,736,422	11	69	716
Tasmania	528,201	5	40	280
Australian Capital Territory	420,960	2	17	0
Northern Territory	247,327	2	25	157
Total	**24,992, 860**	**150**	**558**	**5,060**

Source: Adapted from Tan (2016) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019a)

These councillors represent a great diversity of communities and govern very different kinds of organisations from very large metropolitan councils, which offer an array of services and have substantial budgets, to smaller rural local governments with very limited resources. Councils in Australia range in size. The largest is Brisbane City Council in Queensland. Its expenditure in 2017/18 was just over $2 billion (Brisbane City Council 2018). It serves a community of just over a million people and covers an area of 133,809 ha (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019a). In stark contrast, Sandstone Shire Council, in Western Australia, has a population of 81 residents living in an area covering 3,266,650 ha (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019a), comparable to the size of Belgium at 3,300,000 ha (World Bank 2015). Sandstone's expenditure in 2018 was $8.5 million (Shire of Sandstone 2018). Even within states there is great diversity. In NSW, one of the largest local governments is Blacktown City Council which services a community of 366,534 residents, has a land area of 24,000 ha (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019a) and an annual operating budget of approximately $340 million (Blacktown City Council 2018). In contrast, Brewarrina Shire Council is the smallest local government by population with 1,655 residents living in a local government area of 1.9 million ha (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019a) and with an annual operating budget of approximately $15 million (Brewarrina Shire Council 2018). Figure 1.2 below presents a map of New South Wales including the boundaries of its 129 local government areas. What the map makes clear is the diversity, in relation to geographical size, between the relatively small, in terms of land area, councils in

metropolitan Sydney (e.g. Hunters Hill Council in metropolitan Sydney has a population of approximately 15,000 people and a land area of 571 ha) in comparison to the vast local government areas located in western parts of the state (Central Darling Shire has a population of 1,837 living in an area of 5.3 million ha[1]) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019a). It is clear that across Australia, local governments differ greatly in terms of size, population, revenue, their capacity to deliver services and the communities they represent.

Figure 1.2 Map of Local Government Areas in NSW (N=129)

Source: Local Government and Municipal Knowledge Base (no date)

Revenue and expenditure

In order to provide a sense of the relative size of local government within the federal system, I have provided figures on expenditure according to level of government in Table 1.3 below. This shows that total expenditure for all levels of government in

[1] For comparative purposes, Denmark is approximately 4.3 million ha in extent and has a population of approximately 4.8 million (Statistics Denmark 2019).

2017/18 was approximately $647 billion. Local government revenue during this time was $37 billion (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019b). Drawing on these figures, local government expenditure makes up about 6% of total government expenditure. Councils obtain their revenue from four main sources: rates on property, financial assistance grants from the Commonwealth government, council fees such as development application fees, hall hire, sporting field use etc. and other revenue such as interest from investments etc. (Department of Local Government NSW 2006; Sawer, Abjorensen & Larkin 2009).

Table 1.3 Government Expenditure 2017/18

	Expenditure*	Percentage of total expenditure
All levels of government	647,116	
Commonwealth government	346,506	53%
States/territories	263,613	41%
Local governments	36,998	6%

*Expenditure is in $ millions
Source: compiled from figures from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019b)

Table 1.4 shows this data for NSW. It presents a slightly different picture from the national expenditure figures, with local government accounting for approximately 13% of government spending within the state. Total state and local government expenditure in NSW in 2017/18 was approximately $78 billion. Local government's share of this expenditure was approximately $11 billion.

Table 1.4 NSW state and local government expenditure 2017/18

	Expenditure*	Percentage of expenditure
NSW State Government	78,106	87%
NSW Local Government	11,269	13%
NSW State and Local Government expenditure	89,375	100%

*Expenditure is in $ millions
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019b)

Local government and employment

Local government is also a significant employer. In June 2014, there were 1,908,200 public sector employees of which 246,400 were employed by the Commonwealth Government 1,472,900 by state government and 188,900 by local government (ABS 2014). The total Australian workforce in June 2014 was 11,582,400, which means that local government employed approximately 1.6% of Australia's active labour force. These figures are similar to the mining industry for 2013-2014 which employed 187,000 workers as at June 2014 (ABS 2015). Importantly, local government is a significant employer in rural and regional areas (Hastings et al. 2015). For example, my analysis of the 2011 ABS Census data shows that Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council in rural Queensland employed 54% of the workforce in the area. Looking at the larger picture, in 46 local governments in regional and rural areas across Australia, 10% or more of the workforce in these areas were employed by councils (ABS 2011).

This profile of local government in Australia makes several things clear. Local governments across the nation are responsible for a wide range of services to their communities ranging from infrastructure and property service (roads, bridges, footpaths etc.) to community services (child care, aged care), to planning and development approval processes. The approximately 5,000 locally elected councillors across Australia represent a very diverse range of communities. Finally, the local government sector is responsible for a reasonable proportion of public expenditure and is a significant employer, particularly in rural and regional areas. Having set out what local government currently looks like within the Australian federation, this chapter now moves to a consideration of the processes of reform which have shaped the sector, resulting in its current configuration.

Local government reform in Australia

> The challenge to local government in the 21st century is to retain local community 'uniqueness' while delivering valued services as economically as possible (Department of Local Government NSW 2006, p. 3).

Across Australia local councils are *de jure* the level of government closest to communities. They are responsible for delivering a wide range of services and are seen

as the 'seat' of local democracy (Aulich 2005). Local governments perform their service delivery and representative roles within a policy context which has evolved significantly over the last three decades (see for example, Grant & Dollery 2014; Grant & Drew 2017; Marshall 2008). Aulich (2005) observes that the revitalisation of local government, which began in the 1980s, coincided with a period in Australian history of intensive transformation in the public sector. This was in response to changes in public and government expectations as to how government is meant to operate. The stated primary aim of these reforms was to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of local government in its service provision (Aulich 2005). As a result, local government's remit expanded from a focus on roads, rates and rubbish to encompass a wider range of community and social services (for example, services for the elderly, like meals on wheels, and in some cases medical services through the provision of a General Practitioner etc.). These are in addition to those required by the state government statutes under which it operates (Cripps 2010). This model of a diverse range of activities and service delivery being determined by a citizen-elected body and administered by the one small group of administrators is unparalleled in either state or federal public sector departments (Hutchinson, Walker & McKenzie 2017). I begin the discussion of this reform process by examining the approach which has driven public service reform over the last three decades, new public management (NPM). Although, arguably, the justifications for NPM may be on the wane, being superseded by more contemporary approaches to public service delivery within the local government system such as public value management (Grant & Drew 2017), I argue that the institutional architecture still reflects the principles of NPM. And, while NPM may be losing its appeal as a guide for reform, "it is equally the case that no one alternative appellation has definitively replaced it" (Shaw 2012, p. x).

The influence of NPM

In the 1980s and 1990s, public policy reform was characterised by the introduction of 'business approaches', also known as NPM to the organisation and running of the public sector which included an emphasis on the efficient delivery of services (Aulich 2005, Osborne & Gaebler 1992). Indeed "private sector solutions are central to the discourse of reform in the public sector" (Kloot & Martin 2002, p. 3). The stated main goal of NPM was to improve local government's capacity to make a substantial contribution to the national economy by better provision of services, infrastructure and

regulatory functions (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton 2008; Marshall & Sproats 2000). It was envisaged that these improvements would be achieved through adopting private sector principles and practices, such as the contracting out of services, to pursue a result-oriented approach (Van Gramberg & Teicher 2000). The literature documenting the attributes, successes and failures of NPM is extensive and is not fully reviewed here. Instead, what follows is an overview of the approach and its implications for local government reform in Australia.

In his account of NPM, Diefenbach (2009) provides a useful framework for this discussion. He identifies five basic assumptions and core elements which constitute an NPM approach - 1) business environment and strategic objectives 2) organisational structures and processes 3) performance management and measurement systems 4) management and managers and 5) employees and corporate culture. The first element, business environment and strategic objectives, describes a more challenging and changing business environment which exerts strong external pressure on the delivery of public services. The approach favours a competitive view of service provision within the public sector. The response has been market oriented strategies and objectives resulting in the commodification of services. The second element, organisational structures and processes, describes a decentralisation and re-organisation of business or service delivery units allowing them to become more flexible and less hierarchical. The concentration is on faster decision-making and implementation. Strategic and operational management is also standardised through the acceptance of widely recognised management tools such as mission statement, strategic and business plans (Hood 1995). This is exemplified in NSW by the introduction of Integrated Planning and Reporting requirements which oblige councils to develop long-term strategic plans which are underpinned by delivery and resourcing strategies (Division of Local Government NSW 2013). The third element Diefenbach identifies is performance management and measurement. This includes the systematic, regular and comprehensive capturing, measurement, monitoring and assessment of crucial aspects of organisational and individual performance through explicit targets, standards, performance indicators, measurement and control systems. For example, before the reforms in NSW, the administrative head of the organisation, the town clerk, was employed on an on-going basis, since the advent of reform, the position, now called a

general manager, is offered on a contractual basis. This has been characterised by Brunetto & Farr-Wharton (2008) and Kloot & Martin (2002) as an emphasis on results.

> The reform aimed to change the focus of activities away from inputs (such as resources) towards producing measurable outputs (such as the implementation of zoning laws, garbage delivery) in an attempt to achieve organisational goals and objectives (outcomes) (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton 2008, p. 38).

NPM also favours positive consequences for the people working within these systems such as increased efficiency, productivity and quality, higher performance and motivation. The fourth element, management and managers, describes the establishment of a 'management culture' defined as a separate and distinct organisational function, emphasising the primacy of management compared to all other activities and competencies. The final fifth element, employees and corporate culture, details the ideas of empowerment and subsidiarity, as staff are expected to develop 'business-like' attitudes within the context of a new corporate culture. Local governments' responses to achieving the changes required by NPM have included increased tendering and contracting out of many functions as well as the introduction of financial reforms and management and appraisal practices (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton 2008). The rest of this section examines the repercussions on the local government sector of the introduction of NPM reforms in terms of legislative reform, changes to management/administration and structural reform or amalgamations with a particular focus on the implications for the role of the councillor.

Legislative Reform

State and territory governments all amended their Local Government Acts between 1989 and 1995 (Dollery & Grant, 2011). In addition, Queensland introduced a more recent local government Act which came into effect in 2009. In Victoria, the proposed Local Government Bill 2019 will soon be passed through parliament and will create a new Local Government Act for that state. For NSW, the process of reform to the Local Government Act 1993 continues with the recent adoption of the model code of meeting practice and model code of conduct. The main outcome of these reforms has been the granting of general powers of competency to local governments, giving them more discretion over operational matters. For example, in NSW the *Local Government Act*

1993 enables a local government to carry out any service function it chooses (as long as it is not in conflict with the laws of NSW) in order to meet its community's needs. Prior to the 1993 Act, the legislation provided specific detail on the services councils could provide (Kelly 2011b).

In NSW, the impact of these reforms on the role of councillors has been significant. Prior to the current reform processes the *Local Government Act* 1919 identified the mayor as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and the town clerk was the head of the staff. In addition, the chief engineer and the health and building inspector also had their powers described in the legislation. The introduction of the *Local Government Act* 1993 altered this arrangement, abolishing the town clerk position and establishing a General Manager (GM) or CEO who had the powers of management and councillors whose role is to develop the councils' strategy and policy. For example, ideally, councillors have input into the development of the ten year community strategic plan, it then falls to the GM (and his or her staff) to implement the programs and activities necessary to achieve the goals set out in this plan (Local Government Inquiry 2006). As a result of reforms to the legislation, the councillor's role has changed from one of being more directly involved in the day-to-day management of the organisation to that of being responsible for setting the strategic and policy directions for the local government. This change has also had implications for how a local government is managed, and the role of elected representatives.

Managerial Reform

One of the most significant managerial reforms brought about by the legislation introduced in the 1990s was the change in the mayor's and the CEO's or GM's role. For example, the *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act* 2003 (Vic) increased the CEO's powers to include "appointing as many staff members as are required to enable the function of the council to be carried out" (S.94A, 2). In addition to clarifying the CEO's role and allocating them responsibility for the employment of all staff and for creating an appropriate organisational structure, the Australian states and the Northern Territory also introduced new strategic planning and management requirements. In NSW the *Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Act* 2009 introduced new requirements for local governments to prepare 10-year financial plans, 10-year asset management plans and 4-year workforce plans (Tan & Artist 2013). These local

government reforms included a stronger emphasis on the strategic, long-term decision-making in terms of the role of councillors and requirements for establishing community engagement strategies. They were intended to shift a previously widespread perception of local councils as simply managers of local services and local infrastructure to one where their role, as democratically representative bodies, was more significant (Hearfield & Dollery 2009). Pierre (1999) argues that NPM approaches assume that service providers operate at an arm's-length distance from elected officials. As a result, a councillor's primary role becomes confined to defining long-term objectives for service production. The role of the market is to guide the delivery of services through facilitating communication and exchanges between service providers and clients. The redefinition of the role and function of councillors is necessary under NPM because of the requirement to distinguish between policy-making and administration. In addition, arguably, the complexity and professionalism of modern management has become such that most councillors may not have the background or the qualifications for this task. The removal of these responsibilities enables councillors to concentrate on policy direction and strategic planning for the municipality (Grant & Drew 2017) rather than the day to day delivery of services. In addition, while NPM may have changed the role of the councillor, at the same time locally elected members should also be able to expect better performance from local government administrations. Ideally, this is achieved by elected members passing on the necessary responsibilities and resources to the administration (or managers) to enable them to meet agreed objectives. Furthermore, structures to monitor progress are established, such as budget monitoring and performance measurement systems to enable politicians and citizens to evaluate the performance of the administration (Krapp, Pleschberger & Egner 2013).

The removal from the role of the councillor of involvement in day-to-day administration and resulting focus on strategic decision-making is not unproblematic in the Australian context. In his discussion of local government reform in the Northern Territory, Sanders (2013) documented the frustration and confusion experienced by councillors who, following a change in the legislation, were no longer able, nor were they permitted, to deal directly with staff or to get involved in the day-to-day administration of the organisation. Sanders (2013, p. 485), drawing on interviews with councillors, established that councillors were frustrated with the separation of powers and felt that

the new legislation was not meeting their needs and should be changed so that councillors and staff "can work together." Rather than having a direct relationship with staff in their local area, these councillors were being told to direct their questions and concerns up through council meetings to the central shire administration and that appropriate directives would then be passed on to the staff or management of the organisation. This denied the councillors the direct relationship that they were used to. Most wanted to have a direct relationship with a staff member in their local office who could help them attend to problems on a day-to-day basis.

Furthermore, in his study of the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) in the Australian state of Victoria, Aulich (1999b) found that while the councils he studied tried to adopt a clear policy-administration division consistent with the guidelines provided by the Victorian government, in practice this led to senior staff taking a strategic decision-making role rather than councillors. Councillors and staff failed to recognize the strategic implications of CCT; policy and administration became blurred as CCT was redefined as 'administration', and thus the province of senior staff.

> Strategic considerations appeared to become the province of senior staff, as councillors often were more concerned about the electorate and community ... To the extent that such electoral issues impacted on policy, councillors have taken a role in policy matters. Generally, however, the role of policy development in relation to CCT and, by implication, the setting of council's strategic direction has been undertaken within the bureaucracy. In contrast with public sector reform in other areas both in Australia and overseas, the reforms have not enhanced the power of elected members over the senior bureaucracy (Aulich 1999b, p. 41).

Indeed, the separation between policy and administration may sit uncomfortably with the realities of local representation. The final report of the NSW Independent Local Government Review Panel *Revitalising Local Government* (Sansom, Munroe & Inglis 2013) concludes that under Section 232 of the NSW *Local Government Act* 1993 the role of a councillor is divided into two parts: as a "member of the governing body" and as an "elected person." The former is seen as deliberative planning, resource allocation,

policy development, and performance monitoring (Sansom et al., 2013). These functions give rise to councillors being removed from everyday administration, instead they are to perform and behave as a board of directors. The role of the councillor as an elected person is described in terms of community representation, leadership, and communication. This is more clearly political and includes those functions that most councillors would regard as fundamental to being re-elected. The Panel's investigations suggested that amendment to the *Local Government Act* 1993 was necessary to explain more fully the councillors' role and sharpen the distinction between the functions of the governing body – in which the councillors must act collectively – and the individual councillor's role and responsibilities in representing their constituencies. Managerial and legislative reforms, therefore, strengthen the delineation of responsibilities between councillors and the CEO. However, no research exists to confirm whether or not councillors in NSW understand this delineation or the challenges and implications of upholding this separation of responsibilities within the current structure of the local government system.

Amalgamations

A third aspect of reform which has had a direct impact on local democracy is structural reform or amalgamations. Amalgamations involve boundary changes to local government, often reducing the number of local governments by combining two or more together into a larger body. These amalgamations have been undertaken in four of the six states. Most occurred in the 1990s when the number of councils nation-wide decreased from 841 in 1995 to 559 in 2008 (see Table 1.5). In Victoria, the amalgamation process was drastic; in January 1993 there were 210 local government councils and by December 1995 there were 78, a decline of 73% in three years (Grant, Dollery & Crase 2009). Most recently, on 12 May 2016, the government of NSW announced the amalgamations of 42 councils into 19 councils to reduce the total number of local government areas in the state from 152 to 129 (Governement of New South Wales 2016). Most of the amalgamations in NSW were in greater Sydney. Much of local government reform in Australia has focused on amalgamation, in large part initiated by state and territory governments. It was argued that larger organisations would be more efficient and effective and would be able to deliver better quality and a wider range of services (Aulich, Sansom & McKinlay 2014). Whether these amalgamations have resulted in more efficient and effective service delivery by local

government continues to be highly contested (see, for example, Aulich, Sansom & McKinlay 2014; Dollery, Grant & Kortt 2013).

Table 1.5 Number of local councils in Australia 1910-2012

State/Territory	1910	1967	1982	1990	1995	2008	2012
New South Wales	324	224	175	176	177	152	152*
Northern Territory	0	1	6	22	63	16	16
Queensland	164	131	134	134	125	73	73
South Australia	175	142	127	n/a	119	68	68
Tasmania	51	49	49	46	29	29	29
Victoria	206	210	211	210	184	79	79
Western Australia	147	144	138	138	144	142	139
Total	1067	901	840	726	841	559	556

Source Dollery, Grant & Kortt (2013, p. 218)
* In 2016, amalgamations in NSW saw the number of councils drop from 152 to 129.

In many cases amalgamation has been bitterly contested. For example, in NSW, in response to the announcement of amalgamations, Woollahra Mayor Toni Zeltzer (Woollahra is an extremely affluent local government area in the Sydney metropoltian region) said her council would fight a forced merger with Randwick and Waverley, in Sydney's eastern suburbs. The ABC News (2015) quoted her as saying "I don't think people in Woollahra are going to roll over…If we are forced [to amalgamate], that just reinforces the view that democracy is dead in New South Wales." Resistance to the forced mergers of councils in NSW was based on several factors including a desire to retain the local character of an area, a fear that larger councils would mean less representation and advocacy, a weaker voice with regard to land use planning decisions and poorer or less appropraite services (Sansom 2015).

Aulich et al. (2014) examined the impact of amalgamation or consolidation on the local government sector. This is one of the few studies of the impact on local representation of amalgamations (see also, Hearfield & Dollery 2009). While they focused on examining the arguments of the alleged increased efficiency of larger local government bodies, the authors also considered the effects on local representation, as demonstrated below. They identified the lack of consideration of representation in amalgamation processes and pointed out that the reports of all the inquiries into local government in Australia and internationally are:

> … often heavily focused on economic arguments to the exclusion of other issues such as the importance of good governance and effective local democracy and representation … [and] that there was relatively little concern about the impact of consolidation on the level of electoral representation and strength of local democracy, especially from officials. However, some elected members were more concerned about potential or real losses in local identity due to both the scale of amalgamated councils and reductions in the overall number of elected councillors (Aulich et al., 2014, p. 13).

They went on to provide four possible reasons for this limited focus on local democracy. First, the impact on local representation may not be overt and readily appreciated. Second, public opinion may dissipate once a reduction in councillor numbers has been accepted as the new norm. Third, in some of the cases they studied, specific measures were put in place to ensure that the perceived quality of local democracy was not unduly affected (for example, implementing ward structures). Finally, it may be that councils are now more conscious of the importance of transparency and accountability and have made improvements in these areas (Aulich et al., 2014). Local government amalgamation in Australia has affected local representation by increasing the number of residents each elected member represents (Jaensch 2003; LGAT 2013; VEC 2009). There has been a tendency for amalgamated councils to have fewer elected councillors than the combined total of their predecessors. The impact of this on local democracy is unclear.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the context for the research. I began by outlining the importance of role of local government within the Australian federation and then provided a closer examination of recent processes of local government reform with a focus on how these have affected the role of the councillor. I have paid particular attention to the role of NPM in delineating the role of locally elected members and of general managers or CEOs. This delineation of roles is significant. I argue throughout this thesis that although the simplicity of the split between strategic and operational roles may be appealing, it can be deeply problematic. Furthermore, this division does not adequately encompass the nuanced and multi-faceted role of councillors, nor does it

do justice to the expectations communities have of their democratically elected leaders. In so doing, I return to the initial observation of this chapter. This research on local councillors is set within a context of democratic deficit, where citizens are becoming increasingly disillusioned with politicians and the democratic system. Having set out the context, chapter two reviews the relevant scholarly literature as it pertains to my research question on local democracy.

Chapter 2
Local government, deliberative democracy and representation

This chapter reviews the scholarly literature relevant to this study. I begin by looking at the justifications for a local government system, its intended role and function. This is followed by a discussion and delineation of the concepts of governance, government and deliberation as they pertain to local government. The last part of the chapter examines the concept of democratic representation.

Why local government?

The scholarly literature on local government in Australia can be grouped into two main areas. The first examines local governments as democratic and governmental organisations. This encompasses the literature which examines the effects of local government reform and typically focusses on questions of local government efficiency (see for example, Al Farid Uddin 2019; Drew & Dollery 2014; McQuestin, Drew & Dollery 2018) as well as research which investigates how the organisation functions (see for example, Jorgensen, Martin & Nursey-Bray 2018, for a discussion of managerial career choices within South Australian local government.). The second area considers the various facets of their service delivery functions. Given the varied services local governments provide to their communities this body of literature is diverse, including, for example, research on road safety (McTiernan 2019), on local government's role in the provision of business infrastructure (Ollerenshaw, Murphy & McDonald 2017) and on the role it can play in facilitating access to affordable housing (Morris et al. 2019).

In general, research on local government in Australia is characterised by a lack of current theoretical work about its role within the Australian Federation. Local government "writ large is grounded in a significant body of theoretical work that spans a range of academic disciplines, yet rarely is this work applied to local government in Australia in any holistic sense" (Grant & Drew 2017, p. 125). One current exception is the work done by Grant & Drew (2017) who endeavour to draw together the strands of

theoretical work on Australian local government and local government more generally. They begin with Aulich's (1999a) justification of local government on the basis of democracy and for the efficient delivery of services. Local democracy embodies values such as representativeness and advocacy of interests, responsiveness and access to decision-making. Service delivery, on the other hand, is thought to be more efficient if it is done at the local level. Aulich explains that these two aspects of local government are often in tension; for example, the argument for larger local government units is usually based on the need for economies of scale in service delivery, but this may be to the detriment of local democracy and representation as large units may be less responsive to community needs. Grant & Drew (2017) also note that these two models of local government co-exist in that "the effective functioning of democratic processes can inform the efficient allocation of resources; similarly, an efficient local government or local government sector can reinforce the legitimacy of democratic processes" (p. 128). In his assessment of the Australian context, Aulich also states that these models co-exist and that local government is shaped by the degree of emphasis of one approach over the other (democracy over efficiency or vice versa). However, he concludes that local government reform has resulted in a pre-dominance of the service delivery model within Australian local government: "Local government reform reflects a growing acceptance and implementation of reforms consistent with the values embedded in the structural efficiency model" (Aulich 1999a, p. 19).

More recently, Andrew Sancton (2011) identified three justifications for local government.[2] The first addresses the question of efficiency through providing economic and allocative efficiency. The second and third justifications for local government point to the benefits of participation and pluralism within a democratic system.

[2] Andrew Sancton is a Canadian scholar. Given the lack of Australia specific considerations of the justification for local government, this section uses a discussion of the Canadian federal system to enable a richer and more complex understanding of the context within which this research is situated. The Canadian system is similar to that in Australia in several important ways. It has a federal bicameral parliamentary democracy and a highly varied local government system. As in Australia, legislation for local government is unique to each province and territory. Canada's constitution divides powers between the federal government and the ten provincial governments, and, like Australia, local governments are not recognised as a separate order of government. Instead, provinces and territories have a number of legislative Acts that govern local government within their jurisdictions (Commonwealth Local Governance Forum 2018). The existence of these parallels means that the justifications for local government in Canada can legitimately be applied to the Australian context.

Economic and allocative efficiency

Similar to Aulich (1999), Sancton's first justification for local government relates to the economies and diseconomies of scale in the provision of services. Local governments can be more efficient in delivering certain services than state level governments. As Watt (2006, p. 8) comments, the

> … clearest rationale for the existence of local government is a solution to the problem of local public goods. Whilst many public goods such as defence are national in extent, other public goods such as local parks, street lighting and refuse collection, have a more limited geographical extent or benefit area.

Another sense of efficiency Sancton identifies, relates to local government's allocative function. Allocative efficiency involves ensuring that the bundle of services and taxes provided by government matches as closely as possible what it is that people actually want (Sancton 2011). As Watt (2006, p. 4) clarifies, "a major advantage of local government provision of local public goods lies in its ability to match local provision to local tastes and preferences in contrast with the uniformity expected under central government provision." Sancton goes on to explain that a local government system also provides an avenue for competition in order to improve efficiency.

> If there are no local governments within a given jurisdiction, then the one central government in that jurisdiction is a monopoly in the sense that it is the only provider of government services. Monopolies are notorious for being inefficient and for passing on their excessive costs to their captive consumers (Sancton 2011, p. 17).

A system of local government enables comparison among the levels of services they provide vis-à-vis the taxes they charge. This allows citizens to have some sense of the relative efficiency of their own local government in comparison to other and can vote or move accordingly.

Participation, pluralism and local democracy

Sancton's second justification for local government is that it enables citizens to participate in decision-making. Local government systems provide a vehicle through which citizens can influence the decisions that affect their locality either through voting or by getting involved in the opportunities that local government provide for citizen

engagement or deliberation (Sancton 2011). Rusen (2016, p. 25) agrees, stating that "public participation as one of the principal values underlying local self-government." A third justification is that local governments enable a pluralist system thereby preventing power being too centralised. "A pluralistic political system is one in which there are many sources of power" (Sancton 2011, p. 21). In liberal democracies political power emanates from many sources of power such as business, trade unions, social movements and interest groups.

> Orthodox justifications for local government include pluralist arguments that institutions of local democracy provide for diffusion of power within society, arguments that local democracy support diversity and difference in the face of an otherwise constrictively uniform set of central policies, and arguments for local responsiveness… in short there are strong normative justifications for local democracy and local government (Pratchett 2004, p. 360).

In addition, local governments can claim a special legitimacy based on the fact that their governing bodies are subject to election. This legitimacy means that local governments can plausibly claim to represent people within their jurisdictions. Local governments are, therefore, a distinct voice within the pluralist system of government. Having said this, a word of warning must be highlighted

> … local self-government in both unitary and federal systems occurs only because a higher-level authority delegates some of its sovereign powers and responsibilities. These powers and responsibilities can be withdrawn or altered at the whim of the sovereign power (Pratchett 2004, p. 362).

This is particularly true for the Australian federation where local government is typically referred to as a creature of the state and where it has always been seen as a comparatively weak creation (Brown 2002; Brown 2008).

In terms of the literature pertinent to my research, it is clear that the justifications related to participation, pluralism and local democracy are directly relevant. However, this must be situated within the wider justifications for local government (i.e. service delivery, citizen engagement and pluralism), so while councillors are a central feature of

local government, representation is not its only function. While not wishing to stray into the analysis of my results, this point is important to note. Arguably, some of the frustration and discontent voiced by several of the councillors I interviewed may be as a result of a view which identifies representation as the primary and sole function of local government, rather than as one of a range of functions the sector must fulfil. Having set out the arguments in support of a local government system, I can now turn to an examination of the thinking on public administration as it relates to local government.

From government to governance

For the purposes of this study, it is important to delineate the transition within public administration from ideas of government to those of governance and the associated implications for the role of the councillor. Hambleton (2007, p. 165) provides a useful analysis of the move from the era of "government" to one of "governance" where government refers to the formal institutions of the state. Government makes decisions within specific administrative and legal frameworks and uses public resources ideally in a financially accountable way. Its decisions are hopefully backed up by the legitimate hierarchical power of the state. Governance on the other hand involves government plus the looser process of influencing and negotiating with a range of public and private sector agencies to achieve desired outcomes. According to Rhodes (1996) governance reflects a preference for less government. It "… signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a *new* process of governing; or a *changed* condition of ordered rule; or the *new* method by which society is governed" (Rhodes 1996, pp. 652-3). A governance perspective encourages collaboration between the public, private and non-profit sectors to achieve mutual goals.

> Policy outcomes are not the product of actions by central government. The centre may pass a law but subsequently it interacts with local government, health authorities, the voluntary sector, the private sector and, in turn they interact with one another … all actors in a particular policy area need one another. Each can contribute relevant knowledge or other resources. No one has all the relevant knowledge or resources to make the policy work (Rhodes 1996, p. 657).

While the hierarchical power of the state remains in a governance approach, the emphasis is on steering, influencing, and coordinating the actions of others.

Government cannot go it alone (Hambleton 2007). "Governance is ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action. The outputs of governance are not therefore different from those of government; it is rather a matter of a difference in processes" (Stoker 1998, p. 17). At the local government level the governance approach is also often referred to as networked community governance (e.g. Stoker 2011) or community governance (e.g. Hambleton 2011) which places an emphasis on the role of the community as a key part of the network guiding local government direction.

> Networked community governance sets as its over-arching goal the meeting of community needs as defined by the community within the context of the demands of a complex system of multi-level governance. In this complex world of multiple demands and networks the most powerful and effective role for elected local government is that of network coordinator (Stoker 2011, p. 17).

The limitations of local governance have been recognised. As Stoker (2011) explains, sustainability for local government rests on a combination of access to soft and hard power. Hard power is the power of command and incentives while soft power is defined as the ability to get other people to share your ideas and visions or in other words the power of influence. As Stoker points out, in its community governance role soft power is the only option for local government. The lack of hard power can be very problematic (Stoker 2011). Local governments often lack the hard and soft power to bring stakeholders together and to hold them to account severely constraining their ability to address community identified objectives particularly when this requires cross-agency collaboration among government departments or working with businesses and other groups within the community. For example, councillors may want to establish a primary school in their area. However, given their relatively weak position within the broader government system, their ability to successfully engage and negotiate with the state agency responsible for delivering this service is limited.

Despite these constraints, a governance approach continues to be the best option for local government. It sees them moving away from being the sole vehicle for providing a range of services to a new emphasis on community leadership through, for example,

the development of collective goals and visions for a particular local government area. In Hambleton's (2007) analysis, the logical next step is therefore an emphasis on "governing". This involves ensuring the effective and accountable processes which are needed for good governance. Governments have to work differently, delivering services but also enabling other actors to contribute to the realization of community identified goals. This means working horizontally with other local governments, community businesses and groups but also vertically with other levels of government.

Importantly, a governance approach requires local governments to change the way they engage with communities. Often community inclusion within local government initiatives is limited to interest groups or non-profit organisations that have a particular interest in the issue being addressed. A governance approach places an emphasis on the need to ensure legitimacy through broad based representative engagement. "This coordination role demands a leadership capacity that goes beyond a search for efficiency gains or a customer orientation to take on the challenge of working across boundaries and to take up the goal of holistic working" (Stoker 2011, p. 17). Governing requires locally elected governments to be robust in orchestrating the various stakeholders involved in governance.

This transition to a governance approach is important for this thesis in that is has led to changes in the role of the councillor and in the role of the community. As demonstrated above in chapter one, the local government reforms in NSW have led to requirements for councils to engage with their communities to develop strategic plans. The question remains as to how councillors view these plans vis-à-vis their role as elected representatives who are voted in to make decisions.

Participatory democracy and deliberation

Not surprisingly then, recent interest in local government has also focused on its capacity to facilitate and enhance participatory democracy and deliberation. This focus on participatory democracy argues that local government is closer to citizens and deals more directly with the issues that impinge on them. Further, it is accessible and its institutions are easier to engage with. Citizen participation in government has traditionally concentrated on measures to facilitate greater public access to information

about government, enhance the rights of citizens to be 'consulted' on matters which directly affect them, and ensure that all voices can be heard equally through fair systems of representative democracy (Aulich 2009). In contrast, participation in governance, or participatory governance, involves different principles and methods for engagement. These might include developing partnerships between different actors; establishing information exchanges and knowledge transfers among various stakeholders and deliberative platforms; decentralizing decision-making and inter-institutional dialogues; and embracing relationships based more on reciprocity and trust (Aulich 2009). While the transition from government to governance within the literature on public administration and local government is well-established, contemporary thinking on connections between governance and deliberation is less well explored. It is to this less well-charted terrain that I now turn.

Deliberative democracy

The theoretical underpinnings for democratic deliberation as conceptualised by Habermas are discussed in detail in chapter three. This section is limited to a description of the development of the literature on deliberation. During the 1990s, we saw the theory of democracy take a strong deliberative turn. This meant that increasingly, democratic legitimacy came to be seen in terms of the ability or opportunity of citizens to participate in effective deliberation on the part of those subject to collective decisions (Dryzek 2000). Deliberative democracy is a specific approach to a set of principles about how decisions should be made (Elstub 2015). As such, deliberative remedies were put forward in response to the various limitations that were perceived to characterise democracy. The poor quality of decision-making, low levels of participation, declining legitimacy of government, and poorly informed citizens were among the more frequently mentioned shortcomings (Shapiro 2003). What distinguishes theories of deliberative democracy, is the view that democracy requires not only the capacity of all citizens to vote, but also an equal and effective opportunity to participate in processes of collective judgement (Warren 2002). Elstub (2015) provides a very useful overview of deliberative democracy. In order to counter the idea that deliberative democracy can be characterised as a group of people talking, Elstub provides some boundaries to clarify and define the concept. Firstly, there is the idea of democracy which comprises collective decision-making and the participation of relevant actors. Secondly, there is deliberation, described as a "dialogical process in the

exchange of reason for the purpose of resolving problematic situations that cannot be settled through interpersonal coordination or cooperation" (p. 102). This means that discussions take place between groups of stakeholders in order to come to agreements about how to address a particular problem that cannot be solved through individual interactions. Also, crucial to the idea of deliberation is the determination of existing preferences coupled with the possibility of forming new ones. In summary, the central core for deliberation is the

> making of collective decisions involving the participation of relevant actors. The more equal the participation the more democratic it will be through the consideration and exchange of reason aimed at the transformation of preferences (p. 102).

One of the key weaknesses of deliberative democracy is its practicality. Elstub considers the challenges in operationalising and institutionalising deliberative democracy, particularly when you consider the question of scale. Is it indeed possible or even desirable to involve everyone affected by an issue in the decision-making process? In addition, "complexity and diversity are other pertinent problems for deliberative democracy, as [it requires] the exchange of all relevant reasons; in plural and diverse societies that means a whole lot of different reasons and perspectives" (p. 103).

Having set out what deliberative democracy is and some of its challenges, Elstub then turns to a useful delineation of the evolution of deliberative democratic theory, which he does in three phases. The first phase is characterised by the development of the normative justifications for deliberative democracy as set out by Habermas (1996) and Rawls (1993). These important theorists set out the justification for deliberation within complex modern societies in that deliberation provides legitimacy to decision-making. The second generation of deliberative thinking focused on the institutionalisation of deliberation within democratic institutions:

> Although the second-generation thinkers see that preferences will adapt to public reason and new information, as Habermas and Rawls suggested, they don't see this as occurring in a uniform manner due to the diversity and plurality of societies. Not everybody is going to

> develop the same preferences to the same reason. Therefore, consensus isn't going to be achieved (p. 105).

In addition, a diversity of communication and exchange should be included in the deliberative space, in order to facilitate the participation of a more diverse citizenry. This second generation of scholars endeavoured to make deliberative democracy more practical and more accessible. But they did not address questions of institutional design and this is where the third generation stepped in. Current thinking is "preoccupied with the specifics of how different institutions would operate deliberatively and democratically" (p. 106) resulting in the documentation and examination of various deliberative processes and events. It is within this third generation of thinking on deliberative democracy that my research sits, as I examine the institutional possibilities for more deliberative approaches to decision-making within the current local government system in NSW.

A discussion of contemporary deliberative democratic theory is not complete without a consideration of the work of John Dryzek. While Elstub traced the development of theoretical thinking on the role of deliberation, Dryzek (2017) focussed on three different but interrelated and interdependent images of deliberative democracy. Firstly, the image is that of a single forum, such as a legislature or a citizen's forum. This first conception is limited by issues of scale as "large numbers of people cannot deliberate face to face" (p. 612). This gives rise to the second image, that of a system which incorporates division of responsibility for deliberation and decision-making among actors across multiple sites. The third image takes an even wider view encompassing a "polity defined by integrative norms that can be more or less deliberative in their content and formation" (p. 611). This polity connects the various sites for deliberation and brings them together into an overarching process of decision-making. Dryzek emphasises that these three forms should be held in productive tension. With regard to the role of the single forum, Dryzek draws on evidence from the literature to demonstrate that decisions made in these singular and confined events (often in the guise of mini-publics) may not be applicable to the larger civil society. However, while their decisions may not be useful, Dryzek contends that the arguments and discussions which have taken place within these forums are. "The place of the mini public in the larger system should be seen as deliberation making rather than anything like decision making.

[Because] anything communicated out of the mini public has survived reflection therein" (p. 616). That is to say that the process of deliberation itself or 'deliberation making' may be just as, and sometimes more, important than the act of decision-making. This is because the arguments which survive the deliberative process within a specific event can be seen as legitimate and valid because they have been generated by this process of exchange. In addition 'deliberation making' may generate further benefits. The communication and information exchange that takes place within these forums may serve to strengthen social cohesion and understanding as different parties come together and discuss their priorities, interests and values.

> The forum cannot do without the system if the very different micro benefits yielded by different sorts of forums are to be combined in meaningful fashion to have broad political effect. The system cannot do without the polity which provides a necessary democratic vantage point for the evaluation of deliberative systems (p. 611).

In summary, deliberative forums must be situated within a wider deliberative system. This in turn should be evaluated in democratic terms through reference to the idea of a deliberative polity. A deliberative polity is the larger system which connects isolated deliberative events. It is able to bring together the various arguments and decisions generated by these events in order to address wider public interests and generate large scale policy direction. Individual forums ensure that deliberative systems are grounded in the justification and reflection necessary to generate legitimacy and the existence of the system enables deliberative ideals to be delivered at larger scales, but according to Dryzek "ultimately it is in terms of the polity that the democratic contributions of forums and systems need to be assessed" (p. 631).

Scholarly reflection on deliberative democracy has traced an arc which starts with the justification of deliberation on normative grounds, through the work of theorists such as Habermas (1996) and Rawls (1993). This is followed by the examination of deliberative events within institutions described by Elstub as the second generation of thinking and by Dryzek as the single forum. Recognition that these singular instances of deliberation were not sufficient, led to the conceptualisation of deliberative systems and the consideration of the interrelation, coordination and institutional design of multiple

arenas for deliberation through what Dryzek terms a polity. Take for example the issue of unemployment within a particular community. Habermas (1996) and Rawls (1993) teach us that appropriate policy approaches to address this issue should be arrived at deliberatively. As a result several forums may be held with different stakeholders to examine this question and determine the best approach. Within the deliberative system, the various discussions and outcomes of these singular forums would be collated and discussed (deliberatively) to determine which approach could ultimately be taken. At the polity level, this decision would be put into a context of all the various decisions that need to be made within the context of a democracy. That is not just addressing questions of unemployment but also health provision, education etc. Communication and interaction between the levels of the singular forum, the system and the polity will be iterative with each level informing the debate and actions at the other level.

This section has set out, albeit briefly, the scholarly thinking on the public administration of local government (ideas of government and governance) and that of the role of deliberative democracy. I conclude this discussion with some brief reflection on how these two areas are connected, and interrelated. I start by stating that the research in this field is limited: "Scholars within each of these literatures seldom explicitly address and problematize the concepts of the other, even though they may allude to the other's importance" (Melo & Baiocchi 2006, p. 588). Nevertheless as Melo & Baiocchi (2006) point out, studies of local governance point to the importance of wider engagement and participation in decision-making and service delivery within our communities, but they do not necessarily address the normative standards by which this kind of participation should be assessed. Conversely, studies of deliberative democracy often allude to its governance-enhancing potential, but generally focus on one aspect of service delivery rather than considering its overall impact (Melo & Baiocchi 2006). Melo & Baiocchi (2006) state that there is fertile ground in the examination of the overlap between ideas of local governance and democratic deliberation. For example, there is concern that horizontal local governance structures tend to favour the representation of middle-class and elite interests. This is because they involve the coordination of private, market and broader public interests and, as a result, governance structures may be inherently biased. Although there are elements in governance structures that make them more democratic — such as transparency,

proceduralism and publicity - market interests may conflict with public values. The application of deliberative democratic approaches within these contexts may offer possibilities for more equitable participation in these governance structures. In addition, further research could be done to determine the conditions under which participatory arrangements can be both democratic and governance–enhancing. A key question is what are the factors that facilitate or hinder the emergence of local horizontal governance arrangements?

Closely related to this analysis of governance and deliberative democracy is the consideration of the connections between ideas of localism and deliberation. Localism is a general term which describes the devolution of power and resources away from central government towards local democratic structures. The degree to which power and responsibility is devolved to local governments can vary enormously as can the degree to which local communities themselves are involved in localised decision-making (Ercan & Hendriks 2013; Parkinson 2007). In their work Ercan & Hendriks (2013) respond to the critique that local governance and indeed, localism, can favour the interests of local elites, exacerbating local inequalities and power relations (Parkinson 2007). They contend that for devolved decision-making to be equal and open structure and facilitation is required. "Without structure and design, public participation, especially at the local level, falls victim to all the material and power inequities of modern public spheres" (Ercan & Hendriks 2013, p. 428). In addition 'meta-governance' is also required to address power inequalities. This could take the form of the state or an independent body providing resources and support for marginalised groups. Finally Ercan & Hendriks (2013) argue that marginalised groups must be allowed to use more diverse and appropriate ways of communicating such as "protest, veto and boycotts, to influence public deliberation within the deliberative system, in order to address democratic injustices" (p. 429). Ercan & Hendriks (2013) conclude that the critiques of localism as a concept can be addressed by using deliberation to strengthen the practice of local democracy.

To sum up, it is clear that the literature on local government, local governance and deliberative democracy are important for this study. Ideas of government and governance are the public administration context within which the local government

system in NSW is situated. In addition, given that my concern is local democracy and decision-making and it is, arguably, through deliberative processes that better decisions are made, an exploration of the literature on deliberative democracy is required. This being done, I now turn to another key feature of democracy, that of representation.

Representation

Representation within democratic systems is directly relevant to my research on local government councillors. I have chosen to focus on the work of two key scholars in this field. The first is Hannah Pitkin and in particular her seminal book, *The Concept of Representation*. The second is Jane Mansbridge who builds on Pitkin's work and sets out her own typology of representation. In addition, I examine a third area - representation with a specific focus on local government.

Hannah Pitkin

Arguably the most comprehensive contemporary theoretical work which has been undertaken on representation is Hannah Pitkin's 1967 book, *The Concept of Representation,* in which she focuses on the role of representatives and the act of representation. Pitkin suggests that the best way to think of representation is as a 'substantive acting for others', not merely a formal authorization or accountability to others. Representing means 'acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (Pitkin 1967, p. 209). Pitkin's typology of representation can be divided into four broad categories: formal, descriptive, symbolic and substantive. The formalistic view defines representation "in terms of the giving and having of authority" (Pitkin 1967, p. 38). Pitkin also refers to this as the authorization view and its basic feature is that a representative is someone who has been authorised to act. In a sense, an exchange of rights has occurred between the representative and the represented. The authorisation view concentrates on how the relationship is agreed and organised. This is why Pitkin describes it as a formalistic understanding of representation. The elements that make up this kind of representation include the transactions that happen before representation actually takes place, i.e. the agreements made about the limits of the representative's authority. In terms of representative democracy one key element is, of course, that of elections. These grant authority to the elected officials from the voters. Normally this authority is limited within a time frame so that the official's status as a representative ends when his or her term has finished and it is time for new elections (Pitkin 1967).

The descriptive view of representation moves away from the idea of individual transactions or the transfer of rights. Instead, it is based on the premise that true representation "requires that the legislature be so selected that its composition corresponds accurately to that of the whole nation; only then is it really a representative body" (Pitkin 1967, p. 60). This approach differs from the formalistic/authorisation view because it is not the transfer of authority that matters. Rather what matters are the representative's characteristics, what he or she is like in terms of age, ethnicity, socio-economic status etc. The representative "does not act for others; he 'stands for' them, by virtue of a correspondence or connection between them, a resemblance or reflection" (Pitkin 1967, p. 61). Ideally, in this view of representation the elected body mirrors that of the population across a range of descriptors such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, profession, views on the environment, etc.

Similar to descriptive representation, symbols are often used to represent something. Pitkin asserts that this is also true in political representation. In this conception,

> a political representative is to be understood on the model of a flag representing the nation, or an emblem representing a cult … Human beings can be thought of as symbols, can under the right circumstances stand for a nation just as the flag does (Pitkin 1967, p. 92).

Heads of state often perform this function when they embody or represent the unity of the people. An obvious example is that of Nelson Mandela. He was more than the president of South Africa, through his lifework and presidency, he came to symbolise the struggle of the South African people for equality.

> To get people to believe in, accept, respond appropriately to a nonconventional symbol, one must arouse a certain response in them, form certain habits in them, invite certain attitudes on their part. Unlike making a descriptive representation, creating a symbol is apt to be a matter of working on the minds of the people who are to accept it rather than of working on the symbol itself (Pitkin 1967, p. 101).

A representative creates acceptance by the electorate through his or her energy, intelligence and personality. Elections are one way of gaining acceptance, but there are

other ways elected representatives can create this acceptance e.g. through ceremonies and parades, etc. The application of this kind of symbolic representation emerges most clearly in regard to the head of state (or in the case of local government, the mayor) in his or her symbolic, ceremonial functions.

The final typology which Pitkin discusses is that of representation as "acting for" or substantive representation. This view focusses on the act of representing. Representation as "acting for" differs from formalistic, descriptive or symbolic representation because it focusses on the act of representing itself. While the formalistic view does see the representative as active, his or her status as representative is defined in terms of the formal arrangement that initiates and ends the activity, namely that of elections, not in terms of the nature of representation itself.

> Any number of writers tell us that there must be some connection or relationship or tie between a representative and those for whom he [or she] acts… We are variously told that his [or her] actions, or opinions, or both must correspond to or be in accord with the wishes, or needs or interests, of those form how he [or she] acts (Pitkin 1967, p. 114).

To understand what this connection means in practice, we need an articulated view of representation, what Piktin calls the 'activity of view' of representing. The activity view enables a discussion of the obligations of the representative as agent or actor for others. For example, it is often argued that a representative is like a trustee or guardian. This view of representation focusses on the act itself and how it is executed.

Jane Mansbridge

It can be argued that Pitkin's four broad typologies of representation, formal, descriptive, symbolic and substantive, set out the theoretical terrain upon which contemporary discussions of representation are based. Using Pitkin's landscape as a starting point, Jane Mansbridge's thinking on representation develops further the conceptualisation of democratic representation. She also identifies four types of representation - promissory, anticipatory, gyroscopic and surrogate. In practice, however, representative behaviour will often mix several of these forms. While it is not always possible to tell by looking at the behaviour of elected members which one of these forms of representation underlies their actions, Mansbridge argues that the act of

analysing each form "separately makes it possible to identify the underlying power relation in each form, the role of deliberation in each, and the normative criteria appropriate to each" (Mansbridge 2003, p. 515). She explains that we choose representatives, not only to think more carefully than we might about setting priorities and identifying strategies to realise common goals, but also

> to negotiate more perceptively and fight more skilfully than constituents have either the time or the inclination to do. The difference between representation and direct democracy creates a need for norms designed particularly for democratic representation (Mansbridge 2003, p. 515).

It is in this sense that perhaps Mansbridge's analysis is more pertinent to this study as she more explicitly considers the role of deliberation and decision-making in her discussion of representation.

Mansbridge begins with her description of promissory representation. This model follows the traditional principal-agent format where the challenge for the principal (or voter) is maintaining legal or moral control over the agent (or representative) (Mansbridge 2003). The "understanding of accountability in promissory representation is that the representative is 'responsible to,' 'answerable to,' 'bound' and even 'bound by' the voters" (p. 516). She explains that in the 'mandate' version of promissory representation, the elected member promises to abide by their constituents' instructions or expressed desires and "in the 'trustee' version, the representative promises to further the constituency's long-run interests and the interest of the nation as a whole" (Mansbridge 2003, p. 516). In this kind of representation the power transfer is straightforward from the voter to the representative. The voter elects a representative on the basis of a promise to carry out a particular mandate defined at the time of election. The last stage of this relationship comes at re-election when the voter decides whether the representative has succeeded or failed in delivering their promise. Promissory representation

> focuses on the normative duty to keep promises made in the authorizing election, uses a conception of the voter's power of the representative that assumes forward looking intentionality, embodies a

> relatively unmediated version of the constituents' will, and results in accountability through sanction (Mansbridge 2003, p. 516).

The second type of representation that Mansbridge describes is that of anticipatory representation. This type accounts for the importance of retrospective voting where the voter considers the past behaviour of a representative when they cast their ballot. This action of the voter looking back on a representative's performance while in office has an opposite effect on the elected member. From the representative's point of view, this generates anticipatory representation, in which the representative tries to please future voters. Importantly, this view of representation "provides space for deliberation because voters can be educated by, not only the representatives but also by parties, interest groups and the media etc. to encourage them to vote for the candidate at the next election" (Mansbridge 2003, p. 517). Anticipatory representation results in a shift in emphasis from the

> individual to the system, from aggregative democracy to deliberative democracy, from preferences to interests, from the way the legislator votes to the way the legislator communicates, and from the quality of promise-keeping to the quality of mutual education between legislator and constituents (Mansbridge 2003, p. 518).

This form is particularly relevant to this study as I examine the role of deliberation within the local democratic context.

The third type of representation described by Mansbridge is that of gyroscopic representation. In this type, representatives are expected to act in ways that the voter approves but without external incentives. The representatives act like "gyroscopes, rotating on their own axes, maintaining a certain direction, pursuing certain built-in (although not fully immutable) goals" (p. 520). In contrast to the first two types described above, these representatives are not accountable to their electors in the traditional sense. Instead, their "accountability is only to their own beliefs and principles" (Mansbridge 2003, p. 520). They look within for guidance. Examples might include single issue representatives or a voter may select a person of integrity, committed to the public good with similar policy preferences, who are perceived to be honest, principled and sufficiently skilled (Mansbridge 2003). In this type of

representation the voter affects political outcomes through their selection of the candidate and their characteristics, rather than by influencing the behaviour of the elected official as is the case for the promissory or anticipatory types (Mansbridge 2003, p. 521). Gyroscopic representation is different from the trustee form in the sense that in this type, the voter may select a candidate only

> because both voter and representative share some overriding self-interested goal, such as lowering taxes. Or the voter may select a representative with many of the voter's own background characteristics, on the grounds that such a representative will act much the way the voter would if placed in the legislature (Mansbridge 2003, p. 522).

Gyroscopic representation does resemble trustee representation in one important respect, because the voter often expects this kind of representative to act with considerable discretion, this allows deliberation and negotiation. "Compromises, changes of heart, and even the recasting of fundamental interests are all normatively permitted" within the gyroscopic model (Mansbridge 2003, p. 522).

The fourth and final type described by Mansbridge is surrogate representation. She uses this to encompass representation by an elected member with whom a voter has no electoral relationship, generally, a representative in another district. Mansbridge explains that this sense of a surrogate relationship is stronger when the elected member shares experiences with surrogate constituents in a way that a majority of the legislature does not. For example, "representatives who are female African American or have a child with a disability etc. … often feel not only a particular sensitivity to issues relating to these experiences but also a particular responsibility for representing the interests and perspectives of these groups" (Mansbridge 2003, p. 523). In summary, Mansbridge clarifies that these four types of representation can be complementary and can be used in different contexts. "These forms of representation are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, they may interact over time with one another" (Mansbridge 2003, p. 525). Mansbridge's analysis is important for my study because her examination encompasses ideas of deliberation and communication. I use Habermas's ideas of deliberative democracy (see chapter four) to frame my analysis.

Representation and local government

Much of the contemporary scholarly work on representation at the local level focusses on questions of gender (see for example, Bauhr, Charron & Wängnerud 2019) or diversity (see for example, Webster & Fa'apoi 2018). There has been relatively little work on the distinct nature of elected representation at the local level. There are two notable exceptions which I discuss more fully here. The first is Burdess and O'Toole's (2004) consideration of the linkages between the electoral system and representation. In their article they acknowledge that while communities can participate in local governance in several ways, representation continues to be fundamentally important to the local government system (Burdess & O'Toole 2004). They begin their discussion by setting out an analysis of representation at the local level. The first typology they identify is interest representation, "where local constituents perceive their elected representatives as their personal advocates" (p. 67). In this type of representation, councillors are expected by the electorate to advocate for a particular viewpoint or interest. This can range from a particular issue, e.g. improvements to roads, to a broader platform, e.g. the consideration of environmental issues in local government decision-making. They claim that interest representation works best in local government areas that are small enough (both in terms of geography and population) for councillors to make personal contact with a significant proportion of the electorate. The second typology they identify is "corporate representation". This is conceived of as "a principal–agent model where the representative body seeks to protect and enforce a collective interest. In this sense the representatives are 'acting for' the electorate as a whole…" (p. 67). This includes the idea of acting as a trustee and having the ability to make decisions on behalf of the community. Importantly in the NSW context, council "representatives are in a similar position to a company board of directors, who determine policy, set directives and establish strategic directions" (p. 67). As discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis, this idea of councillors acting as a board of directors is reflected in the NSW Councillor Handbook which states that the council of locally elected representatives can be compared to a "board of a public company" (Office of Local Government 2017, p. 8). Burdess and O'Toole's final category is that of "mirror representation" where specific groups in society are represented according to their ratio in the community. In Hannah Pitkin's terms this is descriptive representation in that "it depends upon the representatives' characteristics as a reflection of those groups in the community" (p. 67).

Haus & Sweeting (2006) have also made an important contribution in this area. Their typology of local democracy identifies four categories: user, participatory, network, and representative democracy. The first category, user democracy, is based on the marketization of political relationships. The market becomes the central mechanism for decision-making by measuring (not evaluating) individual preferences. Money is the medium by which the relation between supply and demand is expressed. For example, the decisions around the provision of local government services are made on the basis of demand and economic viability rather than on the basis of addressing wider social needs or public good. Second, participatory democracy requires the construction, articulation, and promotion of the common good through communication amongst active citizens. This type of democracy is most closely related to deliberative democracy in that citizens themselves must come together to identify priorities and needs. Third, network democracy refers to the organizational networks (inter-governmental and otherwise) on which local governments rely, to achieve their community's goals or address their challenges. Finally, representative democracy is described as the representation of society by elected bodies, the legitimacy of the representative conferred by the election being the key defining feature of this category. The focus in Haus and Sweeting's typology is much less on the councillor's role per se; rather, their emphasis is on the functioning of the democratic system as a whole. In the case of the user, participatory, and representative categories, it is the citizen's role which is described rather than that of the elected member. It should be noted that, as in Mansbridge's typology, these categories are not mutually exclusive; rather, they describe the various aspects of local democracy that co-exist, sometimes uncomfortably.

Other descriptions of representative democracy place the councillors at the centre of the analysis referring to their representation style. The most common delineation is that of councillors as either trustees or delegates. The trustee or corporate form of representation envisages that councillors make informed independent judgments in the best interests of their constituents (Karlsson 2013): "[F]reely-elected representatives should have the requisite knowledge and character to make such judgments, and, by virtue of election, are authorized to formulate policy and establish strategic directions on behalf of the social collective" (Hearfield & Dollery 2009, p. 64). In contrast, if

councillors adopt a delegate style, then they make decisions on the basis of what the voters want: "Delegates … 'keep their ears to the ground' in order to fulfil the wishes of the people who elected them. They are elected to be the instrument of others and a delegate's personal priorities are secondary" (Karlsson, 2013, p. 98).

There are some similarities in the typologies outlined. For example, elements of Hannah Pitkin's classification of formal representation (in that representatives are elected on the basis of a mandate) can be found in Mansbridge's concept of promissory representation and Haus and Sweeting's ideas of representative members. However, other typologies are distinct. For example, Mansbridge's ideas of gyroscopic representation does not really have an equivalent in Pitkin's model nor in the models provided by the local government scholars

Conclusion

The theoretical work on representation is complex and multi-faceted, reflecting its thorny nature, and provides an indicator of the difficulties one might experience in trying to guide and shape local representation at the legislative and policy level. Despite these difficulties the consideration of representation is important for this study in that this is one of the main functions that local councillors perform in their role as elected members. This chapter also traced the progression within the public administration from an emphasis of government to one on governance, and reviewed the thinking on deliberative democracy and the potential for further consideration of the complementarities between deliberation and governance. It is within the context of these tensions between government, governance and deliberation that the role of the councillor is shaped and must be executed. This study uses Habermas's concept of deliberative democracy as its theoretical framework, as such the intersection between government, governance, representation and deliberation becomes a critical area of enquiry and is explored further in chapter seven. Having completed this review of the literature, the thesis now maps out the theoretical frameworks which structure the analysis of the research data.

Chapter 3
Habermas and Bourdieu

This chapter maps out the theoretical frameworks used for this study. In order to analyse councillors' accounts of representing their communities, I use Jürgen Habermas's (1996) conceptualisation of deliberative democracy and Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of habitus, field and capital. I use Habermas's (1996) model of deliberative democracy and its associated concepts - lifeworld and system, communicative action and public sphere - to shed light on the context, i.e. the institutions of local democracy. Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of habitus, capital and field are used to understand councillors' decisions and behaviour within this context, i.e. their motivations for becoming councillors as well as their understanding of their role within the local government system. The logic of using these frameworks and concepts to help answer my research questions is as follows. If the objective of local government reform is a better local government system, I argue that one crucial element of this better system is councillors who are in a stronger position to make sensible decisions on behalf of and with their communities. "It is widely recognised … that a healthy democratic politics requires the public use of reason based upon a citizenry engaged in political discourse and institutional settings that facilitate civic deliberation" (Ward 2019, p. 1). I have chosen to use both Habermas's and Bourdieu's theoretical frameworks because, while each sheds light on particular aspects of decision-making, individually they are not sufficient. Habermas's theories discuss institutional contexts and processes but they do not address the question of why people may behave in certain ways – this is where Bourdieu comes in. My readings of Habermas and Bourdieu have made two aspects clear:

1) The institutional context within which councillors work needs to facilitate good decision-making. Habermas explains that this happens when the conditions are right for communicative action to occur and for true deliberation to take place.

2) We as actors in the local government space (local representatives, policy makers, researchers, educators and capacity builders etc.) need to understand the factors, un-related to the institutional context, which influence decision-making.

> Bourdieu's habitus helps us to understand why actors make certain decisions and not others and why they may behave in particular ways or hold certain views.

Next, this chapter sets out the relevant aspects of Habermas's thinking with respect to local democracy including the ideas of lifeworld and system, communicative action and public sphere. Section three discusses Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field as models for explaining the factors that influence an actor's decision-making and behaviour. The chapter concludes with a brief section in which I draw the two theoretical frameworks together.

Habermas, democracy and local government

Defining democracy is a difficult task. It has been and continues to be "an essentially contested concept, open to multiple meanings for alternative deliberative, representative, and pluralist conceptions … there is no universal consensus about which values, procedures and principles are most important" (Norris 2011, p. 26). At its most basic, democracy consists of two elements, collective decision-making and the authentic participation of relevant actors (Elstub 2015; Warren 2002). As illustrated in the above quote from Norris (2011), much of the debate in the scholarly literature considers the values, procedures and principles of how these elements are operationalised. For Habermas, the central principle of political theory is the principle of democracy in which "only those statutes may claim legitimacy … that can meet with the assent of all citizens in a discursive process of legislation that in turn has been legally constituted" (Habermas 1996, p. 110). Habermas's (1996, p. 196) definition of democracy places much emphasis on the right of every citizen to have an equal opportunity to participate:

> In the *principle of popular sovereignty*, according to which all governmental authority derives from the people, the individual's right to an equal opportunity to participate in democratic will-formation [communicative action] is combined with a legally institutionalized practice of civic self-determination. This principle forms the hinge between the system of rights and the construction of a constitutional democracy.

The basic elements of collective decision-making and participation i.e. "the opportunity to participate in democratic will-formation" are present. What Habermas's

definition adds is the argument that governmental authority comes from the people. In addition to addressing the shortcomings of previous democratic models, Habermas provides a moral grounding for inclusive participation and points to the barriers to a more deliberative and participatory democratic approach (Barrett & Scott 2008). Habermas's conceptualisation of the features of society and democratic systems can be used as a foil against which to examine local democracy. To begin, it is important to understand that Habermas's work does not try to understand the first principles of things, he does not try to answer the question of what ought to be. Instead, his work is about process. He sets out the steps we need to take to decide what ought to be, and the conditions that need to be in place for this to happen. Habermas distinguishes himself from other theorists, in that, instead of focussing on subjectivity and how society should rationally be constituted, he focuses on inter-subjectivity or the process of communication among subjects (Flyvbjerg 1998) in order to decide how things should be constituted. These demanding conditions for fair procedure, presupposes a specific kind of communication, the *process* of communication is key (Habermas 1996). Habermas seeks out a direct transition from normative models of democracy, which provide institutional models for decision making, to sociological theories of democracy which instead describe processes for forming a collective will and identifying priorities. He argues for a discourse concept of democracy which relies on communication enabling deliberation and decision-making amongst citizens (Habermas 1996). In fact, the principle of democracy is anchored in and derived from the action of discourse: "Only those norms are valid that could meet with the assent of all those potentially affected, insofar as they participate in rational discourse" (Habermas 1996, p. 107). In order to explore this theoretical ground further, I turn to Habermas's concept of deliberative democracy, beginning with a consideration of its constituent parts.

Lifeworld and system

Habermas proposes that in order to comprehend processes of social development and reproduction, we must engage society at two levels, lifeworld and system (Habermas 1984c). At the level of the lifeworld, we aim to make sense of social processes as the outcome of social actors' intentions and values. At the level of the system, we aim to comprehend the manner in which social actions intermesh above the will and/or consciousness of social actors (Goode 2005). Modern societies are characterised by

three different ways to coordinate social interaction. The first two are power or administration (as expressed through the state) and money (as expressed through economic markets) which are both classified as 'systems'. The third method of social coordination is solidarity (as expressed through civil society) (Habermas 1996).

In his description of lifeworld, Habermas explains that it refers to those interpretive patterns that are culturally transmitted and linguistically organised including the formation of group identities and the development of individual personalities. For him, the lifeworld is the site where speaker and listener meet, where they can settle their disagreements and arrive at agreements (Habermas 1984c). For two people involved in a conversation, the lifeworld is the reservoir of things which both speakers can take for granted, of convictions that they can draw upon in a cooperative processes of interpretation. As Habermas notes this reservoir is made up of ideas with which people within the same lifeworld are intuitively familiar. The lifeworld appears as a reservoir of ideas which are taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation (Habermas 1984c). These mutually understood concepts, facts, ideas, traditions etc. are necessary for societal interaction (otherwise we would have to explain each idea we use, every time we use it), as such, language and culture are the materials we use to construct the lifeworld. People within societies are always moving *within* the horizon of their lifeworld. They cannot step outside of it because they themselves belong to the lifeworld.

> Communicative actors are always moving *within* the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step outside of it. As interpreters, they themselves belong to the lifeworld, along with their speech acts, but they cannot refer to 'something in the lifeworld' in the same way as they can to facts, norms, or experiences (Habermas 1984c, location 2961).

Habermas goes on to explain that any agreement requires a general common understanding of basic issues, such as fairness or desirable outcomes, which are unproblematic (Regh 1996 in Barrett & Scott 2008, p. 298; Brown & Goodman 2001). Lifeworld is a resource of implicit assumptions, pre-interpreted knowledge and traditional practices. While the contents of the lifeworld are generally stable, they are

not immutable, with argument and reflection a group can change a lifeworld to make it more ordered and rational (Brown & Goodman 2001).

Habermas's concept of 'system' is distinct from the lifeworld. The key difference between the two lies in the ways in which they coordinate interactions between people. The lifeworld is coordinated through dialogue and mutual understanding. Systems are state and market structures. They are objectified into structures in which social relations are regulated only via power (the state) and money (the economy) (Habermas 1984c). Power and money have a certain degree of autonomy and do not respond directly to, nor do they directly reflect the intentions of the individuals or norms of groups who use them or are subject to them (Warren 2002). The system

> abandons the notion of individual and collective agency. In the face of immense complexes of increasing organisational density, it resolutely concludes that society should be conceived as a network of autonomous subsystems… (Habermas 1996, p. 334).

The systems paradigm corresponds closely to the capitalist economy and to public administration. In terms of a hierarchy, the system depends on the lifeworld. Lifeworld "…remains the subsystem that defines the pattern of the social system as a whole… Systemic mechanisms need to be anchored in the lifeworld: they have to be institutionalized" (Habermas 1984c, p. location 3547). Furthermore, Habermas explains that

> systemic deficiencies are experienced in the context of individual life histories; such burdens accumulate in the lifeworld. The latter has the appropriate antennae, for in its horizon are intermeshed the private life histories of the "clients" of functional systems that might be failing in their delivery of services (Habermas 1996, p. 365).

So individuals experience the failures of political or economic systems at the level of the lifeworld. Therefore, it is in the lifeworld that we are in a position to determine what should be done to address these failures. The political question of "what we ought to do" cannot be asked of markets (which lack any agency of the sort that could respond), nor directly of bureaucratized power (which, institutionalised in the state, has its own organisational imperatives). It is only in those forms of social organisation

where language based communication is central that it is possible to put the political question, "what ought we to do?" (Warren 2002). Overseeing and governing the economy and the state administration happens in the lifeworld. It

> is advisable that the enlarged knowledge base of a planning and supervising administration be shaped by deliberative politics, that is, shaped by the publicly organized context of opinions between experts and counter-experts and monitored by public opinion (Habermas 1996, p. 351).

Systems cannot exist in isolation - "political action system is embedded in lifeworld contexts" (Habermas 1996, p. 352). Although governed by the lifeworld, the system can destructively encroach on it. The more influence the system has on the lifeworld the less democratic it is likely to be because the presence of the system restricts opportunities for communicative action. System and lifeworld are always together in practice. Communicative action, the preferred method of dialogue and exchange in the lifeworld, is a risky and unstable method of social integration. It is vulnerable to many failures, particularly being taken over by the more efficient system. Under current conditions the lifeworld and communicative action are threatened by the expansion of the system (Brown & Goodman 2001). Money and administrative logic increasingly pervade those aspects of social life such as the university, national broadcasters, etc. which are most valued as sites of meaning in which social actors develop understandings and interpretations of the subjective and social world. The commodification of culture; the interventions of expert systems into everyday life; and importantly the co-option of the lifeworld by financial and strategic interests: these processes are conceived by Habermas in terms of a colonisation of the lifeworld by the system (Goode 2005; Habermas 1984c).

In summary then, Habermas conceives of society as divided into three organising mechanisms, power and money which are classified as systems and civil society, where the lifeworld and communicative action are located. These distinctions provide the basis for examining the extent to which politics and/or economics have encroached on local councillors' democratic sphere. Are councillors able to make decisions on the basis of deliberation or do factors such as power and money have an undue influence?

Having set out this framework, it makes sense to turn now to the idea of communicative action as the primary mechanism for interaction within the lifeworld.

Communicative Action

> Communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations… The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement (Habermas 1984a, p. 86).

The understanding and configuration of the lifeworld is constantly being reshaped and refined through a process of communicative action. Habermas distinguishes between the instrumental or strategic reason or communication which is tied only to efficiency, calculability and control (related to the system) and communicative action (which is related to the lifeworld). Strategic action or communication is defined by Habermas as "the reciprocal influencing of one another by opponents acting in a purposive-rational manner" in order to win or succeed in the debate. In contrast, communicative action is "a process of reaching understanding among members of a lifeworld"(Habermas 1984a, p. 286). The goal of strategic communication, characteristic of the system, is to simply and effectively achieve the plans of the speaker. Communicative action is a way of relating to others that does not just use them as a means to achieve self-interested goals tied to the necessity of meeting our own material needs. Instead, the goal of communicative action is understanding. It is through the process of communicating to come to a mutual understanding that results in a more cohesive and better coordinated society (Brown & Goodman 2001; Habermas 1984a). In a Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas's goal is to "grasp structural properties of processes of reaching understanding, from which we can derive general pragmatic presuppositions of communicative action" (Habermas 1984a, p. 286). A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents (Habermas 1984a).

For Habermas (1984a), the basic legitimacy of a political community is founded on its members' general rights to equal liberties, along with membership rights and guaranteed legal remedies. But Habermas goes on to argue that legal guarantees of rights alone are

not enough - the norms governing members of a particular political community must be justified by a discourse that includes all those affected. Communicative action establishes coordination of action not on the basis of influence or force but on the basis of a rational consensus between participants (Biebricher 2007; Habermas 1984c). Thus, ultimately a legitimate political community constitutes itself on the basis of an argument achieved through discussion. In his ideal community, empathetic, competent speakers resolve social issues through rational argumentation, which informs the construction of community norms (Barrett & Scott 2008). Habermas (1984a, p. 99) explains that there is a possibility of reaching consensus without force as long as:

1) The statements that are made are true.
2) The speech act is right.
3) The intention of the speaker is meant as expressed.

He later refines this list in *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, stating that validity and truth are ensured where the participants in a given discourse respect five key procedural requirements:

1) no party affected by what is being discussed should be excluded from the discourse;
2) all participants should have equal possibility to present and criticize validity claims in the process of discourse;
3) participants must be willing and able to empathize with each other's validity claims;
4) existing power differences between participants must be neutralized such that these differences have no effect on the creation of consensus; and
5) participants must openly explain their goals and intentions and in this connection desist from strategic action (Flyvbjerg 1998, p. 213)

Ideally communicative action is the basis for interaction between representatives (councillors, members of parliament, etc.) and citizens, and among citizens themselves when it comes to political decision-making. It is through this basis that the *lifeworld* is constructed and that common needs, objectives and goals are identified. For Habermas

(1996), rational argumentation is fundamental to democratic discourse. This argumentation is communicative so that empathic actors value equally others' positions and interests, and seek to reach genuine rational agreement on a particular subject (Barrett & Scott 2008).

Habermas's ideal speech situation for communicative action to occur has provoked controversy. Goode (2005) proposes that we can only take it seriously, if we acknowledge its status as a counterfactual. It is something that Habermas believes is anticipated in communication – an unspoken aspirational norm, rather than a concrete possibility. Precise equality between fellow interlocutors would be difficult to imagine or to measure. In reality, participants will occupy differential levels of authority to act as final arbiter when the inevitable constraints of time are faced. Invariably some participants will command higher levels of implicit trust in the validity claims they raise because of their status or reputation. Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy *ideally* does not allow for power imbalances among groups. However, as Bourdieu (1990a, p. 81) points out, "interpersonal relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction". But Habermas is aware of the power imbalances: "for Habermas, then, the model of communicative action functions as a framework for analysing the shortcomings and blockages of extant practices, discourses and institutions" (Goode 2005, p. 67). It is with this spirit that I will use Habermas idea of communicative action. Not as something for the local government system and councillors to actually achieve, but as a mechanism for identifying ways in which to strengthen the structure of the local government system so that it can facilitate better communication amongst councillors. I will also use it as a tool for assessing the extent to which the system has intruded on the lifeworld, i.e. the degree to which local government and decisions are shaped by politics or the market rather than by the lifeworld and genuine communication.

Public Sphere

> The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view… the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a

> way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions. Like the lifeworld as a whole, so too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action … (Habermas 1996, p. 360).

Communicative action and the construction of the *lifeworld* take place within the public sphere. This is the network for communicating information and points of view, in such a way that they coalesce to form public opinions (Habermas 1996). It is the space where people come together to engage public authorities in debate over the general rules governing the economy and political bureaucracy. "In complex societies, the public sphere consists of an intermediary structure between the political system, on the one hand, and the private sectors of the lifeworld and functional systems, on the other" (Habermas 1996, p. 373). The existence of the public sphere compensates to a certain extent for the exclusionary character of participation in legislative, political decision making. The public sphere can be thought of as a critical forum in which the process of decision-making is checked by discussing the given political arguments (Munnichs 2002).

In Habermas's ideal conception, differences and inequalities are irrelevant in the public sphere as it is only the better argument that counts (Thomassen 2010). An optimal public sphere is supposed to be inclusive, egalitarian and conducive to rational discourse. It is a place where even actors from the periphery of civil society have the opportunity to voice their sentiments and demands and find a potentially broad audience. Debates filter out faulty information and provide critical validation of opinions. This leads to 'rational' results, although, the debates remain open ended and there is always the opportunity for critical re-evaluation (Biebricher 2007). This basis of equality is, of course, not found in reality, but the premise provides a useful starting point from which to discuss issues of power and difference among local representatives and between councillors and their communities. Furthermore, a functioning public sphere is a prerequisite for democracy.

> A political system has to exhibit a certain level of responsiveness vis-à-vis the public sphere and the demands and needs being voiced there … [this requires] a 'functioning' public sphere... Neither of these two criteria is sufficient in itself. Only if both conditions are given to

> a certain extent is there a … legitimate democratic system' (Biebricher 2007, p. 222).

In Habermas's ideal there are two critical characteristics of a functioning democracy, the first being a robust public sphere and the second is the presence of communicative action within this sphere. It is through this process of communicative action that democracy emerges. In terms of my examination of local government in NSW, the concept of public sphere is useful for the examination of community engagement by councillors with their constituents and by the organisation as required for the development of the Community Strategic Plan.

Deliberative Democracy

For Habermas, democracy is more than the aggregation of already existing interests or the realisation of an already existing communal identity. Rather democracy has a formative role, and the deliberative process – from the public sphere to the parliament – is constitutive of interests and identities (Thomassen 2010). The "…central element of the democratic process resides in the procedure of deliberative politics" (Habermas 1996, location 6177). When it comes to democracy, Habermas is concerned with how decisions are made, rather than the content of the decisions themselves, as is illustrated by this quote from John Dewey which he highlights in *Between Facts and Norms*.

> Majority rule, just as majority rule, is as foolish as its critics charge it with being. But it never is *merely* majority rule… The means by which a majority comes to be a majority is the more important thing: antecedent debates, modification of views to meet the opinions of minorities… The essential need, in other words is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion (John Dewey cited in Habermas 1996, p. 304)

According to Habermas, deliberative politics acquires its legitimating force from the discursive structure of an opinion, hence the quality of discussions within public debates constitutes the most important variable for determining the legitimacy of a decision (Habermas 1996). How decisions and opinions are formed is a key concern for Habermas. He argues that only those agreements and clarifications reached by free argument and discussion are capable of producing genuine conviction and commitments

that apply to a broad range of contexts and situations. They have a motivating force and structure that limit and define what can and cannot claim legitimacy (Pusey 1987). The question 'what is normatively right?' should be answered through discussions among citizens. If people are able to debate ideas under circumstances that are free from inequality and manipulation, then the result will be rational consensus (Thomassen 2010). The "democratic procedure is institutionalised in discourses and bargaining processes by employing forms of communication that promise that all outcomes reached in conformity with the procedure are reasonable" (Habermas 1996, location 6322). In Habermas's view, the majority comes to be through debates and the modification of views in response to arguments made; while the process of debate is important, so too are the structures and institutions which facilitate this exchange. The

> … success of deliberative politics depends not on a collectively acting citizenry but on the institutionalization of the corresponding procedures and conditions of communication, as well as on the interplay of institutionalized deliberative processes with informally developed public opinions (Habermas 1996, p. 298).

Elstub (2015) provides a useful discussion of some of the weaknesses in Habermas's framework. First, its practicality; how can true deliberative democracy actually be operationalized, institutionalized, and made into something that can work in life outside of the mind? Secondly, complexity and diversity, as deliberation looks for the exchange of all relevant reasons. In plural and diverse societies that means a whole lot of different reasons and perspectives. For Elstub, the ideal of deliberative democracy, that exchange of pure reason under the auspices of selflessness, the authentic concern for advancing the greater good, and the genuine will to resolve issues, is a methodological fallacy. It is never going to happen. Although Habermas's s concept of deliberative democracy is a counterfactual ideal, it nonetheless can inform practice. The ideal can act as a very good way of criticising practice. It can be a standard that we can try to approximate (Elstub 2015). It is in this spirit that I will use the framework and ideas proposed by Habermas to analyse the accounts of councillors with a view to understanding how local government democracy works in practice.

A word on Rawls

The contemporary literature on deliberative democracy is founded on both the work of

Rawls (1993) and Habermas (1996). Both of these theorists identified the challenge of a pluralist democracy in a post-metaphysical world (i.e. one no longer organised or governed by a single religious or philosophical framework) as one of political legitimacy. In order to address this challenge, Rawls (1997) and Habermas (1996) identify similar processes, based on ideas of public reason and the ability of various actors within a society to communicate and come to rational agreements, to underpin democratic legitimacy (Cooke 2000).

> Rawls and Habermas share broad agreement regarding the philosophical premises of the post-metaphysical condition, insofar as they both assume that democratic constitutionalism derives legitimacy from intersubjective agreement on reasonable terms of social cooperation. As such, Rawls and Habermas presuppose a theory of communicative rationality to be central to their idea of public reason (Ward 2019, pp. 1-2).

I conclude this section on Habermas with a consideration of the work of John Rawls (1993, 1997) in order to explain, albeit briefly, why I have chosen to use the former's conceptualisation of deliberative democracy to frame my analysis. Although Habermas (1996) and Rawls (1993) may have the same objectives in mind and there are indeed many similarities between their approaches, they diverge in their conceptualisation of public reason. It is this divergence which has particular relevance for my research on local democracy. Rawls's (1997) account of public reason is restrictive in that he describes it as an activity which can only be carried out by a relatively limited number of institutional political actors. As he explains, the idea of public reason is structured according to five important principles which much all be present.

> (1) the fundamental political questions to which it applies;
> (2) the persons to whom it applies (government officials and candidates for public office);
> (3) its content as given by a family of reasonable political conceptions of justice;
> (4) the application of these conceptions in discussions of coercive norms to be enacted in the form of legitimate law for a democratic people; and

(5) citizens' checking that the principles derived from their conceptions of justice satisfy the criterion of reciprocity (Rawls 1997, p. 767)

It is the second principle i.e. the persons to whom ‘public reason’ applies that is concerning for my research as it does not encompass citizens or other civil society institutions. For Rawls (1997), it is crucial that the idea of public reason is not applied to all political discussions, but only to those which take place in the public political forum. He divides this forum into three parts:

> the discourse of judges in their decisions …; the discourse of government officials, especially chief executives and legislators; and finally, the discourse of candidates for public office and their campaign managers, especially in their public oratory, party platforms, and political statements (Rawls 1997, p. 767).

He recognises that this conception excludes citizens from public reason, but he explains this omission as follows. He states that in a democracy, citizens vote for their representative government. Ideally, therefore,

> citizens are to think of themselves as if they were legislators and ask themselves what statutes, supported by what reasons satisfying the criterion of reciprocity, they would think it most reasonable to enact. When firm and widespread, the disposition of citizens to view themselves as ideal legislators, and to repudiate government officials and candidates for public office who violate public reason, is one of the political and social roots of democracy, and is vital to its enduring strength and vigour. Thus citizens fulfil their duty of civility and support the idea of public reason by doing what they can to hold government officials to it. This duty, like other political rights and duties, is an intrinsically moral duty (Rawls 1997, p. 769).

As demonstrated in subsequent chapters, my application of the principles of deliberative democracy is not confined to locally elected councillors. Rather, I wish to use this concept to analyse the inclusion of community and citizen engagement in decision-making. In contrast to Rawls (1997), Habermas (1996) uses a more extensive model of public reason which allows me to include the consideration of a wider range of political

and civil society actors from both formal and informal institutional settings in my analysis (Ward 2019). In addition, Rawls's (1997) conception of public reason does not encompass a dynamic, transformative dimension. For him, "public reason is not a dynamic process of reasoning that generates normative agreement through the transformation of preferences but an idea imposing a constraint on publicly acceptable political principles" (Cooke 2000, p. 598). On the face of it, the ability of Habermas's (1996) process of will-formation to change preferences appears to provide a stronger basis for sustaining democratic legitimacy and, for the purposes of this study is more appealing in terms of its potential to bring citizens together.

Bourdieu

The primary conceptual tools which I use to analyse councillors' accounts of local democracy and representation are Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital. These are reviewed below. Bourdieu's conceptual framework lends itself to the analysis of the interviews I conducted with councillors and general managers. A key aim of the interviews was to understand what drove councillors to become involved in local government. There was a strong focus on their personal history and how their personal history shaped their habitus. As Wacquant argues,

> the habitus acquired in the family is at the basis of the structuring of school experiences...; the habitus transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is in turn at the basis of all subsequent experiences...and so on, from restructuring to restructuring (Wacquant 1992 in Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 134).

Habitus

Bourdieu argues that an individual's habitus shapes the way they view, understand and act in the world:

> [T]he objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded and … the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the habitus, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 52).

Habitus captures how we carry within us our history and experiences (for example our family background and education), how we bring lessons learned from past events to

bear on our present circumstances and how we make choices to act in certain ways and not others.

> The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices … in accordance with the schemes generated by history … Unlike scientific estimations, which are corrected after each experiment according to rigorous rules of calculation, the anticipations of the habitus, practical hypotheses based on past experience, give disproportionate weight to early experiences (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 54).

The experiences that shape habitus include those of our own making (for example, the kind of education we choose, or that is chosen for us by our parents) as well as those that come about independently of our actions. All of these factors combine to influence how and why we make decisions or take certain actions. Class origins are crucial. People internalise

> through a protracted and multisided process of conditioning, the objective chances they face. They know how to "read" the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are made, … through practical anticipations that grasp, at the very surface of the present, what unquestionable imposes itself as that which "has" to be done or said and which will retrospectively appear as the "only" thing to do or say (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 130).

It is also important to note that the behaviour generated by habitus is not completely pre-determined and does not follow a neat regularity of conduct as might be expected from following normative rules or regulations. Habitus "is in cahoots with the fuzzy and the vague…. it follows a practical logic, that of the fuzzy, of the more-or-less, which defines the ordinary relation to the world" (Bourdieu 1990a, p. 96).

The habitus links the social and the individual. "One of the functions of the notion of habitus is to account for the unity of style, which unites the practices and goods of a single agent or a class of agents" (Bourdieu 1998, p. 8). While our life experiences are unique, to a certain extent they are also shared with people of the same social class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, occupation, nationality, region etc. Members of the same

social class share similar positions within society that engender similar experiences of social relations, processes and structures (Maton 2008).

> There exists a correspondence between social structures and mental structures, between the objective divisions of the social world – particularly into dominant and dominated in the various fields – and the principles of vision and division that agents apply to it (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 12).

Importantly for the purposes of this research, Bourdieu's conception of habitus has critical implications for ideas of equality, class and domination. Local government councillors tend to be older, well-educated men from higher social classes and the use of Bourdieu's conceptual framework will help me to understand why this might be the case. Indeed, he argues that

> socially constituted classificatory schemes through which we actively construct society tend to represent the structures out of which they are issued as natural and necessary, rather than as the historically contingent fallouts of a given balance of power between classes, ethnic groups, or genders (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 13-4).

For Reay (1995) the appeal of the concept of habitus is that it lends itself to a focus on social inequalities. It includes a focus that demands a complex analysis which recognises diversity within social groupings and highlights the crucial importance of the context in which actions take place. Habitus provides a lens with which to analyse social diversity and social class. The relationship between habitus and inequality is interesting for this study as it has implications for Habermas's concept of communicative action and deliberation and the ideal for these processes to take place between equals. Habitus may help explain why local politics is dominated by older, well-educated men and may highlight specific challenges to trying to make local politics and deliberation more inclusive of women, younger people and ethnic minorities. In addition, this concept is very useful for understanding the motivations for running for office, decision-making processes and how councillors view their roles and responsibilities.

Field

A field is the socially structured space where people struggle, depending on their position, to change or preserve its boundaries or form. Each

> field prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles… Two properties are central to this succinct definition. First, a field is a patterned system of objective forces (much in the manner of a magnetic field), a *relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity* which it imposes on all the objects and agents which enter in it … In the course of these struggles, the very shape and divisions of the field become a central stake, because to alter the distribution and relative weight of forms of capital is tantamount to modifying the structure of the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 18)

For example, in the local government context the field is characterised by rules that govern the division of responsibilities between councillors and the general manager and the organisation. As discussed in Chapter Two, the councillors are meant to act as a "Board of Directors" making strategic decisions about the goals and objectives of the organisation. The general manager's job is to develop a program of activities to achieve these goals. The field may be a network or configuration of objective relations between positions. These positions are defined, by the fact that they exist and by the restrictions they place on people, by their current and potential location in the distribution of power or capital. The possession of power or capital requires access to the specific advantages or capital (economic, cultural, social, see below for a further discussion of Bourdieu's concept of capital) that are available in that field. For example, the artistic field, or the religious field, or the economic field all follow specific logics: while the artistic field has constituted itself by rejecting or reversing the law of material profit, the economic field has emerged, historically, through the creation of a universe within which, as we commonly say, "business is business", where the enchanted relations of friendship and love are in principle excluded. The boundaries of a field are fuzzy even though they are always marked by more or less institutionalised barriers to entry. That is people are able to enter a field on the basis of their possessing a certain configuration of properties, that is, forms of specific capital. "The strategies of agents depend on their position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific capital, and on the perception that

they have of the field depending on the point of view they take *on* the field as a view taken from a point *in* the field" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 101).

There are a range of structural and functional similarities between fields. Each has its dominant and its dominated, its struggles for usurpation and exclusion, its mechanism of reproduction, and so on (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 106). The concepts of habitus and field are

> relational in that they function fully only in relation to one another. A field is not simply a dead structure, a set of empty places … but a space of play which exists as such only to the extent that players enter into it believe in and actively pursue the prizes it offers" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 19).

In the local government space, these prizes generally come in the form or political power and the ability to successfully advocate for particular outcomes. The local government field, or the rules of the game which govern the sector, is characterised institutionally through power relationships ascribed to councillors as individuals, as a group and in relation to the general manager as described in the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW). In addition to these formal characteristics, the sector can also be described according to informal features, which may vary from council to council conventions for communications between councillors and between councillors and the organisation, or between different groups of councils e.g. rural councils while share features (such as more regular contact and personal knowledge of constituents) which are not shared with metropolitan councils.

When a field undergoes a major change, the habitus of individuals can be severely disrupted. This idea of innate inertia or hysteresis, means that when a field changes the habitus can have "critical moments when it misfires or is out of phase" (Bourdieu 2000, location 3862). In situations of crisis or change, especially those seen at the time of change in social space, people often have difficulty in holding together their world view in the face of this change. Some of them, often those who were best adapted to the previous state of the game, have difficulty in adjusting to the new established order (Bourdieu 2000). This quality of inertia in habitus means that a person's "dispositions are out of line with the field and with the 'collective expectations' which are constitutive or its normality. This is the case in particular when a field undergoes a

major crisis in its regularities (even its rules) are profoundly changed" (Bourdieu 2000, location 3833). This characteristic of habitus is relevant to my study as the legislative and policy context within which councillors represent their communities has undergone a process of change. The laws that govern the role of local representatives in New South Wales have changed. As a result, the idea of hysteresis facilitates the analysis of how councillors have responded to these changes, in particular the changing the division of responsibilities between elected members and the general manager.

Capital

For Bourdieu the capital an individual possess is a critical determinant of their power in society. According to Bourdieu (1986), capital is created by human labour. It takes time to accumulate. People generate and inherit different kinds of capital in different amounts creating uneven opportunities and possibilities. This differential distribution of the different types of capital reflects the structure of the social world. Bourdieu identifies three primary kinds of capital: economic capital which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights; cultural capital which is convertible on certain conditions into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications, and social capital made up of social obligations or connections which is convertible in certain conditions into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility. Capitals, as forms of power, exist not in isolation but operate relationally in Bourdieu's concept of field. Within the local government context this can materialise in many different forms and combinations. Councillors draw on their various kinds of capital in order to win office and to influence decision-making within the council and community. This may include economic capital in order to invest in election campaigns, in addition economic capital may also be correlated with significant social capital and high standing within the community. A person's cultural capital will shape their capacity to launch an effective campaign and of course their social capital could be a vital asset in regards to recruiting volunteers, etc.

Bourdieu's ideas of capital and habitus are important for understanding political participation. According to Bourdieu, a person of a 'higher social class' broadly defined by higher levels of education and social standing will be more likely to possess the kind of habitus and capital that lends itself to seeking political office at local, state

or federal level. A central feature of his argument is that not all citizens are able to compete equally, but that those endowed with greater 'capital' possess advantages that allow them greater opportunity to sustain their privileges over time. These advantages may in turn bestow resources to allow certain people the means to succeed within a particular area of endeavour (Bourdieu 1986; Savage 2012). Bourdieu(1986) sets out the various types of capital which an individual can possess, how these may shape the decisions someone may take and their capacity to pursue certain objectives. Cultural capital is a very relevant category for my analysis of the reasons why councillors decide to run for council. This kind of capital can be acquired to varying extents. This variation usually depends on class origins and the educational experiences of individuals. Bourdieu identifies three inter-related kinds of cultural capital, the embodied state, often apparent in how a person thinks and acts; the objectified state in the form of goods and family artefacts (pictures, books etc.) and in the institutionalised state (e.g. formal academic qualifications). Embodied cultural capital is gained from the family and shapes a person's character and understanding of how they fit into the world. This embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, cannot be transmitted instantaneously (unlike money, property rights, or even titles of nobility) by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange. It is intrinsic to the individual. Institutionalised cultural capital is most commonly expressed as academic qualifications (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu stresses the crucial, continuous and diffuse role of the family in passing on or transmitting cultural capital, an act which is largely done unconsciously rather than deliberately. Cultural capital is characterised by its earliest conditions of acquisition which leave a more or less visible trace (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region). Cultural capital is

> linked in numerous ways to the person in his [sic] biological singularity and is subject to a hereditary transmission which is always heavily disguised, or even invisible… because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital … (Bourdieu 1986, p. 49).

The idea of cultural capital being viewed as competence or authority is interesting. Councillors and voters may consciously or unconsciously base their decisions either to run for office or to vote for a particular candidate on this perception of authority or legitimacy. The accumulation of cultural capital early in life is an important

precondition for the fast, easy accumulation of every other kind of useful capital. And "for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital; in this case, the accumulation period covers the whole period of socialization"(Bourdieu 1986, p. 49). The longer a family can shield their children from economic necessities such as work, the more cultural capital that child will be able to accumulate, through for example, the pursuit of higher education. "The process of appropriating objectivised cultural capital and the time necessary for it to take place mainly depend on the cultural capital embodied in the whole family" (p. 49). This is particularly important for political participation because "the family is often considered the primary socialization context for young people with regard to political attitudes and behaviours… Within the family, young people learn to fulfil social, gender and political roles, and how to interact with the larger community" (Quintelier 2015, p. 279). This is not to say that children are subject to parental heavy-handed tuition, rather in the course of their development, children are exposed to a variety of everyday cues and reinforcements from their parents that nudge them in particular directions (Jennings, Stoker & Bowers 2009). Early acquisition of parental attributes has lifelong consequences. If parents are politically engaged and frequently discuss politics with the child, transmission rates rise substantially for political engagement, particularly on topics of general political significance and salience. Parents also play an indirect role in terms of situating the child in a given local socio-political environment (Jennings, Stoker & Bowers 2009).

In addition to discussions and experiences at home, the family plays a critical role in a person's education in choice of schools, in the length of time a person can remain in the educational system and in the myriad of ways families support children through their educational journey. Bourdieu argues that educational qualifications serve as an index of cultural capital: '[educational qualifications] . . . guarantees cultural capital more or less completely . . . and so it is an unequally adequate indicator of this capital' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 13). Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of capital are central to my analysis of the question of why councillors run for office and who, in terms of their demographic profile e.g. age, ethnicity, level of education etc., they are.

Politics and power

Bourdieu's analysis of power, capital and field is deeply political. Much of his thinking represents a sustained attempt to develop an analysis of the social conditions for the

possibility of democracy – broadly defined as the state wherein everyone possesses both the inclination and the ability to take political matters into their own hands (Wacquant 2004). Yet, habitus is a relatively under-utilised but potentially interesting concept for understanding local power, politics and representation. Swartz (2006, p. 85) has identified this gap in the American context "Bourdieu is seldom cited let alone discussed in American political sociology and particularly political science. In a survey of relevant literature it is striking that Bourdieu is seldom referenced." He goes on to explain that the "US may not be unique in this regard for a relatively recent review of political sociology in the UK shows no particular interest in Bourdieu and does not reference any of his work" (Rootes 1996 in Swartz 2006, p. 85). In Bourdieu's view the state does not exist only "out there," in the guise of bureaucracies, authorities, and ceremonies: it also lives "in here," indelibly engraved in all of us in the form of the state-sanctioned mental categories acquired via schooling through which we cognitively construct the social world, so that we already consent to its dictates prior to committing any "political" act (Wacquant 2004). In addition, Bourdieu supplies a general principle of political engagement: first to acknowledge that the conditions of access to political expression are not universally granted to all but, on the contrary, that they are socially determined and differentially allocated (Wacquant 2004, p. 12). This is because a person's habitus and cultural capital shapes their ability to realise that they have the right to engage politically, to participate and ask questions within a democracy.

Bourdieu's idea of capital is a key element of his analysis of politics. Political capital is a subtype of social capital that consists of the ability to mobilize social support (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992).

> Political capital is a form of … capital, *credit* founded on *credence* or belief and *recognition* or, more precisely, on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person (or on an object) the very powers that they recognize in him (or it) (Bourdieu 1991b, p. 193).

The political field refers to the arena of struggle where politicians seek to capture positions of power using their political capital (e.g., political parties, occupations, media) (Swartz 2006, p. 36). In addition, the political field sets limits on political discourse, to those ideas which can be produced within the confines of the current

political problematic. This problematic is accepted and adopted within the field - i.e. political positions are defined by the laws that determine entry into the political field (Bourdieu 1991b, p. 173).

> …to acquire the more general skills such as the mastery of a certain kind of language and of a certain political rhetoric -- that of the *popular orator*, indispensable when it comes to cultivating one's relations with non-professionals, or that of the *debater*, which is necessary in relations between fellow professionals. But it is also and above all that sort of *initiation*, with its ordeals and its rites of passage, which tends to inculcate the *practical mastery* of the immanent logic of the political field and to impose a *de facto submission* to the values, hierarchies and censorship mechanisms inherent in this field, or in the specific form that the constraints and control mechanisms of the field assume (Bourdieu 1991b, p. 177).

In politics, the dispossession of the majority of the people correlates or is a consequence of the concentration of these skills (e.g. public speaking, debate etc.) in the hands of a 'professionals'. These professionals can only succeed in the political game on the condition that they possess a specific set of skills and competences (cultural capital). Indeed, nothing is less natural than the mode of thought and action demanded by participation in the political field: the habitus of the politician depends on special training. This training involves gaining an understanding of the political discourses that are on offer at a given moment. These discourses define the universe of what can be said and thought politically. To understand how these evolve requires an analysis of the entire process of professional and ideological development starting with the way individuals are identified according to the often implicit definition of the desired skills and abilities which designates them for the function of politician, for example, their education, professional or family background, and finally examining the continuous 'normalization' or socialization imposed on these politicians by older members of the groups, in particular when newly elected (Bourdieu 1991b).

Given that Bourdieu's sociology makes no distinction between the sociological approach to the study of the social world and the study of political power (Swartz 2006), his concepts and approach offer a very useful lens through which to examine how

councillors construct their habitus, i.e. how their experiences inform and shape their understanding and execution of local power through representation and in turn how this resonates with constituents' understanding of local democracy.

Conclusion: Bridging Habermas and Bourdieu

An important feature of this study is the use of two different theoretical frameworks to examine the question of deliberative democracy. Habermas's framework for deliberative democracy sets out the mechanisms by which we can create democratic legitimacy through processes of deliberation among and between citizens and politicians. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital help to explain people's motivations, understanding of the world and their behaviour. However, this is not to say that these two theoretical approaches are not in tension. For example, as discussed in the section above on communicative action there are several key requirements which must be met in order for true deliberation to take place. These include principles of inclusion, equal possibility of participation, a willingness for participants to empathise with each other's arguments, the neutralisation of power imbalances and an openness on behalf of participants to explain their goals and intentions (Habermas 1993). While this is the ideal, and it is arguable as to whether Habermas thought this was actually attainable, any reading of Bourdieu indicates that it is not possible because the ideas of capital and habitus result in deeply engrained and unconscious power imbalances among citizens. As a result, I conclude this chapter on Bourdieu and Habermas with a further investigation of these tensions.

In his work, *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991a), Bourdieu addresses his critique of Habermas. He argues that if one ignores the social conditions under which language is used, in essence treating it as an "autonomous object" disconnected from it social context,

> one is condemned to looking within words for the power of words, that is , looking for it where it is not to be found… The power of words is nothing other than the delegated power, of the spokesperson, and his speech, that is, the substance of his discourse and, inseparably, his way of speaking, is no more than a testimony, and one among others, of the guarantee of delegation which is vested in him. This is the essence of the error which is expressed in its most accomplished form by Austin

> (and after him, Habermas) … thinks that he has found in discourse itself - in the specifically linguistic substance of speech, as it were - the key to the efficacy of speech (Bourdieu 1991a, p. 107).

Bourdieu asserts that authority comes to language from the outside. "Language at most represents [the authority of the orator], manifests and symbolizes it" (Bourdieu 1991a, p. 109). Although, Bourdieu does not engage extensively with Habermas's work, it is clear that while Habermas wants to demonstrate the circumstances under which communicative action takes place, Bourdieu is concerned that whatever power or force an exchange has between two individuals is as a result of the power or force ascribed to these individuals by social institutions. As a result "the notion of an ideal speech situation, in which the rational character of communicative exchange would be unhindered by social constraints … is based, on a fictitious elision of the social conditions of language use" (John Thomspon in Bourdieu 1991a, p. 10). More recently several scholars have also used Bourdieu's framework to examine Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy and it is to these that I now turn.

In his examination of deliberative democracy, Olson (2011) concludes that power imbalances among citizens, as outlined by Bourdieu, undercut deliberative democracy by rendering some points of view less valuable than others.

> If people are in fact unequal in their specifically democratic capacities, and these inequalities follow the lines of social difference, deliberative democracy may privilege some kinds of people above others, reproducing social differences rather than blunting their effects. In this case, deliberation would simply perpetuate power, difference and inequality rather than thematizing them as topics of common concern (Olson 2011, p. 528)

He argues that the use of Bourdieu to examine deliberative democracy does not simply identify the problems posed by power imbalances but that "it reveals deliberative democracy to be cross-cut by constitutive, conflicting presuppositions that people make about one another and about political interaction." He maintains that this tension cannot be resolved: "I believe that the tensions within political speech are inherent and constitutive of a broader politics of deliberation. They cannot be overcome theoretically

and thus must be negotiated in practice by actual citizens" (p. 528). One important presupposition for deliberation to occur in Habermas's model is participants' recognition of one another as equals. Olson explains that "people … need to take a reciprocal attitude towards one another in order to deliberate … This reciprocity takes the form of treating one another with respect and sincerely attempting to understand their claims" (p. 529). In addition, deliberators need to presuppose that the people they are communicating with have the basic capabilities of public speech, reasoning, argument and comprehension. Importantly for Olson, these presuppositions "are constitutive ones. They constitute the practice of deliberative democracy by articulating what it means to deliberate politically with others" (p. 530).

Having set out these presuppositions for democratic deliberation, Olson then adds habitus to the mix. Habitus posits that "culture, identity and social difference are embodied phenomena… Social diversity and differentiation are lived forms of identity. They include forms of speech, expression, bodily comportment, taste, disposition and attitude," i.e. all the elements that allow us to distinguish the members of various groups from one another (p. 531). This ability to distinguish between groups includes a differentiation in the way a society represents and values different kinds of people. This valuation, in turn, impacts the "competence, credibility and sincerity people are accorded by others. These attributes, as Bourdieu shows, are socially patterned and unequally distributed" (p. 534). These unconscious presuppositions we have about people run counter to the ones required for deliberative democracy (i.e. ideas of equality and equal competence). "Whereas the universalizing presuppositions of communication require us to treat others as people like us, differentiating norms lead us to treat some others as like us and others as not like us" (p. 534). Within this context the key question for Olson is whether discursive strategy can in fact level out these social differences. This is important because in effect any discussion about marginalisation has to take place within the context which generated these social inequalities. "Can marginalized people, whose claims are (to some extent) delegitimized … make claims about the unfairness of their very situation?" (p. 539). The result is what Olson terms reflexive democracy whereby deliberation occurs on the internal, social dynamics of deliberation itself. It is in this sense that deliberative democracy is limited as it cannot always guarantee that the claims of marginalised or weaker groups will not be discounted as less competent, less reliable or less valuable within deliberation processes. In these

situations, Olson suggests that we need to leave the deliberative sphere to achieve political voice:

> … alternatives can constitute separate, parallel sites for political engagement… Here silenced claims and idioms can demand the hearing they have been denied in deliberative arenas. This would provide alternative forms of voice for those not able to contest deliberative marginalization in purely deliberative terms (p. 543).

While Olson's use of Bourdieu to critique Habermas is strong, I believe that Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy is still useful. While true equality among citizens in a debate may not be attainable it does not mean that this is not something we should strive for and seek to attain.

More recently in his response to this perceived tension between Bourdieu and Habermas, Holdo (2015) finds a way to reconcile the two. He suggests a conception of the conditions of equality in the public sphere by drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of investment, field and capital. These concepts not only help us understand obstacles to inclusion, but also the stakes of deliberation and conditions favourable to change. The deliberative field on its own cannot advance the position of its members. The relations of power that make up the norms of public deliberation are constituted by the relations of different fields and by the relations of actors within these fields. Relations between fields depend on the exchange of different kinds of capital (economic, cultural and political). As Holdo explains, if we conceive of deliberation as a field within which participants struggle to increase their cultural capital by leveraging whatever recognition is already involved in the dominant groups will to deliberate, the process of deliberative democracy itself can help to address the limitations of social inequality. So the process of deliberation itself by which people seek to come together to understand one another can partially address this challenge of inequality. In this way marginalised groups may rise above domination by fellow deliberators, and engage in purposeful political discussion.

This chapter mapped the theoretical context within which I situate the analysis of my research data. I began with a discussion of Jürgen Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy and its constituent parts. His ideas of lifeworld and system

provide the setting where life takes place. Lifeworld is the domain of civil society and system encompassing the political and economic elements which make up modern life. Habermas conceives of communicative action and public sphere as the mechanisms by which citizens can communicate authentically, divorced from the influences of power and money. Finally, and importantly for my research, he sets out the justifications for a deliberative approach to democracy and the presuppositions that need to be in place for deliberation to be successful. This is the framework I use to assess the institutional structure and processes of local government as they pertain to local democracy in NSW but as stated above, it is not sufficient as I also examine the actions of councillors within this system. In order to analyse the motivations and actions of councillors I draw on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital. I use Bourdieu in order to understand how councillors construct their habitus, that is, how their life experiences and education have shaped their understanding of local democracy and power. Finally, the chapter explored the inherent tensions between these two theoretical frameworks. Rather than negating aspects of Habermas's deliberative framework, the application of Bourdieu to his construction of deliberative democracy enables a richer and more nuanced discussion of my research results as is demonstrated in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 4
Methodology

This project investigates how councillors conceptualise local democracy and how they carry out their role as local representatives. As outlined in chapter three, I use Habermas's ideas of lifeworld and system, communicative action and the public sphere to explore the theme of local democracy. In order to understand better how it functions in practice, councillors were asked to describe democracy and how it works in their local government areas. This included discussions about the idea of representation, who they represent and how they endeavour to do this in their position as councillors. In addition, Habermas's concept of deliberative democracy is used to understand how decision-making works at the local level. The research also investigates how councillors' perceptions of democracy are developed and attempts to identify their reasons for becoming councillors using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field as the analytical framework (Bourdieu 1977). This chapter sets out the research methodology I used to investigate these questions. It begins with a discussion of the research questions and the themes which structured the interviews. Section two moves to an examination of in-depth semi-structured interviews, as my principle research method. This section also outlines the process of recruitment as well as providing a profile of the councillors I spoke to. Section three addresses the process of interview transcription and finally section four discusses how I analysed the data.

I begin this chapter with discussion of the interview themes. My discussions with councillors were organised according to seven themes or topics as follows. The first theme investigated interviewees' motivations for becoming a councillor. For example, I asked councillors whether they had always been interested in politics and whether their friends or family had any role in encouraging them to run for office. The second theme addressed councillors' conceptions of democracy, how they define it, who they think they represent and what they see as their role within local democratic structures. The third topic examined the role and functions of locally elected representatives. I asked questions about what councillors understood to be their main responsibilities and functions, as well as their goals and achievements for their time in office. The fourth

theme looked at the functioning of the council as a body of elected representatives. Particular questions related to this theme included, how well the council worked as a group and the process of decision making among councillors. The fifth area addressed the role and function of councillors within the context of the current legislation and assessed councillors' understanding of how the Local Government Act 1993 NSW defines their role, as well as their perceptions of local government reform. Questions related to the sixth theme encompassed community engagement and the role of the residents in decision-making together with the councillors' understanding and views on the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework in NSW which requires council (as the organisation led by the General Manager or Chief Executive Officer) to carry out community engagement processes to inform the development of a Community Strategic Plan. This plan guides the activities and services provided by the organisation. The seventh and final theme comprised demographic questions around age, gender, ethnicity, marital status etc. A copy of the detailed research questions organised by theme is provided in Appendix 1. Having set out the research questions and themes which structured this study, I now turn to the question of how I carried out my investigation and analysis.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

I used in-depth semi-structured interview to carry out this study. In total, I conducted 28 interviews. Local councillors accounted for 21 of these discussions. In addition, five were conducted with General Managers[3] and two with experts on local government. The latter included an Adjunct Professor of local government studies and a specialist in local government strategy. The interviews with general managers and experts provided me with the opportunity to interrogate councillors' responses to my questions and situate them within a larger context. The interviews were carried out either in person (n=13) or over the telephone (n=15). The interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length.

In terms of the nature of in-depth semi-structured interviews, they "…sit somewhere between the fixed question-response model of surveys and the open-ended and exploratory unstructured interviews with no fixed interview schedule" (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 56). They are similar to a conversation. It involves two individuals

[3] A General Manager is the terms used in NSW to refer to the Chief Executive Officer employed by the Council to run the organisation.

discussing a particular topic, but, as the researcher, I was charged with asking the questions and following up on the responses of the interviewee in order to obtain as much relevant information as possible. Ideally, the interview is flexible and free flowing with the interviewer allowing the interviewee a good deal of leeway. The skill of the person conducting the research lies in directing the conversation as discreetly as possible so as to ensure as much relevant data is captured as possible in the time allocated (Morris 2015). Using in-depth interviews gave me the ability to accommodate the individual circumstances of each interview, while also providing a basic structure of questions. It is this structure which allowed for comparison and analysis (Lodge 2013). I certainly found this flexibility to be useful as I was able to tailor the questions to the specific experiences and circumstances of the person I was interviewing. For example, if an interviewee had been on council for several terms, I was able to go into much more depth on the topic of the role of the councillor and how it had changed over time. For first term councillors, the conversation was much more about how their initial expectations of the role may have differed from the reality of being an elected member.

In-depth interviews were also chosen as the principle data collection method because I was interested not only in how councillors perceived their role and local democracy, but also in why they held these views. The most effective way I could capture this was through a semi-structured discussion (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005; Lodge 2013; Morris 2015). "Any research question that can be answered by people talking about their experiences lends itself to in-depth interviewing" (Morris 2015, p. 8). The use of Bourdieu's concept of habitus is also suited to the analysis of personal stories and interview data. "Individual histories … are vital to understanding the concept of habitus" (Reay 1995, p. 356). In-depth interviewing gives the researcher the opportunity to establish why people construct the world in particular ways and think the way they do. The strength of an in-depth interview lies in its ability to create a space in which the interviewee is able to tell their story and give the researcher a range of insights and thoughts on a topic. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher is able to obtain an understanding of the social reality under consideration (King & Horrocks 2010; Morris 2015). These personal stories, particularly a person's family background and education, are the building blocks for developing an understanding of a person's habitus. "The habitus acquired in the family is at the basis of the structuring of school experiences...; the habitus transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is

in turn at the basis of all subsequent experiences...and so on, from restructuring to restructuring" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 134). These conversations with councillors allowed me to examine how interviewees' backgrounds shaped their habitus and in turn their ways of seeing the world. Having established the synergies between Bourdieu's theoretical frameworks and the use of in-depth interviewing, I now turn to another important consideration, that of reflexivity.

The literature on social research methods emphasises the importance a researcher needs to place on assessing their personal reflexivity. This involves "giving consideration to the ways in which our beliefs, interests and experiences might have impacted on the research" (King & Horrocks 2010, p. 128). Social research is an active and interactive process involving both the researcher and the interviewee who each have their own emotions and theoretical and political beliefs. "The influence of the interviewer on the production of the interview narrative cannot be ignored" (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 57). The concept of reflexivity responds to this realisation and takes into account "that researchers and the methods they use are entangled in the politics and practices of the social world" (King & Horrocks 2010, p. 126). As a result, researchers need to acknowledge the interviewer-interviewee relationship and the way it can impact on the interaction between interlocutors and the answers provided. This interaction is influenced by factors such as the age, ethnicity, gender and class of the interviewer and, at times, the setting. Reflexivity requires the interviewer to recognise the potential influence of these factors and in an attempt to ensure that bias is minimised.

During the interview, the interviewee constructs a particular view of reality which is shaped by the discussion itself. Responses are shaped by questions, the relationship of the interviewer with the interviewee and the context. This exchange is a collaborative process whereby the content is shaped by this interaction. The interviewee consciously and unconsciously makes decisions to omit some experiences, perceptions and insights and not others, to give varying degrees of detail and perhaps exaggerate some aspects and downplay others. In essence the interviewee and interviewer co-create the data which is generated by their discussion (Kvale 2008; Morris 2015). A crucial skill of qualitative interviewing is, therefore, to have the sensitivity and understanding to engage in self-reflection:

> How might my presence and reactions have influenced the participants? Did I say too much and therefore the responses given were somehow swayed by my involvement? Or perhaps did I say too little, and fail to establish rapport with the interviewee? This level of self-reflection is one of the necessary skills of the qualitative interviewer (King & Horrocks 2010, p. 129).

The physical characteristics of the interviewer may also have an impact. It may matter if a researcher enters the room wearing a suit or casual attire, or with information bearing the name of a prestigious or lesser known university (Lodge 2013, p. 197). In addition, writing up the interview is a construction of social reality. The researcher makes choices about what to include and what to omit; what to emphasise and what not (Morris 2015). Interviews do not merely allow a researcher to discover information that already exists. Meanings and interpretations predate interviews and continue on after them. To varying degrees, these are created, recreated, and transformed during an in-depth interview (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 55). In order to respond to the challenges of reflexivity and co-creation, I kept a research diary which noted the date, time and location of the interviews together with my observations on the quality of the interview. For example, I noted my thoughts on whether I felt comfortable and my impressions of the interviewee's level of comfort in answering the questions. Comments on the location were also made, for example, if the interview was in a café I noted the level of background noise and relative business of the venue. These notes helped to inform a reflexive interpretation of the data during the coding and analysis of the interview transcripts. Extracts from these notes can be found in Appendix 5.

Finally, one common critique of qualitative social research and of in-depth interviews is that it is inherently biased in the sense that a researcher's active listening and thinking during an interview may result in a filter placing more emphasis on some aspects of the conversation than others (Kvale 2008). In response, scholars state that qualitative research does not claim to be objective (King & Horrocks 2010; Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005). King & Horrocks (2010) comment that all research is carried out from a particular standpoint by researchers who bring their subjective values and meanings to their endeavours. Within the social research discipline, "this subjectivity is not treated as a problem to be avoided, but as a resource that can be developed in ways that

augment and intensify social research" (p. 129). In-depth interviewers can design their interview methodology in order to constructively respond to the challenge of subjectivity, rather than pretend it can be avoided. Finally, the idea of bias presumes that there is only one correct answer or version of events, and that anything that differs from this answer needs to be eliminated. However, in-depth interviews in qualitative research draw on an interpretative theoretical framework ,which emphasises that meanings are continually constructed and reconstructed in interaction (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005, p. 57). In summary, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews as the primary research tool for this study. I chose this approach because it allowed me to gather the type of information I was looking for, i.e. councillors' experiences of representing their communities and of decision-making within the local government context. In addition, the data I collected aligned well with the theoretical framework I used to analysis the result of the interviews, namely Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Having established why I chose to use this method, I can now turn to a presentation of how I conducted the study.

Recruitment

In carrying out this research, I spoke to a cross-section of councillors from rural, regional and metropolitan organisations, representing diversity in terms of location, age and gender. In order to achieve this, I gathered the contact details (e.g. email addresses and mobile telephone numbers) of the councillors and General Manager from selected local governments. I ensured that there was diversity in the type of councils (rural, regional and metropolitans) I contacted. In terms of practicality, I began by contacting the councils located closest to me. Once these initial interviews were completed, I then contacted further councils based on their type (i.e. if I needed to speak to more metropolitan councillors, those were the kinds of organisations I emailed) or the type of councillor I needed to speak to (i.e. female or a younger councillor) in order to ensure sufficient diversity within the interview group. Table 4.1 below provides a profile of the local government organisations involved in the research. The table provides data on the number of interviews done from each organisation and information on the type of council, the number of councillors, the population living in the local government area (LGA) and the organisations expenditure in 2018.

Table 4.1 Profile of local governments involved in the research

	No. of interviews	Type	No of councillors	Population* 2018	Expenditure 2018* in '000
1	7	Rural	9	17,000	$30,000
2	1	Rural	9	7,000	$20,000
3	1	Rural	9	5,500	$36,000
4	5	Regional	11	60,000	$130,000
5	2	Regional	9	30,000	$60,000
6	3	Metropolitan	10	250,000	$550,000
7	2	Metropolitan	11	230,000	$180,000
8	1	Metropolitan	10	75,000	$110,000
9	1	Metropolitan	12	130,000	$125,000
10	1	Metropolitan	15	270,000	$330,000
11	1	Metropolitan	13	80,000	$100,000
12	1	Metropolitan	15	200,000	$240,000

* I have used approximate figures to provide an indication of population sizes and annual expenditure in order to safe-guard the anonymity of the councillors and councils involved in this study.
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019a) and council websites.

In terms of process, I emailed each councillor in the local governments I identified, explaining the objectives of the study and inviting them to be interviewed. I also informed the General Manager of the study, primarily as a courtesy to let him or her know the research was taking place, but also to invite him or her to be interviewed as a key informant. I sent a second follow up email to councillors and general managers at a later date (typically two weeks to a month later) to remind them about the study and to invite them again to participate. If there was no response to the second email, I made no further contact. I carried out face-to-face as well as telephone interviews. Face-to-face interviews took place in a variety of locations including, councillors' homes, cafés and councillors' work places.

Table 4.2 below, shows the profile of the councillors I interviewed, and Table 4.3 shows them in comparison to all councillors in NSW in 2012. I was not able to find more recent published data on the characteristics of councillors in NSW. I am assuming that the state-wide councillor profile for 2019, in terms of age and gender, will not have changed significantly. With regard to gender, a third of the councillors I interviewed were female. This is roughly comparable to the state-wide figure of 27% in 2012. In terms of age, the majority of councillors I interviewed were between the ages of 30-59 (57%) and this certaintly reflects the total number of councillors in 2012, as this group

made up 58% of the poplation in 2012. In very general terms, therefore, Table 4. shows that the councillors interviewed roughly reflect locally elected representatives in NSW as a whole.

Table 4.2 Profile of councillors and general managers interviewed

	Pseudonym	Affiliation	Type of council	Age	Gender	Councillor or General Manager
1	Emma	Independent	Metro	60	F	Councillor
2	Olivia	Independent	Metro	38	F	Councillor
3	Liam	Independent	Metro	58	M	Councillor
4	James	Labor	Metro	30s	M	Councillor
5	Oliver	Independent	Metro	24	M	Councillor
6	Grace	Labor	Metro	48	F	Councillor
7	Geraldine	Independent	Metro	63	F	Councillor
8	Jane	Independent	Metro	53	F	Councillor
9	Charlotte	n/a	Metro	n/a	F	General Manager
10	Amelia	n/a	Metro	n/a	F	General Manager
11	Noah	Independent	Regional	69	M	Councillor
12	William	Independent	Regional	26	M	Councillor
13	Logan	Independent	Regional	35	M	Councillor
14	Benjamin	Independent	Regional	64	M	Councillor
15	Mason	Green	Regional	52	M	Councillor
16	Elija	Independent	Regional	52	M	Councillor
17	Daniel	n/a	Regional	n/a	M	General Manager
18	Jacob	Independent	Rural	63	M	Councillor
19	Ava	Independent	Rural	43	F	Councillor
20	Lucas	Independent	Rural	56	M	Councillor
21	Alexander	Independent	Rural	71	M	Councillor
22	Ethan	Independent	Rural	23	M	Councillor
23	Sophia	Independent	Rural	58	F	Councillor
24	Harry	Independent	Rural	71	M	Councillor
25	Matthew	n/a	Rural	n/a	M	General Manager
26	Doug	n/a	Rural	n/a	M	General Manager

Table 4.3 Profile of councillors interviewed compared to NSW

	Number of Councillors (n=21)	Percentage of total (n=21)	All councillors in NSW 2012*
Gender			
Male	14	67%	73%
Female	7	33%	27%
Age			
Age 18-29	3	14%	4%
Age 30-59	12	57%	58%
Age 60+	6	29%	38%
Type of council			
Rural	7	33%	data not available
Regional	6	29%	data not available
Metropolitan	8	38%	data not available

*source: Office of Local Government (2014)

Having explained the process by which I recruited the interviewees and provided some basic demographic data of the people I spoke to, in comparison to the NSW councillor population, I now conclude this section on in-depth interviews with a more considered discussion of the use of telephone interviews.

Use of telephone interviews

This research used both face-to-face and telephone interviews. The telephone interviews allowed me to expand the pool of possible interviewees.[4] For example, it facilitated the participation of councillors whose schedules meant they could not be interviewed during conventional working hours, when I was able to travel to meet them.[5] If mutually agreed and convenient, telephone interviews can be done in the evenings which enable participants to remain home, avoiding the need for child care or travel. Research on telephone interviews is limited (Glogowska, Young & Lockyer 2011; Irvine 2011; Muntanyola Saura & Romero Balsas 2014; Novick 2008; Vogl 2013). However, there is consensus that telephone interviews are not necessarily of lesser quality than interviews done face-to-face:

[4] New South Wales is a large state. It is 809,444 square kilometres, three times the size of France.
[5] At the time I was conducting the interviews I had two children, both under five. This made it difficult to conduct interviews after hours.

> There is no need to consider the use of telephones for narrative interviewing as a 'second-best' option: indeed, there may be sound ideological, methodological and practical reasons why it may be a more favourable mode than the often 'default mode' of face-to-face interviewing (Holt 2010, p. 120).

The studies which have been done on telephone interviews identified several key advantages which are relevant to this research. These include increased access to geographically disparate subjects, interviewee preference and comfort, increased interviewer safety, the ability to take notes unobtrusively, greater anonymity and privacy (see Holt, 2010; Stephens, 2007). A major advantage of telephone interviews is that they allow for the inclusion of participants who are located in areas distant from the researcher (Irvine 2011; Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury 2013; Sturges & Hanrahan 2004). They were certainly crucial for this study as it allowed me to interview councillors who were geographically distant from my home[6] and ensure the inclusion of the experiences and knowledge of a wider diversity of councillors. Stephens (2007, p. 209) also found this to be the case. He is a UK based researcher and telephone interviews allowed him to interview participants living in the United States. Holt (2010, p. 114) documents a similar experience, stating that "it was only when I struggled to access suitable participants for interview in my local community that I began to consider the use of the telephone for narrative interviews as a more practical option for more geographically dispersed participants." Telephone interviews are on the rise because they are low cost and have good reachability (Vogl 2013). In addition, they may provide an opportunity to obtain data from potential participants who are reluctant to participate in face-to-face interviews (Sturges & Hanrahan 2004). Furthermore, because the physical appearance of interviewer and participant has no influence in the telephone interview, participants may feel more at ease and focused on the conversation (Novick 2008). For example, Glogowska, Young & Lockyer (2011) found that the distancing effect of the telephone interview proved helpful in some cases and may have improved the quality of the data collected as a result of the 'pseudo-anonymity' achieved by telephone interviewing. In this case 'interviewer invisibility' may have meant that a particular interviewee was able to broach a potentially sensitive issue, whereas in a face-to-face interview he or she may not have felt able. There is also recognition that in many cultures today, people are

[6] For example, one interviewee was located 762 km from my home.

well-used to communicating by telephone (Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury 2013; Johnson 2013). Finally, when conducting telephone interviews, the interviewer is able to take notes without distracting interviewees. This allows the interviewer more easily to probe the interviewee about a specific topic at a later time in the interview (Sturges & Hanrahan 2004).

However, telephone interviews do have limitations. The reported disadvantages include a lack of visual clues and the perception that they need to be kept shorter than those done in person (Irvine 2011; Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury 2013; Novick 2008; Stephens 2007; Vogl 2013). In considering the lack of non-verbal cues, Novick (2008) finds that while they are absent in telephone interviews, there may be ways to compensate for their loss through, for example, the use of intonation, hesitation, pauses and sighs. Indeed, when present, non-verbal responses may not always be interpreted accurately or used appropriately. In addition non-verbal "data may not actually be used extensively in analyses that rely on transcripts rather than on field notes" (Novick 2008, p. 395). The importance of non-verbal cues may vary depending on the focus of the research and research objectives (Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury 2013). In addition, Holt (2010, p. 116) finds that in the case of telephone interviews,

> the lack of non-verbal communication means that, unlike in face-to-face interactions, everything had to be articulated by both the participants and myself. This need for full articulation meant that a much richer text was produced from which to begin analysis…

The contextual cues present in a face-to-face meeting may also be important for the quality of the data generated (Novick 2008). While the physical setting may indeed provide important information to some researchers, investigations which rely on the generation of transcripts may find that the context may not be advantageous. In some cases, context may actually be a disadvantage; for example, Sturges & Hanrahan (2004) found that interviewing in jail waiting rooms or in another location convenient to the respondent typically did not provide a setting conducive to in-depth interviewing. These settings were often loud, public, and uncomfortable. Morris's (2015) observation that an interview in a coffee shop is potentially difficult because of the possibility that it could be noisy is particularly relevant to this study, as the few interviews I had to conduct in cafés or coffee shops were more difficult to transcribe due to the background

noise. Also, at times both interviewer and interviewee were distracted by the level of noise and by conversations at nearby tables. Nevertheless, despite these potential disadvantages, on balance, the limited research conducted on telephone interviews suggests that they can be just as effective as face to face interviews. The merits of using the telephone which are particularly relevant to this research include the ability to cheaply and effectively include interviewees from a larger geographical area and the preference and/or convenience for both interviewees and the researcher.

This section of the chapter set out the choice of method used to gather data for this study, namely, in-depth semi-structured interviews which were conducted face-to-face and over the telephone. This kind of interview allowed me to collect a rich data set comprised of councillor experiences and points of view on local democracy. I recruited councillors in a targeted fashion to ensure that I spoke to a diverse set of elected representatives in terms of the type of council they came from, their age and their gender. Once the interviews were complete, the next step was to transcribe the data.

Transcription

All of the interviews I conducted were transcribed consequently, this section briefly considers some of the issues which need to be taken into account during this process. Transcription is interpretive. The differences between oral speech and written texts give rise to several considerations (Kvale 2008; Lapadat & Lindsay 1999; Tilley 2003). A transcript is a text that "re"-presents an event; it is not the event itself. What is re-presented is data constructed by a researcher for a particular purpose, not just talk written down (Green, Franquiz & Dixon 1997). In representing an oral voice in written form, the transcriber becomes the channel for that voice (Bird 2005). Researchers make choices about transcription that enact the theories that they hold (Lapadat & Lindsay 1999). This may affect the way participants are understood, the information they share, and the conclusions drawn (Oliver, Serovich & Mason 2005). Indeed, "there is not a one-to-one correspondence between conversational events that unfold during human interaction and what a researcher transcribes from an audio- or video-taped recording. Rather, the process of transcription is both interpretive and constructive" (Lapadat & Lindsay 1999, p. 72). Because there can be no objective transformation from the oral to the written mode, when considering how to approach transcription, Kvale (2008) suggests the question to consider is 'what is a useful transcription for my research

purposes?' In some cases verbatim descriptions are necessary for linguistic analyses; the inclusion of pauses, repetitions and tone of voice may also be relevant for psychological interpretations of, for example, level of anxiety or the meaning of denials. On the other hand, transforming the conversation into a literary style may highlight nuances of a statement and facilitate communication of the meaning of the subject's stories to readers. The next section, therefore, considers the type of transcription most suitable for this research study.

Oliver, Serovich & Mason (2005) argue that transcription practices exist along a continuum with two dominant modes: 'naturalism', in which every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible, and 'denaturalism', in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, non-verbals, involuntary vocalizations) are removed. Researchers who are interested in the intricacies of spoken language often turn to naturalized transcription. In contrast, a denaturalized approach to transcription also attempts a verbatim depiction of speech but has less to do with depicting accents or involuntary vocalization. Rather accuracy concerns the substance of the interview, that is, the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation (Oliver, Serovich & Mason 2005). As the focus of this research on local democracy is on the experiences and stories the interviewees provide, a denaturalized approach was used in transcribing the discussions. Several considerations were taken into account during the process of recording and transcribing interviews. The first significant one was whether I should carry out the transcription, or whether I should pay a service to do the work. The literature on transcription discusses both of these options. In the end, I decided to carry out the work myself for the purposes of building familiarity with the data (Bazeley & Jackson 2013; Brooks 2010; Evers 2011) and to avoid the additional degree of influence/interference introduced into the analysis process when this work is assigned to someone other than the researcher (Tilley 2003). The following should be noted with regard to how I transcribed the interview data:

- No paralinguistic or non-verbal communication was recorded
- There was no notation of pauses, overlaps, intonation or emphasis
- The pages were laid out in paragraphs of text documenting the interviewee's narrative

- Exchanges not relevant to the research were not transcribed (e.g. one interviewee discussed the relative merits of home schooling when he found out the ages of my children – this exchange was not transcribed).

I used Voice Recognition Software (Dragon) to aid in the transcription process. This software allows users to control their computers through their voice. It can be used to dictate transcripts by listening to the interview through headphones and repeating the participant's words aloud. The software created the transcript by transforming my speech into text (Perrier & Kirkby 2013). The objective of using this software was primarily to save time (Brooks 2010). As Perrier & Kirkby (2013) found, depending on the skill of the transcriptionist, transcription by hand can take anywhere between four and eight hours per hour of recording. In comparison, they found that when they transcribed using Dragon, it would take between two and three hours per hour of recording. This timing is in line with what I found in transcribing the interviews carried out for this study. In addition, Perrier & Kirkby (2013) found further benefits to using the voice recognition software. These included the ability to pay greater attention to detail, to how the stories are told through the repetitions of participants' words and the ability to immerse oneself more fully into the interview. "Speaking words resonated with us; by attending to how we felt speaking from our participants' perspectives and our reactions to their thoughts and stories, we could better understand our position with respect to our data" (Perrier & Kirkby 2013, p. 105). Brooks (2010) also found that this approach created a state of actively listening, of being embodied and involved with the material, allowing her to become acutely aware of how the cadence of a voice, the pacing of speech, and the emphasis on particular words, revealed information within an interview that may have been lost in translation from spoken word to written text. Once I had transcribed the interview data, I was then in a position to begin the data analysis. Below section four of this chapter sets out how I went about doing this.

Data Analysis

I used NVivo, a computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), to facilitate the process of analysing the in-depth interview transcripts. There are many advantages to using CAQDAS. These include the relative ease with which I was able to identify relations between different parts of the data set, because the data was easier to manipulate. The set could also be viewed in several different ways allowing the data to

be more rigorously questioned. Because this can be done relatively easily, this increased opportunities to apply different questions and hypotheses to test outcomes. Furthermore, the software can keep track of what is going on in the project allowing me to work more transparently. Tools provided with the software such as memos and annotation boxes enabled me to keep track of developing thoughts, ideas and methodological decisions. It is these systematic approaches and ability to trace the manipulation of the data that can improve the quality of the analysis (Evers 2011; Zapata-Sepúlveda, López-Sánchez & Sánchez-Gómez 2012). In summary, "qualitative data analysis software is designed to carry out administrative tasks of organising the data more efficiently and should therefore be exploited to the full on this basis" (Welsh 2002, p. 5).

NVivo "is particularly appropriate for analysis of free-flowing texts" (Bazeley & Jackson 2013, p. 48). It facilitated the exploration of interview material by enabling me to code data according to the seven research themes identified in section one of this chapter above. This in turn allowed the identification, indexing, or retrieval of data during the analysis process. The software also facilitated data management, coding text, retrieving text, and testing theory through the examination of relationships among nodes (Auld et al. 2007; Bazeley & Jackson 2013). The use of NVivo software, also enabled easy comparison of demographic data to the themes emerging from the interview transcripts allowing me to more easily assess, for example, whether women or men, or councillors from a certain type of council were more likely have particular motivations for running for office (Zapata-Sepúlveda, López-Sánchez & Sánchez-Gómez 2012). In addition to ease of data manipulation, the use of NVivo may add rigour to qualitative research, e.g. by the use of the search function to interrogate the data. "Carrying out such a search electronically will yield more reliable results than doing it manually simply because human error is ruled out" (Welsh 2002, p. 4). In her account of using NVivo, Welsh (2002, p. 5) does add a word of caution. While

> the searching facilities in NVivo can add rigour to the analysis process by allowing the researcher to carry out quick and accurate searches of a particular type… and can add to the validity of the results by ensuring that all instances of a particular usage are found, this

> searching needs to be married with manual scrutiny techniques so that the data are in fact thoroughly interrogated.

I found that using NVivo allowed me to efficiently code the interview material according to the themes identified in the first section of this chapter, and then to determine whether there were relationships between certain demographic characteristics and a councillor's particular experiences or views.

Key document review

Finally, in addition to carrying out semi-structured interviews, I also undertook an analysis of some key documents relevant to the consideration of the research questions. This included a review of the NSW *Local Government Act 1993*, a review of the Model Code of Conduct for Councillors in NSW (Office of Local Government 2018) and the Councillor Handbook (Office of Local Government 2017). The purpose of this analysis was to assess the extent to which the laws and guidelines set out in these documents allowed deliberation among locally elected members to take place. The objective was to determine to what the degree the institutional framework, in contrast to just the behaviour of councillors, could be said to foster or inhibit deliberation.

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter set out the methodology I used for carrying out this research in local democracy. To begin I presented the two main research questions which structured this study, namely, 'what are elected members' perceptions of local democracy?' and 'how do elected members view their role and function?'. The interview process was then further structured along seven themes to more fully explore how local democracy functions in practice. Having set out the research questions, I was then able to turn to the research methodology. The primary research method I used were in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In total I had 28 discussions with councillors, general managers and experts. These were then transcribed and coded in order to facilitate the data analysis. This approach allowed me to obtain a rich data set from each interview enabling me to explore each councillor's experience and understanding of local democracy in some depth. These rich stories lent themselves to analysis using the theoretical frameworks which I selected, particularly those of Bourdieu. In addition, the transcription and coding processes gave me the opportunity to become very familiar with the data facilitating my analysis. In terms of limitations, my analysis and findings are based on data from a very small set of councillors, who

volunteered to participate in the research, as a result, generalising the results to the larger population of locally representatives in NSW must be done with a certain level of caution. Nevertheless, for each finding outlined within this thesis, I was able to find similar research which supported my conclusions enabling a degree confidence that my findings are applicable more broadly to the NSW councillor population. Having established the background to the research, the theoretical frameworks which I chose to situate my analysis and the research methodology I adopted, I am now, finally, able to turn to a discussion of the results. Subsequently, chapter five investigates councillors' motivations for running for office and the implications for local democracy.

Chapter 5
Why people become councillors: implications for local democracy

This chapter analyses why people decide to run for council. In 2012 (the latest data available), the majority of councillors in NSW (60 per cent) were older (between 50 and 69 years old) and nearly three quarters were male (Office of Local Government 2014). A better understanding of what makes an individual decide to run for council may help us to develop approaches to encourage a more diverse group of candidates to stand for election. Why councillors run for office is under-researched. Although written over a decade ago, Fox and Lawless' conclusion is still valid:

> The extant research pertaining to the candidate emergence process … virtually ignores citizens' initial decisions to run for office. Considering a candidacy requires contemplating the courageous step of going before an electorate and opening oneself up to potential examination, scrutiny, and rejection by the public …. no broad empirical work explores the dynamics underlying the initial decision to run for public office (Fox & Lawless 2005, p. 624).

When I searched for research and literature which focuses on what specifically shapes an individual's initial political ambition there were few substantial studies, notable exceptions being the work of Liddle and Michielsens (2007) and Fox & Lawless (2005). A literature search which focussed on the question of similarities between politicians in relation to political ambition was more fruitful and I draw on this literature (see for example, Allen & Cutts 2018; Quintelier & Hooghe 2013) to provide a context within which to situate my findings.

The first section of this chapter examines the important role of social capital in councillors' lives. Section two considers Bourdieu's concept of habitus and the part it plays in making some groups of people more likely to run for local government office than others. Section three examines the reasons and motivations interviewees provided including wanting to make a difference in their community, being asked by the mayor to run, loving their hometown and the influence of the family. Finally, section four looks

at the lack of councillor diversity, drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus. I use Habermas to explore the implications of this low level of diversity among elected members for local democracy.

Characteristics of councillors - deep connections to community

I begin my examination of councillors' motivations to run for office with a consideration of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital. The interviews clearly showed that most of the councillors had one thing in common, strong networks and a deep connection to their community. Charlotte (all the names used are pseudonyms), a general manager (GM) at a metropolitan council, began our discussion with the following observation:

> I have worked as a general manager and at executive level for well over a decade. [I've] had experience in a number of councils with a lot of different elected representatives. My overwhelming view is one of incredible admiration for the work that they do, and a real acknowledgement of their motives for being there. … I have been quite overwhelmed and really heartened by the level of connection that some people have in the community. At the end of the day these are just community members … For many of them the pathway into office … comes off the back of decades of work on the ground in their neighbourhoods, and community groups, in sporting groups, in church groups, at the P&C,[7] or working on environmental activities. They have this huge [body of contacts], and for many of them an enormously diverse and broad body, of relationships, local knowledge … and ideas and aspirations, that they bring to office. … I see my work with them as being a real privilege.

The interviews I had with councillors bore out Charlotte's observations. Table 5.1 quantifies elected representatives' level of continued involvement with community groups. This is in addition to their duties as a local representative. It is interesting to note that the metropolitan councillors had lower levels of involvement in community groups when compared to those from regional and rural local government areas. This being said, three of the metropolitan based councillors, while not being involved in

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[7] A P&C is a school's parents and citizens committee.

community groups per se, were connected to the local area through their professional lives. Thus Emma's previous involvement in a community based business meant that she had contact with the Mayor, which subsequently led to her standing for election. For Olivia and Liam, their professional work reflected a deep commitment to community, albeit in different ways; Olivia, through her work in creative arts and her desire to use the arts as a vehicle for community engagement. For Liam, it was his professional involvement in urban design, and the use of public space which has translated into his desire to work on council. So while these three councillors are not directly involved in organisations outside of council, this does not necessarily reflect a weak or low level connection to their community.

With regard to councillors from regional areas, two of the six regional councillors interviewed, said that they did not have much community involvement. Elija explained that while he had been on the committee for the junior football club six years ago, currently he did not have much room for any other engagements. It is worth noting that Elija is a small business owner with a family, as a result, demands on his time, in addition to council, are substantial. William, another regional councillor, simply explained, "I'm not really involved in any other community groups other than work that I'm doing on council." William, who was 26 when interviewed, is a young councillor at the beginning of his career. The demands of his job meant that even fitting in time for council business was sometimes difficult. However, this is not to say that many other councillors did not also have significant work or family commitments. All the other regional councillors were involved in a range of other community activities such as various clubs (Rotary Club, soldiers clubs, workers clubs etc.), environmental groups, community associations, the voluntary fire brigade etc.

All of the seven councillors based in rural areas had very high levels of involvement within their communities. As Ethan, a young rural councillor, explained,

> I often end up leaving people quite shocked about what I do in the background. … I do a lot of public speaking work so Rostrum, Toastmasters. … I get involved in my local repertory society, all sorts of play productions. I've been doing that for seven years now and I'm still doing it and still loving it … Obviously I'm involved in the

> political party, and will volunteer my time into a lot of the committees and policy groups that are formed there… I also do a lot of [military] reserve work.

Ava, also commented that she has been heavily involved in her community in addition to her role on council. She volunteers in various roles at her children's schools (at the time of interview, Ava had four young children) including

> producing videos of school dramatic performances [which can then be sold to] raise funds for the school, [volunteering at] fetes and stalls, [carrying out] weekly visits to the classroom to do some reading with the class on a one on one basis, judging of the Rostrum CWA[8] primary school public speaking competition etc.

Alexander, an older rural councillor, also informed me that in addition to volunteering at the local fire brigade he is on the on the market committee and is an active member of Landcare[9] and the local Progress Association. The majority of the councillors had similar stories to tell when it came to their level of involvement in the community, thus supporting Charlotte's initial assessment that the elected representatives she had worked with as a General Manager, were deeply connected to their communities.

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[8] CWA is the Country Women's Association

[9] *Landcare* is a grassroots movement dedicated to managing environmental issues in local communities across Australia from coast to country (https://landcareaustralia.org.au/).

Table 5.1 Councillors' level of involvement with community groups

		No known involvement	Level of continued involvement	
			Low	High
Metropolitan	Emma	Involvement with a community business led to her meeting the Mayor and being asked to run on the Mayor's team ticket.		
	Olivia	No evidence of involvement with particular community groups per se but Olivia is clearly very professionally involved in the arts community. Her stated professional goal is to use the arts to engage and connect with communities.		
	Liam	No evidence of involvement with a community group per se but has a strong personal and professional interest in urban design and architecture.		
	James		X	
	Oliver		X	
	Grace			X
	Jane		X	
	Geraldine			X
Regional	Noah			X
	William	X		
	Logan			X
	Benjamin			X
	Mason			X
	Elija	X		
Rural	Jacob			X
	Ava			X
	Lucas			X
	Alexander			X
	Ethan			X
	Sophia			X
	Harry			X

I use this deep level of connection to their communities as a starting point in this chapter, because this is a characteristic that almost all councillors across metropolitan, regional and rural areas seemed to share. In order to explore this question further, and to delineate the connections between community involvement and political participation, I draw on Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital.

Social Capital

The very high community involvement of councillors can be partially explained using Bourdieu's concept of social capital (for a fuller discussion of Bourdieu and capital, see Chapter Three). He defines social capital as the sum of the actual or potential resources associated with a person's formal or informal networks of relationships. Social capital is a function of the number of networks to which a person is connected, and can access or mobilise. This web of relationships is the product of individual and collective investment, in order to establish or reproduce useful social connections (characterised either through mutual obligations or rights) (Bourdieu 1986). The social capital of

almost all the councillors interviewed was extensive. Emma, a metropolitan councillor stated, "Look I was probably known around the neighbourhood. [I] volunteered at the [church] and places like that [in my] local area." Alexander, a rural councillor observed that he decided to run for council as a result of pressure from his fellow residents who encouraged him to run. When describing his local electoral campaign he stated that "it started because I was getting engaged with the community [and] the community felt that I could get engaged more." This engagement led to support from fellow residents for his campaign and ultimately his election to office. Importantly, social capital is often co-constructed together with the other capitals a person possesses (social, cultural, symbolic and economic). The continuous co-construction of these capitals is one of the mechanisms through which privilege and disadvantage are reproduced. Bourdieu suggests that the benefits of cultural and social capital are as concealed forms of inter-generational capital accumulation, which reproduce privilege and disadvantage (see Holt 2008).

There exists a body of scholarly research on the relationship between involvement in community organisations (an expression of social capital) and political participation. The studies by Van Der Meer & Van Ingen (2009) and Dodge & Ospina (2016) provide a useful overview of the thinking and research strands on this relationship. They explain that numerous studies by social and political scientists have found that when people get involved in voluntary associations, there are all kinds of benefits for the participants themselves, and for society as a whole. These effects include aspects such as greater trust, physical and mental health, democratic values, generosity, and income in later life. More importantly, in terms of this study, political scientists have paid particular attention to the positive effects that civic participation has on political activity. Certainly, my data aligns with this research. Most of the councillors I interviewed (13 of the 21), demonstrated a high level of social capital as reflected by their extensive work with community groups and volunteer associations. Three of the councillors had lower levels of community participation and although a further three did not state they were active in the community outside of their work as an elected representative, as discussed they had strong ties to the community through other avenues (e.g. their work or political life). Finally, only two said they had no involvement in community organisations outside of council.

However, while it seems clear there is a correlation between social capital and political engagement, the mechanisms of exactly how and why this happens are not apparent. As Dodge & Ospina (2016, p. 479) conclude,

> [There is] … a limited conceptualization of the link between participation and civic action. It is as if citizens magically channel cooperation into political action. Although social capital might be necessary for collective action, it is insufficient. We also need to explain mechanisms by which political action is encouraged and enacted …

Despite the generally accepted role that social capital plays in democracies, I agree with Lee's conclusion that "… little effort has been made to examine systematically how citizen participation in voluntary associations has affected democratic change taking place at the level of individual citizens" (Lee 2008, p. 581). That is to say that our understanding of how individuals translate involvement in community and voluntary associations into political or democratic engagement is limited. Ideas of social capital alone do not adequately explain why councillors decide to run for office and, as indicated by Lee (2008) and Dodge & Ospina (2016), this question remains under-researched. In order to shed light on this question, I return to Bourdieu and his delineation of the roles of habitus and capital, in shaping people's lives, motivations and decisions.

Socialised to be a councillor? The role of capital and habitus

I argue that in order to understand how and why some people are able to translate capital into political engagement, we need to examine their early life, the influence of their family, and the role that habitus and capital have played in shaping their life choices. As discussed in Chapter Three, habitus shapes how a person sees themselves and how they fit into society. In other words, by examining a person's habitus, one comes closer to an understanding of how their motives are formed (Aner 2016). One of the defining elements shaping habitus is social class. As Bourdieu argues,

> …the relationship between social class and political opinion varies by social class… The probability of producing a political response to a politically constituted question rises as one moves up the social hierarchy (and the hierarchy of incomes and qualifications). … There

> is a very strong correlation with social class (and also, of course, with sex and education), in the capacity to have an opinion (Bourdieu 1984, p. 427).

According to Bourdieu, social class, gender and education have a strong bearing on whether an individual can consider running for local government in the first place - that is to say, whether this idea is even a possibility given their particular background. Research does lend support to Bourdieu's argument. Most recently, Allen and Cutts' (2018) analysis of political ambition in Britain examined the question of who is interested in putting themselves forward for political office. Drawing on data from an original online survey of just over 10,000 respondents carried out in 2017, they found patterns in the distribution of political ambition which indicate a gender, social class and an education gap, a north-south divide and a personality gap. Their analysis showed that survey respondents belonging to the middle and upper classes did indeed have higher rates of political ambition. In their study, slightly over 12 per cent of individuals from upper, middle, and lower middle classes reported having considered running for political office compared to just under eight per cent of respondents in skilled working class, working class and not working groups. Of the 39 individuals who identified themselves as upper class, 28 per cent had considered putting themselves forward for political office.

In the United States, Fox and Lawless (2005) surveyed the four professions that most frequently precede a career in politics (lawyers, political activists, educators and businessmen/women). They used the results of their survey (there were just under 3,800 respondents) to develop and examine the concept of "nascent political ambition", defined as the embryonic or potential interest in office seeking that precedes the actual decision to enter a specific political contest. They found that membership of a group historically excluded from politics, reduces the likelihood of a person considering a candidacy and that

> race, gender, and a sense of efficacy as a candidate play critical roles, independently and in concert with one another, in predicting whether potential candidates will even reach the political opportunity structures central to expressive ambition (p. 654).

They also emphasise that the gap in the research and literature on nascent political ambition means that we overlook the strong role that early political socialisation plays in the decision to run for office: "To bypass nascent ambition, therefore, is to leave a critical void in our understanding of who comes to control the reins of all levels of government" (p. 654).

In Belgium, Quintelier and Hooghe (2013) examined a similar question. Based on their knowledge from previous research confirming that political participation is affected by socio-economic status, they investigated whether political participation is influenced by young people's socio-economic status. They analysed this question using the Belgian Political Panel Survey 2006–2008, a representative panel study of 4,235 young Belgian adolescents (aged 16), containing self-reported questions on the socio-economic status of the adolescents and their parents. They found that an adolescent's socio-economic status affects their current political participation and their future ambitions. Furthermore, their study showed that higher educational achievement generally translated into greater levels of political participation. They conclude that the lack of participation by poorly resourced individuals can undermine the legitimacy of the political process:

> As citizens with low socio-economic status scores are less likely to participate, this represents problems for the legitimacy of political participation: if people do not participate because they lack resources, political participation is potentially unfair … under representation of an important groups as the lower educated can be problematic, since most likely their interest will not receive the same weight in political decision-making (Quintelier & Hooghe 2013, p. 273).

Liddle and Michielsens (2000) draw on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic capital to argue that a person's sense of entitlement to power is embedded in particular social groups which 'traditionally' hold dominant positions. This domination is recognised by themselves and others as a natural and self-evident aspect of their character, whereas for 'non-traditional' social categories, this sense of entitlement has to be both, constructed for the self and then publicly presented to others before the authority to exercise power is recognised. An obvious example of this sense of entitlement is the numbers of British Prime Ministers who were schooled at Eton (20

out of 55), or who attended university at either Cambridge or Oxford (42 out of 55) (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2019).

> The right to represent others and to exercise political power is acquired early in life by traditional political elites such as educated white middle-class men… Family and education are the main constitutive elements of habitus which condition the ability to compete successfully in the cultural field of politics. Social and cultural capital is acquired by familiarity through extensive exposure in the family during childhood and then more formally through education (Liddle & Michielsens 2000, p. 129).

In his seminal work, *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) provides an analysis of the relationship between social class and people's perceptions of their political agency. He examines the finding that those in lower-class positions are more likely to offer 'don't know' responses in opinion polls, and are more likely to be politically disengaged. Savage argues that in this work Bourdieu,

> sees the extent to which people feel politically entitled as fundamental to the political field. 'The right to speak' is even more significant than whether one speaks from a feminist, conservative, socialist, liberal, or any other perspective. And in many democratic nations, Bourdieu, notes, large numbers of people do not think they do have the right to speak. Their lack of capital and their marginalised position in social space have made them internalize their own lack of right to a view. It is this that speaks to the true power of class (Savage 2012, p. 300).

In other words, to understand the relationship between a person's education and their propensity to answer political questions (rather that responding "I don't know"), it is not sufficient to consider their capacity to understand, reproduce, and even produce political discourse. Although these basics facets of an ability to respond can be developed through education, they are not generally sufficient. In order for a person to be able to respond or engage politically we also have to consider the (socially authorised and encouraged) sense of being entitled to be concerned with politics, authorised to talk politics (Bourdieu 1984). "If the notion of a candidacy has never even crossed an individual's mind, then he/she never actually faces a political opportunity" (Fox &

Lawless 2005, p. 644). Feeling qualified and being recognised by others as qualified, are part of the same process of identity construction. A person's entitlements are continuously "enacted, embodied, institutionalised and legitimated, or alternatively undermined, restricted, de-legitimated and withheld" (Liddle & Michielsens 2007, p. 675). As Bourdieu explains,

> the propensity to delegate responsibility for political matters to others recognized as technically competent varies in inverse ratio to the educational capital possessed, because the educational qualification (and the culture it is presumed to guarantee) is tacitly regarded - by its holders but also by others - as a legitimate title to the exercise of authority (1984, p. 414).

In summary then, citizens from high income, better educated socio-economic groups are more likely to consider putting themselves forward for local government election. This can be understood as economic, cultural and social capital shaping a person's habitus. This tendency is also reflected in the group of councillors interviewed. Using education as a proxy for socio-economic status, the analysis of the councillors interviewed reveals them to be generally from higher, better educated socio-economic groups. Table 5.2 below shows that, in terms of their highest level of education, 18 out of 21 (86 per cent) of the councillors interviewed had a university degree with six possessing post-graduate qualifications. This is far higher than the general population. In NSW, 23 per cent of people have university degrees (ABS 2016). Looking just at educational attainment at the university level, it is clear that people with Bachelor degrees and above are over-represented within my councillor sample group. Using educational attainment as a proxy for socio-economic status, it can then be said that this group of councillors is dominated by people with high levels of cultural capital (and probably higher economic capital) when compared to the population of NSW. In addition, Table 5.2 shows that two thirds of the councillors I spoke to were male; 57 per cent were in professional occupations and a similar percentage were aged 30-59.[10] This group does not reflect the NSW population (particularly in terms of gender), in which about 49 per cent are male, 37 per cent classify themselves as professionals and 53 per cent are aged 30-59.

[10] Please note, I have chosen these age bands in order to compare the profile of the councillors interviewed with the data provided in the NSW Councillor and Candidate Report (Office of Local Government 2014).

Table 5.2 Councillor profile

	Interviewed councillors (n=21)	All NSW councillors	NSW population
Gender			
Male	67% (n=14)	73%	49%
Female	33% (n=7)	27%	51%
Age			
Age 18-29	14% (n=3)	4%	21%
Age 30-59	57% (n=12)	58%	53%
Age 60+	29% (n=6)	38%	26%
Education (Bachelor degree or higher)			
University qualification	86% (n=18)	Not known	23%
Occupation			
Professional	57% (n=12)	51%*	37%

Sources: Office of Local Government (2014), ABS (2016)
* This is comprised of councillors who identified themselves as professionals, managers and self-employed (Office of Local Government 2014).

In summary, their educational backgrounds and employment indicates that the councillors interviewed tended to have higher levels of cultural capital and most probably come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. This finding broadly reflects the scholarly literature on this subject. My research adds to the relatively small body of analysis which uses Bourdieu's ideas of capital to explain this homogeneity amongst elected representatives. As I discuss in section four of this chapter and later in chapter eight, on the implications of my research for policy and practice, this finding has important bearings for the functioning of local democracy and efforts to increase councillor diversity. Having set out the important relationship between political ambition and capital, I can now move to section three of this chapter which discusses councillor motivations for running for office.

Making a difference in the community: habitus and place

I begin this section with a discussion of place attachment in order to situate the various motivations councillors expressed within the landscape of this scholarly literature. I then go on to discuss the various motivations interviewees provided for running for office. These included the desire to make a difference to their community, the fact of

being asked by the Mayor to run, a feeling of loving the home town, and the influence of family either in terms of fostering and supporting an interest in politics or in terms of having family members who had also been elected representatives. I should emphasise that these motivations are certainly not mutually exclusive. Thus, a person can have family members who were councillors and also feel a strong sense of attachment to their local government area.

I start with a discussion of place attachment as an underlying explanation of why these councillors decided to stand for election. I include in my analysis, neighbourhood attachment. While being distinct ideas, place and neighbourhood attachment are closely related. Place attachment is understood as the bonding that occurs between individuals and their environments (Scannell & Gifford 2010). This bonding has several dimensions, the first being whether it is an individual or a community that is attached to a particular place. For example, a place could have religious or cultural significance for a particular group of people. At an individual level, Jacob, from a rural council, explained that his attachment to place was linked to his occupation, "… I was working as a farmer at the time and it was something I could do because I was tied to a place and it was something that I could do that was local." The second is the psychological element. How does this place attachment manifest? Individuals may connect to a place in the sense that it comes to represent who they are. The third dimension is the object of the attachment, including place characteristics: what is the attachment to, and what is the nature of this place (Scannell & Gifford 2010). A person may define themselves by the fact that they come from a country or regional town or they may feel most at home in a metropolitan context. For example, Liam, a metropolitan councillor, said that he wanted be an elected member because of the possibilities to make a difference to the built environment.

> I am obviously interested in all aspects of public space, in all aspects of transport planning, public transport, moderating the over influence of cars … active transport-cyclists and pedestrians. I'm very interested in all forms of affordable and alternative housing … I am very interested in questions of heritage … I am also interested in issues of ownership of public space and facilities.

Liam also spoke with pride at having written "a large and heavy book" which celebrated all the public infrastructure that has ever been built in his city. Liam's dedication to improving his metropolitan area can be considered one expression of the physical or objective attachment to place. It is in these ways, that Liam's attachment to place has also manifested itself psychologically as described by Scannell & Gifford (2010) above. Neighbourhood attachment is very similar in that it encompasses a sense of bondedness, or feelings of being a part of one's neighbourhood, and a sense of rootedness to the community (Hays & Kogl 2007). A person's degree of neighbourhood attachment is a function of several dimensions such as gender, age, ethnicity and social class. These factors shape whether and how we participate in neighbourhood processes. This includes whether we feel marginalized or empowered to participate in community change efforts, and whether we feel we have a place, or a right to a place, at the bargaining table (Manzo & Perkins 2006).

This sense of having a place, or the right to a place, at the bargaining table strongly echoes Bourdieu's analysis of the links between social class and political agency and align with Bourdieu's ideas of habitus. In her research, Aner (2016) uses the intersection between habitus and place attachment to examine people's reasons for moving out of Copenhagen. She argues that Bourdieu's idea of habitus incorporates physical and social structures. These can include the distribution of wealth, of buildings, of houses, and of different populations and class relations. These structures influence a person's options for action. For example, the housing market and income patterns set the context within which people make decisions about where to live. Our habitus is partly shaped by where we live and our experience of these places. The decisions we make "are to be understood as connected to and formed by structural possibilities and limitations… habitus [is] the mediating link between structures and practice" (Aner 2016, pp. 664-5). Similarly, Benson's (2014) study of the development of a sense of belonging amongst the middle class in London, UK, revealed the capacity of this socio-economic group to choose locations where the available fields – housing, education and consumption infrastructure – fit as closely as possible to their habitus. Where the fit was close, the result was a sense of belonging. The experience of and attachment to a place is closely associated to people's life stories and people make use of past experiences of place to orient themselves in the present (Aner 2016). In this way, habitus, place and neighbourhood attachment are deeply interconnected.

Turning now to the question of political agency, studies have shown that individuals with strong place attachment tend to have higher rates of civic involvement (see for example, Dragouni & Fouseki 2018; Hays & Kogl 2007). For example, in order to identify the linkages between place attachment and active participation in the community, Dragouni & Fouseki (2018) explored the role of heritage values, tourism and community perceptions held by community members as drivers of the willingness to participate in heritage tourism development. They collated evidence from 665 surveys, and conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders to inform their analysis of people's willingness to participate in a participatory heritage tourism program in Greece. They found a strong positive relationship between willingness to participate in participatory heritage tourism programs and a high attachment to place.

Hays & Kogl (2007) explain that scholars concerned with civic engagement have argued that there is a strong link between social capital (as defined by Bourdieu) and citizen engagement in the larger community. Their study sought to demonstrate this linkage at the level of the neighbourhood, because, according to Hays and Kogl, notions of social capital and social networks do not directly incorporate the fact that neighbourhood-based efforts to increase participation or mobilize citizens involve people living in a particular, shared place. They ask if it is not just human connectedness (i.e. social capital) which supports certain forms of political participation, but whether political engagement also requires connectedness in particular places, reinforced by the sharing of those places, especially the places where ordinary people live their everyday lives (Hays & Kogl 2007). They used evidence concerning social networks, neighbourhood identification, and political action gathered through an intensive case study comprising 70 interviews of a representative sample of neighbourhood residents in Waterloo, Iowa, a small Midwestern city in the United States of America. With regard to neighbourhood-based political activity, their findings support the conclusion that active involvement in one's neighbourhood association is closely linked to greater local political involvement, including both voting and more intensive forms of involvement, such as attending City Council meetings (Hays & Kogl 2007).

These studies suggest that social capital, cultural capital, habitus, and place attachment interact. For some community members, the result is a desire to participate in local

political processes. These findings were strongly reflected in the interviews I conducted. Councillors spoke of their involvement in the community and their desire to make it a better place as their primary motivation for standing for office. They did this in three primary ways. The first group came to the attention of their local mayor through their involvement in the community and were subsequently asked to stand for election. The second group spoke of pride in their hometown. The third group expressed a desire to make a difference and improve the place where they live. In contrast, the fourth and last group I discuss in this chapter spoke about the influence of family as the main source of their motivation to run for council. Of course, there was significant overlap, and for most councillors it was a combination of factors which led to them standing for election.

Picked by the Mayor

For four of the councillors interviewed their road to election hinged mainly on their coming into contact with their local Mayor. All of these councillors had a track record of involvement in the community albeit in different ways. Emma (a metropolitan councillor) came into contact with her Mayor because she had been doing some community advocacy that brought her into contact with state and local government elected representatives. On the basis of this advocacy work, the Mayor of Emma's local government area asked her to run on her team ticket at the next election. As Emma explained, "It was quite unexpected, and when I was asked by [the Mayor] to go on the team I thought, 'Oh that sounds really interesting' but I had no idea what was involved."

For Liam, a metropolitan councillor, it was his profession that brought him into contact with his Mayor and local councillors. Through his work in urban planning, he came to know many of the councillors in his area and had met the current Mayor in the 1980s. But Liam explained that despite having had dealings with local government for over three decades,

> I did not have any thought of standing. It is only that [the Mayor] asked me to stand on her team. Otherwise, I would not have stood. I did not seek it out. I do know a lot about all the [local government] issues. I guess I thought I had been frustrated by [these issues] for a long time, so this was an opportunity to … [do something about them] … from the inside.

Oliver is in his 20s, from an ethnic minority and lives in a metropolitan area. He told of how he had met the Mayor through a mutual friend and that she "was looking for a bit of diversity on our council and obviously I provided that. Without her having asked me, I probably would not have voluntarily done it myself." For him, the approach by the Mayor, "is a big reason of why [he] chose to stand and was subsequently elected."

In 2016 Olivia, also a metropolitan councillor, was asked by her local Mayor to stand for the local council elections. Although she identified the role of the family as her primary influence in fostering an interest in politics, her attachment to place also played a critical role. Olivia's interest in cities and the contribution they make to supporting creative industries were also key factors pushing her to stand;

> [I] thought I would get involved in local politics because it has the opportunity to make immediate change at a local level … "[I] always expected … [to]… get involved in local government later on in [my] career. Because it does seem like something that is more suited to older people. But then the opportunity came about in 2016 when [the Mayor] asked if I wanted to run as part of her independent team. I decided to take up that opportunity.

Loving the hometown

While all of the councillors I interviewed, expressed a strong commitment to their communities, some of the interviewees specifically framed their motivation to run for local government in terms of a love for their local area. These councillors were the only ones who said that their "love" for their area and a desire to make it a better place, were their key motivations.

Noah, is a regional councillor, and although he initially decided to run to address a specific issue, he spoke at length about his desire to make his town a better place. He related to me that during his first candidate speech he said to his constituency that his goal was that

> at the end of my term, my objective would be to be able to say that people from [Barrie] are happy to skite[11] about the fact that they come from [Barrie]. So that [Barrie] is a liveable place, where people can

[11] To 'skite' is Australian slang, meaning to boast or brag about something.

> work and live. [That it is] a better place. I reckon that's about as much as I want to do.

Logan, also from a regional council, loved his town: "I've always been involved in things … and I love the hometown. One day I was reading the paper and it said the next elections are coming up and I thought I would put my hand up for that and see how we go."

Sophia, a rural councillor, commented, "You do it [run for your local council] because you care and you care for the community… I thought I had some time … and care enough about this community to stop complaining and I put my hand up."

Standing to make a difference

Many of councillors said that their desire to make a difference was their main reason for standing for office. Here I have included councillors who said that they ran as part of the party political system, because these councillors also spoke of their membership as a mechanism for being able to make a change in their communities. Grace represented the Labor Party in a metropolitan council:

> I think the Labor party ideology aligned with my personal values. … The Greens did not appeal to me because they are not a party that will ever have responsibility for implementing decisions in government. I joined a party … that would have the opportunity to form government.

In addition, many interviewees framed their reason for running in terms of not wanting to sit on the sidelines and complain, but rather they wanted to get involved and address the problems they felt their community was facing.

> [If] you leave it to somebody else, [then] you can't complain, sitting on the sideline, that the team is not playing well enough. If you're not playing yourself, then you should shut up and enjoy life (Elija, from a regional council).

Jane, a metropolitan councillor, outlined her unusual trajectory to deciding to stand. She complained to a friend about the trouble she was having with a home renovation and the associated development application. Her friend responded, "Well, if you don't

like it, you should do something about it. You should stand for council". That was Jane's trigger: "My friend was right. You can't just sit back and whinge about stuff. You have to be prepared to act."

Also included in this category, are the single issue councillors. For these councillors it was often the desire to address one particular issue which motivated them to stand. For one regional councillor, it was the need to resolve the issue of access to adequate water sources in times of drought.

> It was in 2008 we were in the grip of a drought. A very severe drought and [Barrie] was almost at the point where they were going to have to transport water in, such were our water levels. The council was going through a process of decisions about how to address the future water needs for the city. The [Don] River runs past here and the [St Lawrence] River just the other side. And the question was do we increase the size of the dam, put another dam in so that we can catch the water before it runs past and goes to [Toronto]. We are in the [Toronto] catchment area, or there was another option, pipe in water from a guaranteed source. And what would happen [in council] is [that] a decision would be made to build a dam and then there would be a rescission motion lodged and the debate would start again about the pros and cons. Then they would make a decision to pipe the water, then a rescission motion would get lodged again. And it went on and on and on. In the meantime we're running out of water and nothing is happening. And I'm in the pub, drinking my beer, complaining, as good ratepayers do, saying they should do this and do that. Because I've always had a bit of a profile in town, a bit of a leadership role in other areas, [at work], and local football and things like that, I am reasonably well known. People said, "Why don't you get in there and sort it out?" So, I put my hand up …[12]

Elija, also from a regional council, wanted to address the quality of the roads in his area and improve bridge access for a particular village. For Ava, a particular experience

[12] NB: During Noah's first term on council this issue was resolve and a water pipeline has since been constructed.

with the local health system and local emergency services (or the lack thereof) spurred her to seek election in her regional council. As she observed, "my success in the area of health advocacy on behalf of my community, prompted a popular councillor to ask me to run for local government in the 2012 election."

The influence of family

While many of the councillors I spoke to framed their initial motivations for running for elected office primarily in terms of place attachment, others acknowledged the important role their family had played in their decision to stand. Eight of the councillors interviewed identified family as the key factor in them deciding to run for council. They mentioned that either their parents had supported and developed their interest in politics as children and young adults and/or they had an immediate relative who had been on council. Often, family stimulating an interest in politics and having a relative who was an elected member were both mentioned by the interviewees as a basis for their political ambition. The majority of councillors, who mentioned family as a motivation for running for council, came from rural or regional councils.

Three of the councillors I interviewed had family members who had also been elected members. All three came from regional and rural councils. When Mason, was describing his family's history of political involvement, he framed it in terms of it being an inherited trait.

> There is probably some *genetics* there because my maternal grandfather was an MP. He was actually a [Federal] MP not a local MP. … I guess political activism, political awareness, is normal [where I come from]. How it then manifests outwardly is probably up to each individual. I left [my home town] pretty much as soon as I could get out, but the interest in politics was there… [The] experience gave me a strong sense of social justice (emphasis added).

Lucas is a rural councillor who has been on council for almost 24 years. He explained that his "dad was on council for 17 years. I live in a country town. I want to see the town [do] better, and the extended community [do] better. The motivation probably has been more about improving the towns, not so much the rural roads etc." When describing his relationship with a fellow councillor, he jokingly explained that his colleague's "father was the Mayor when my father was on council." It is interesting

that these two families were known to each other and the relationships between fathers and then between sons were similar in that both generations served on council.

Matthew, a general manager from a rural council, observed that the mother of one of the current councillors he works with had also been an elected member on the same council. When he asked her what she wanted to achieve, “she said she would like to get sewerage over to the other side of the river … ‘I want to do that because when my mother was on council she got water to the other side of the river’”. These quotes are interesting because they suggest the inter-generational transmission of local political engagement and the role of habitus in the process.

Benjamin, from a regional council, recounted a story of a family deeply involved in local government.

> I do have a lot of family who were councillors. Not immediate family members, but basically, my great-grandfather was the Mayor of [Barrie], my great uncle was the Mayor of [Toronto], I have an uncle who is the Mayor of [Acton], and another uncle who is the Mayor of [Guelph]. … They were all businessmen in their communities and they were simply serving their communities as businessmen guiding what happened within our community.

Other councillors also spoke of the support and encouragement their family provided. For example, some described their parents as having a strong interest in politics. These parents were well-informed and discussed political issues ‘around the dinner table’ and were often aligned with a particular political party and / or a particular political ideology. I asked Olivia if her interest in politics came from her family:

> Yes, I think it is partly from my family. Both my parents are immigrants. My mum comes from a country that had a military coup and there was a political angle or a political awareness in my childhood. I … was very interested in politics from very early on. I was interested in how decisions were made. I grew up in [a less well-off area of the city]. I could tell there was something different about where I grew up and where I went to school [compared to] the other parts of the city. There was this nascent idea that decisions were being

> made somewhere [else] that the world is not fair and … opportunities are unevenly distributed and that politics has a role in helping to correct that.

In a similar vein, William, from a regional council, commented that while he did not have any friends or family who had been elected to local government, most of his family and friends did have an interest in politics. They "regularly discussed the goings on [at] state, federal [and] local [level]." He clarified that while his family did have an interest in politics they did not have associations with a particular political party. Their interest stemmed more from a desire to keep up with current issues. In William's view "everyone should have an interest in politics."

In contrast, Ethan's family identified with particular political parties:

> My [paternal grandfather] was … Green Democrat. My [paternal grandmother] was Republican.[13] [There was] quite a diversity of views within the family … [My maternal great grandfather] was involved with the National party for a long time.

The impact of family support was well-articulated by Olivia:

> The role that the family plays is that it gives you confidence that what you have to say matters … I think it is a broader feeling of being raised to feel like your opinion matters and that you can have an impact even beyond politics.

For other councillors the family played an important role in instilling a commitment to community service rather than an interest in politics per se. Benjamin, a regional councillor, had several members of his family who had been locally elected members. However, he was at pains to argue that the fact that his uncles and grandfather had been on council was "not necessarily a motivation." Instead he emphasised the role that his grandfather and father played in instilling in him a strong sense of community service.

> My father's father was very community minded. … He had a family business and he devoted his life to community and looking after people in his community. He lost his wife fairly early, and so most of his life

[13] They were American.

> was spent helping other people in the community. That had a big impact. My father was involved in community service … when he was just a kid through Scouts. When he left Scouts, he joined Apex.[14] Service clubs were really big during the 50s and 60s. The community really depended on input from [their] members. … That was my [and my brothers'] entire life … helping my father in service groups.

Benjamin sums up this formative experience by explaining that the motivation to join council "was always there, because the thing that is in the family is community service. That is the motivation. It is about community service."

Ava had a similar family history and trajectory to Benjamin. Her parents were public servants. Their "dinner time conversations", and the way they conducted themselves had a strong influence on Ava.

> [There was] no fear or favour. [As a public servant] my father kept at arm's distance from personal transactions which might put him in a position to be influenced. … I am not affiliated with any political party so I think the strongest influence on me was my … background. My family's support and confidence in me … empowered me to decide to run for election.

Finally, Harry, an older councillor from a rural area, stated that the main influence was his philosophy on life, which he credits to his parents. This philosophy was simply "not to complain about anything unless you were willing to have a go yourself."

The dominance of older, male councillors: implications for local democracy

Importantly, all of the councillors I spoke to tended to possess similar characteristics in terms of age, socio-economic class, profession and levels of education. As presented in Table 5.2, older professional and well-educated men are over-represented. As Logan from a regional council observed, given the structural features of local government and the resultant demands on a councillors time and resources,

[14] Apex Australia is a volunteer service organisation established in 1931 to empower working-aged adults to create positive and lasting change in themselves and their local community (www.apex.org.au).

> … you end up with a lot of older people on the council. They are really overrepresented. … We only have two female councillors out of 11 which is nowhere near enough. It is hard to get women to put up their hand to do it.

It is evident that factors such as women's role as primary care givers in the home and their socialisation or habitus all combine to result in many fewer women standing as locally elected members. Ava, commented on the challenges of being a councillor as well as a mother.

> I brought a lot of issues to the last council, an extremely conservative Council. Things like the fact that I had to breastfeed a newborn baby during my time as a councillor, led me to do things like try to introduce a motion for council to seek accreditation as … a breastfeeding friendly workplace. … We don't have a room apart from the toilet where a woman can go and breastfeed with a locked door let alone pump and have a refrigerator or hand washing facility or any of those things. … In the chamber it was the mayor and the 80 year old professor of education who were the ones debating me to not do it.

Bourdieu's ideas of habitus and capital helped explain why councillors tend to be professional, older men. An important question is whether this over-representation has an impact democracy? To answer this question I return to Habermas. As discussed in chapter three, for Habermas the process of deliberation and communication is central to democracy. Deliberation fills a gap left by the absence of a shared world view (e.g. a unified vision based either on religion or a political philosophy). Within our current context of secular pluralism, the burden of legitimation falls on the democratic process itself.

> Democratically generated laws would … remain deficient… if they were … nothing but the expression of an arbitrary or unbound 'will of the people'. A legitimating authority can only spring from a democratic process that grounds a reasonable presumption for the rational acceptability of outcomes. And this will be only the case if there is a cognitive dimension built into it—the decisions of the

> democratic law giver must remain internally linked to preceding deliberations. And here is the entry for a discourse theory that claims to explain how the institutionalization of deliberative politics can generate a post-metaphysical and post-religious kind of legitimacy within a pluralist civil society (Habermas 2005, p. 386).

The norms governing members of a particular political community must be justified by a discourse that includes all those affected. Communicative action coordinates action between participants without using force or influence, relying instead on rational discourse and ultimately consensus (Biebricher 2007; Habermas 1984c). In Habermas' ideal, community decisions are made by empathetic participants who use rational argument to establish community norms (Barrett & Scott 2008). So we need deliberation amongst *all those concerned* by an issue to be able to justify and underpin the political decisions we make. As demonstrated by the evidence provided in this chapter, the current profile of councillors does not adequately represent *all those concerned* in decision-making processes.

One way of ensuring that all those concerned are involved is through better descriptive representation. Descriptive representation means that the representatives are in themselves (i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, social class, etc.), in the lives that they lead and in their shared experiences (i.e. interests, professions, family structure etc.) in some sense typical of the larger community they represent. Older councillors represent older constituents, female councillors represent female constituents, farmers represent farmers and so on, the idea being that descriptive representatives are able to make more appropriate decisions for their electorate (Mansbridge 1999). Legitimacy and the quality of decisions are key concerns which descriptive representation addresses.

> Many researchers express concern over the quality of democratic governance and political legitimacy. A central criterion in evaluating the health of democracy … is the degree to which citizens are willing to engage the political system and run for public office… The initial decision to run for office is also intertwined with fundamental issues of political representation. A compelling body of evidence suggests that particular sociodemographic groups are best able to represent the policy preferences of that group (Fox & Lawless 2005, p. 643).

As Charlotte (a general manager in a metropolitan council) commented, "… it is highly unlikely that [a council would] be able to adequately represent, speak to or understand the issue facing a very diverse community if [it were] a homogenous unit." Amelia, another metropolitan general manager, echoed Charlotte's statement when she told me that she would not feel capable of confidently articulating the needs of the millennial generation in relation to recreation or similar services. In her words, "I'm just too far from it. I don't know. Councillors are meant to be representing the whole community, so as close as they can get to reflecting the whole community the better the decision-making is going to be." Geraldine, a metropolitan mayor, also spoke of the lack of diversity on her council and its negative impact:

> we need to understand how our community is changing and it is changing so quickly. We have to represent, we have to mirror our community. At the moment we don't have one person on council from an Asian background or with English as a second language even, and it is quite frankly not good enough. It is wrong.

Jane is a metropolitan councillor without a university degree who describes herself as a "normal person". She explained that her connection to her community may come as a result of her being more representative of the majority of people living in her local government area.

> A lot of the people I dealt with on council were part of a [political] party or community group members, on all these committees and stuff. That sort of changes the way you look at things. I'm not a university graduate. I'm not really an 'anything'. There are a lot of normal people [sic] out there (not that a university graduate is not normal…). There are a lot of normal people out there that just get out and do their day to day activities. I think I connected really well with my community, for exactly that reason. I'm just a normal person. I'm not a political antagonist. I'm just a normal person.

Amelia summed up the impact of the demographics of councillors succinctly: "I [have] councillors on my council [who are] climate change deniers. That is a great position to be in when you are 70, but not so fantastic when you are 30. You get pretty different decisions out of that type of paddock."

Ulbig (2007) in her study on gender and local government, investigated feelings of political trust with regard to the descriptive representation of women in local government. She found that just as racial/ethnic representation sends signals about the place and role of minorities in society, the gender composition of legislative bodies may communicate messages about the respect and responsiveness accorded women in a community. As a result, descriptive representation results in better political trust which is important because cynicism about government and the political process can arguably reduce participation and the quality of democracy. These questions of political trust and leadership models were echoed in my interviews. Geraldine, a metropolitan mayor, also feels that the inclusion of women and younger people in councils is important because of the experience and knowledge they bring to the decision-making process.

> When I was first elected I still had children at the local high schools. I still had my connections with people from the local primary school. If you are younger and you have family and school life you are often in touch with a lot of the issues. I strongly feel that many elected councils are totally out of balance when it comes to the age demographic [i.e. councillors tend to be older residents]. This is a big challenge for local councils and it is one we need to put special focus on.

In a slightly different vein, Charlotte observed:

> If we are talking about the body politic, then we are talking about leadership in communities. The council, when it is going well, when you have robust, strong local government which is very joined up with its community and it is carrying some trust, [when that happens] what you will find is that there are recognised leadership roles. With that comes all the stuff around modelling. We want young people to feel engaged in political processes so then we need young people on that council (metropolitan general manager).

Similarly, William, a younger councillor from a regional local government, told me that the current council he was serving on was different because it comprised three younger councillors. In his words “I like to think that I take part … in leading the way in getting more younger people to stand [for election] to show that it is one, possible, and two, that

it should be encouraged [for younger people] to be active in the community." For William, it was not just about getting younger people to stand for council, but also about encouraging them to be more engaged in their communities:

> It's not just putting yourself in an election. It's about having those discussions at the dinner table, going to committee meetings and volunteering at those meetings, informing yourself, not just expressing a view but having an informed view, and of course listening to the views of others.

Mansbridge (1999) observed that representatives and voters who share a set of experiences can often read one another's signals relatively easily and are able to engage in accurate short-hand communication. Shared memberships in groups can also result in increased trust. Mansbridge's observation describes the important role of a shared habitus between representative and constituents in building trust and in making decisions. Common backgrounds, experiences and levels of education may lead to closer affinities between elected officials and communities and in this sense a more diverse council is able to bring a broader range of perspectives to bear on their decision-making. Further arguments for descriptive representation come from the literature on gender and politics. Campbell, Childs & Lovenduski (2010), assert that the interests of stakeholders are realised during the course of deliberation and decision-making. This occurs through the discussion of various options, strategies and competing concerns, as a result it is "only when present may women benefit from such realization and insert their interests" (p. 172). In addition they stress that women are not a homogenous group, consequently, for descriptive representation to be meaning full, women of various backgrounds with differing interests should also be represented in elected bodies (Campbell, Childs & Lovenduski 2010). None of the councillors I interviewed, identified themselves as coming from low-income households and this is reflective of councillors in NSW more generally (Office of Local Government 2014). The absence of this social group from local decision-making processes has important implications for councillors' understanding, or lack thereof, of the issues facing low income groups.

Having said this, descriptive representation may not always be positive. During our interview, a metropolitan general manager, offered a note of caution. She pointed out that having a particular demographic characteristic does not necessarily make you an

expert. For example, during her time in leadership she encouraged one of the younger councillors to get involved in the youth committee. "… But he was terrible. He was awful, I went to two [meetings] and it was just a train wreck." She observed that just because "you are young does not give you the qualification or any particular expertise to be engaging" (Charlotte).

The scholarly literature on deliberation and descriptive representation does offer an alternative in the form of discursive representation (Dryzek & Niemeyer 2008). "Discourse can be understood as a set of categories and concepts embodying specific assumptions, judgements, contentions, dispositions, and capabilities" (p. 481). The whole person cannot be represented rather it is their interests, identities and values which are represented. These are diverse and may occasionally be at odds. Dryzek and Niemeyer give the example of a skier who, as a consumer might be eager for a new resort to be established but as a citizen, they may object to its construction in a wilderness area (p. 483). In fact individuals may engage in multiple and perhaps conflicting discourses. As a result there may be more than one discourse relevant to a person's interests. As such a unitary framing of a group's interests in the form of one representative, e.g. a woman representing women's interests, is not sufficient (p. 483). Consequently, Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) assert that deliberative democracy ought to be less wedded to conventional notions of representing persons but rather the emphasis should be on discourses because this approach puts talk and communication at the centre of democracy (p. 484). "From the viewpoint of the discursive self in deliberative democracy, it may then be more important for the quality of deliberation that all relevant discourses get represented, rather than that all individuals get represented" (p. 484). In addition to Dryzek and Niemeyer's discussion of discursive representation Mansbridge (2019) offers another conceptualisation of representation which places equal importance on communication. Her model, recursive representation, is based on an aspiration for iterative and ongoing communication between elected officials and their constituents. Here the role of the representative is that of intermediary between constituents and all the other stakeholders in the political sphere, e.g. residents and elected officials from other jurisdictions, the political administration, interest groups, lobbyists etc. "The representative as interlocutor links the representative system together less by making policy herself than by helping those in all the other parts of the system understand one another" (Mansbridge 2019, p. 300). These models may provide

opportunities for better communicative and deliberative processes at the local government level, but their realisation is difficult to achieve. They are ideals and as Mansbridge concedes they can never be fully achieved (p. 299). Descriptive representation, while elusive to date, does have the advantage of being achievable.

Nevertheless, descriptive representation is not a panacea in terms of making good decisions. But given, Habermas's imperative that all parties concerned should have the opportunity to be involved in deliberation, it would certainly, be an important step to improving the quality of the local government decision-making process in NSW. For the foreseeable future, habitus and cultural capital will make the creation of a truly representative council difficult. The interviews suggested that in line with the studies by Fox & Lawless (2005); and Liddle & Michielsens (2000), social class and cultural and economic capital remain key factors in shaping people's propensity to run for local government. As illustrated, the result is a very high proportion of professional, older male councillors with high levels of formal education.

Conclusion

In this chapter I used Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital to frame my analysis to understand who councillors are and why they run for council. The interviews showed that the roles of the family and of education are often central. They lay the foundations for people's understanding of their place and role in society. The research does suggest that children with more politically engaged or community-minded parents are more likely to run in local government elections. Place attachment also intersects with a person's habitus to encourage people to run for office. The result is that the demographic profile of councillors in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, education and profession does not reflect that of the population at large. In other words our local councils do not achieve descriptive representation. Why is this important? According to Habermas this is important because in a deliberative democratic system *all concerned citizens* should participate in the decision-making processes that affect our lives. Research indicates that socio-economic status is the most important predictor of political participation. While the finding that descriptive representation is not achieved amongst councillors in NSW is not a new one (see Office of Local Government 2014), my analysis brings a fresh perspective as to why this might be the case, i.e. the impacts of habitus and capital. This lack of descriptive representation means that local

government is in NSW is not currently able to meet one of Habermas' key criteria for effective deliberation - that all concerned parties should have the opportunity to contribute to the process of collective will formation.

Chapter 6
Councillors, the bureaucracy and the community: uneasy relations?

For local democracy to function effectively, its three main constituent parts, the community, local councillors and the local government bureaucracy, must work well together. According to Habermas, there must be the opportunity for communicative action to take place among elected representatives, the bureaucracy and citizens. The goal of communicative action is understanding. It is the process of communicating to come to a mutual understanding that results in a more cohesive and better coordinated society (Brown & Goodman 2001; Habermas 1984a). In contrast, the purpose of instrumental or strategic communication is to succeed in winning the argument (Habermas 1984a). To examine the extent to which opportunities for communicative action are present in the NSW local government system, the first section of this chapter reviews the changes in the roles and responsibilities of councillors and GMs in NSW and the implications of these shifts since the passing of the *Local Government Act* 1993. I use Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and hysteresis to understand some councillors' experiences of these changes. Secondly, I turn to the question of councillors' relationship with their constituents to examine their views on the value of community engagement.

How councillors perceive their role: challenges and possibilities

In this first section I examine legislative reforms and their impact on the role of the councillor. It is within this legislative framework that opportunities for communicative action between councillors and the bureaucracy are located. The structure of local government in NSW has evolved significantly since the introduction of the *Local Government Act* 1993. Prior to the introduction of the Act, the Mayor was deemed to be the chief executive officer of the council. The Mayor's primary tasks were to control and direct the employees of the council (including the hiring, firing and payment of staff) and, in accordance with the resolutions of the council, to carry out the regular services and operations of the council within the budget sums voted by the council for expenditure (*Local Government Act* 1919, s. 87). Following the introduction of the *Local Government Act* 1993, the council bureaucracy is now under the control of the

GM (GM). In addition, the Act has altered the roles of mayors and councillors. The Act states that they should no longer be directly involved in the day-to-day management of the organisation. Rather, their primary responsibility is to set the strategic and policy directions of the council. A key question that emerges is how do councillors see their role? Do they adhere to the Act's directive to focus on strategy?

Councillors as a board of directors?

Councillors are supposed to play a vital role in meeting the needs of local communities. In order to serve their communities their stated task is to listen to their constituents and then represent these views on council. According to the NSW Office of Local Government (2017, p. 8),

> the elected council's role may be compared to that of the board of a public company or a more complex version of a board that oversees a local club; the elected council oversees the activities of the council but is not involved in the day-to-day running of the council. The 'shareholders' of a public company can be likened to a local community.

This portrayal of councillors as similar to a board of directors, was voiced by many of the elected representatives interviewed. Almost all were happy with this description. Oliver, a metropolitan councillor, was totally aligned with this description of councillors' roles: "The councillors are the board of directors overlooking the administration which is done and executed by the GM and their staff." He went on to clarify that councillors "set the high level vision, the goals, the strategy, the medium and long-term plans." In addition, they "also [have] a lot of corporate governance responsibilities, [for example,] double checking and triple checking on finances."

Councillors' role as a board of directors is predicated on the appointment of a chief executive officer or GM (GM) to run the organisation. This is provided for in the legislation. The GM is appointed by the council (s. 223). The council is also responsible, in consultation with the GM, for determining the senior staff positions (but not their appointment), and the roles and reporting lines for senior staff (s. 223). The appointment of senior staff is the responsibility of the GM, but this must be done in consultation with the council (s. 337). The GM must, after consultation with the

council, determine the positions (other than senior staff) within the organisation of the council (s. 332). Section 332 also stipulates that

> the positions within the organisational structure of the council are to be determined so as to give effect to the priorities set out in the strategic plans (including the community strategic plan) and delivery program of the council.

This is important. The organisation is charged with implementing the community strategic plan and delivery program. But, as discussed below, councillors' involvement in the development of the strategic plan is limited. If councillors are detached from this process they are, effectively, overseeing an organisation whose goals and objectives are developed with little input from them. I examine this issue in more detail later on in this chapter.

In the local government system the GM as the head of the bureaucracy, is a powerful position. S/he wields this power in several important ways. At a policy and political level, they are jointly responsible with councillors for the development of the community strategic plan which identifies the long-term strategic direction and priorities for the organisation. In terms of decisions, they set the parameters of what is discussed at council meetings as they are responsible for putting together the agenda and associated business papers which inform councillor decision-making during council meeting. Decision-making and council meetings are discussed further in Chapter Seven. Suffice to say that the responsibility accorded to the GM in this regard, indicates the powerful nature of this position. It gives the GM great scope to influence and shape the information presented to councillors on which they base their decisions. Finally, in terms of running the organisation, the legislation is clear, this is the domain of the GM, councillors are not to direct staff in this regard. "A member of staff of a council is not subject to direction by the council or by a councillor" (s. 352). The legislation clearly draws a line between what is to be the high level strategic planning role for councillors and the day-to-day operational nature of the GM's role. It is important to note that prima facia, this delineation of roles does not preclude communicative-action between councillors and GMs as its focus is on roles and responsibilities.

This form of local government whereby councillors appoint a GM to oversee the running of the organisation is called the council-manager form (Mouritzen & Svara 2002). The dynamics of this relationship have been relatively well studied in other contexts, particularly in the United States (see for example, Carr 2015; Nalbandian et al. 2013; Nelson & Svara 2015) and to some extent in Canada (see for example, Ashton, Kushner & Siegel 2007; Siegel 2010, 2015) and in New Zealand (see Stocker & Thompson-Fawcett 2014). However, in the Australian context, this question of the relationship between councillors and GMs remains relatively under-examined in the scholarly literature, exceptions being the discussion papers by Martin & Aulich (2012) on the relationship between mayors and CEOs and Sansom (2012) on the role of the mayor and the article by Grant, Dollery & Gow (2011) on the elected executive model. The works of Sansom, Martin and Aulich focus on the formal divisions between the roles of elected officials and public administrators and do not consider the views or experiences of councillors. Haidar & Spooner (2017), on the other hand, do provide a consideration of councillors' views in NSW with regard to this separation of powers. Their study sought to understand, firstly, councillors' experience in relation to the values that guide senior council staff in their actions and, secondly, the preferences elected members have in relation to the values of senior staff. In setting out the landscape for their study they explore the question of the 'neutrality' of the public servant, i.e. whether councillors prefer a politically neutral or politically aligned GM. To explore this question they analysed data from 132 completed online surveys and seven semi-structured interviews. They found that

> councillors prefer managers to adopt neutral values because this set of values recognises clear distribution of power and functions between councillors and council staff. This set of values recognises that councillors as the 'council' determine policies and strategies. This neutral value pattern stipulates that council staff must be loyal to the councillors so long as the latter works lawfully. They must provide them with advice that is objective and evidence based and implement policies that have been formulated lawfully. (p. 10).

They go on to explain that councillors do not want local government staff to act as community trustees (i.e. have a knowledge of the community and act on its behalf) because they see that as the role of the elected representative (Haidar & Spooner 2017).

While the work by Haidar and Spooner is instructive, it does not interrogate this idea of perceived 'neutrality'. As outlined above, the GM occupies a very powerful role within the local government structure and can wield a significant amount of influence with regard to the goals and activities of the organisation. Consequently, while a GM may be perceived as neutral, in fact the level of power and influence located in this position means that, in fact, it is necessarily political. For example, Kelly (2004, p. 39) explains that, in addition to its service delivery role, the government bureaucracy carries out a wide range of functions including the design and implementation of community consultation exercises, the dissemination of information and advocating for marginal citizens. These functions "cut against the grain of the traditional idea of a neutral administrator who simply, if not mechanistically, carries out the will of the legislature" (p. 39). For Kelly, in "any model of collaborative government there appears a fundamental tension between administrative discretion and the democratic legitimacy of administrative power" (p. 39). Aside from the work by Haidar & Spooner (2017), the experiences of councillors in NSW in relation to the division of responsibilities between the GM and elected body remains under-examined. It is within this context that the discussion below is situated.

The relationship between councillors and the GM

In this section I draw on Bourdieu's ideas of habitus, field and hysteresis to examine councillors' perceptions of the changes in their role and that of the GM in order to consider the implications for communicative action. As discussed in Chapter Three, Bourdieu explains that habitus is shaped by the culmination of experiences and events in our lives and directs future action (Bourdieu 1990b). Field on the other hand is the socially structured space where we interact. This space is structured explicitly, e.g. through legislation, and implicitly, through cultural norms or traditions (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Hysteresis is used by Bourdieu to describe a cultural lag or mismatch between habitus and the changing "rules" and regularities of a field (McDonough & Polzer 2012). During the time-lag, agents may assimilate, withdraw from active participation in the field or become engaged in strategies of resistance (Dirk & Gelderblom 2017). This consideration is important because the presence of hysteresis (i.e. withdrawing or adopting strategies of resistance) would indicate that possibilities for communicative-action between councillors and GMs are limited or non-existent with corresponding detrimental effects on local democratic processes.

My literature search found relatively few articles which used hysteresis as a model for analysing people's reactions to institutional change with particular relevance to government or the public service. One notable exception is the work of McDonough & Polzer (2012) which investigates the experiences of local government employees as the sector underwent substantial organisational change as a result of the introduction of NPM approaches to local government services delivery. These changes included the amalgamation of several different municipalities into a single entity, the City of Toronto, Canada. McDonough and Polzer analyse these experiences using Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis. They found that organizational shifts imposed by NPM displaced the "traditional" principle of the public good — the sacrificing of selfish interests, especially economic ones, for the good of the group — and favoured the view that the public good is better served through market mechanisms. As a result, "the front-line workers' experiences of frustration can be viewed as embodied manifestations of political redefinitions of the public good" (p. 372). McDonough and Polzer's work shows that Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis is a useful way to analyse and understand councillors' reactions to changes in their institutional context.

A first step in this analysis requires a better description of the local government field, particularly as it pertains to the relationship between councillors and GMs. In this regard, the work done by Siegel (2015) in local government in Canada provides a useful starting point. He uses the public service bargain model as a framework to understand the complex relationship between councillors and GMs.[15]

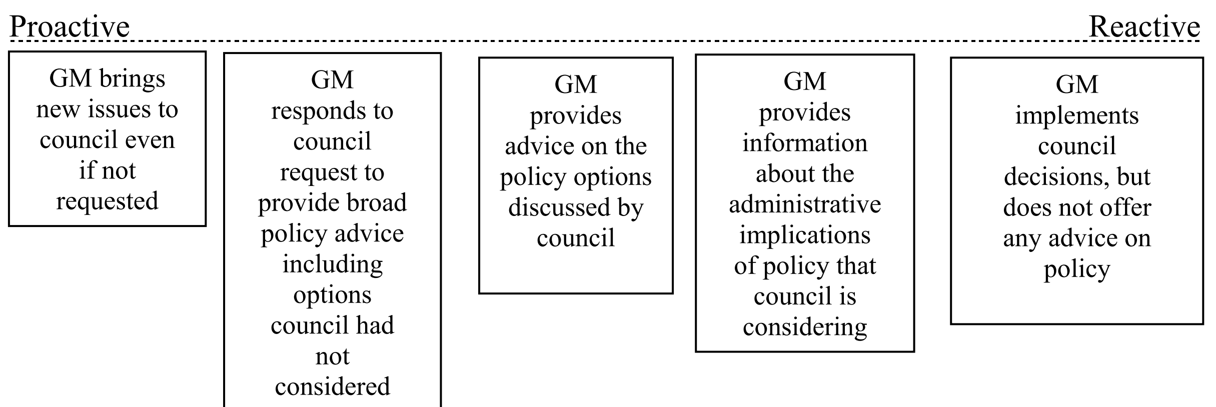
> A major part of the bargain is based on the idea that politicians and public servants each bring a different kind of expertise to the table. On the one hand, councillors are elected by the public and put their jobs on the line every few years. They are highly attuned to community values and citizens' expectations with regard to policy. On the other hand, public servants are highly trained professionals who have a great deal of knowledge and experience in their areas of expertise. The best

[15] The term public service bargain, defined by Hood & Lodge (2004) is the implicit understandings and agreements between senior public servants and other actors in the political system over their respective roles and responsibilities.

decisions of a community reflect the two different kinds of expertise brought to the table by the two groups; good decisions will be the product of a melding of community values and professional expertise (Siegel 2015, p. 415).

Siegel observes that for councillors and GMs to work well together (and by inference to create favourable conditions for communicative-action to take place) they must agree on the rules of the game. They have to agree, either implicitly or explicitly, where the role of the GM in relationship to the councillors sits along a continuum. This continuum ranges from proactive, where the GM is happy to bring new issues to council even if not requested, to reactive, where the GM only implements council decisions, he or she does not offer advice on policy (see Figure 6.1 below).

Figure 6.1 The role of the GM with regard to Council



Source: Siegel (2015)

Figure 6.1 provides a map of the various configurations of the local government field as it pertains to the relationships between elected members and the bureaucracy. According to Siegel, the best decisions come about as products of the interaction of the GM's professional, administrative advice and the council's knowledge of local values and culture. If the two sides are working well together, then each needs to feel able to play its role. The challenge and complication is that councillors on the same council are invariably not a homogenous group. They may have different ideas about where the GM role should sit on this continuum and when a councillor's views may differ from a

GM's actions. This can lead to both parties becoming frustrated. This was certainly evident among some of the elected members I spoke to.

Five of the councillors I interviewed displayed some level of hysteresis with regard to their role and the perceived power that the legislation afforded the GM and senior staff. They felt that the council staff, and in particular the GM, strayed into the political space. Jacob, an older rural councillor, was particularly frustrated by the level of power held by the bureaucracy in general and the GM in particular.

> There is just so much power vested in the GM and the senior staff. That power gets used fairly ruthlessly at times. There is a whole lot of interference by officials [i.e. staff] into the council [i.e. the elected body]. To the extent that if you have a typical council, when people talk about council they don't talk about the councillors anymore, it's about the organisation … The thing that I find frustrating is that it is accepted that [the GM and staff] play in the political space, and they should not. It's just plain and simple, they should not. The gamesmanship and all that sort of stuff, I find unacceptable.

Using Siegel's public service bargain framework, it is clear that in Jacob's view the GM and staff are more proactive in their role than he feels they should be. The result is that Jacob does not feel that the GM is playing by the rules, he even uses the term 'gamesmanship' in describing the actions of the GM. In addition, Jacob's observation of who or what is the 'council', merits further consideration. In his view it is the elected members which should be considered as the council. However, this is a contested view which arguably reflects the dual roles of local government. As a sector it plays two roles, the seat of local democracy and the mechanism for efficient service delivery. The reforms have arguably strengthened the service delivery role of local governments (Aulich 2005). The result is Jacob's assessment that at present the idea of a local government council may emphasise service delivery over democracy and broader strategy (i.e. the elected members).

Elija, a regional councillor, had a similar complaint, stating that the "GM looks at us as a part-time nuisance. As much as he says that we are in control, we are not in control… He is in charge in many ways. He treats us like mushrooms. He keeps us in the dark."

Equally for Elija, the GM's approach does not fit with his view of the rules governing the field. As a result Elija feels that he is there to try to keep the GM as "honest as possible".

Benjamin, a regional councillor, explained that in his previous experience of being a mayor on a different council, he took the responsibility for all council decisions. As mayor he was the outward face of the council and if the community had any complaints they could come to him. It is these experiences which shaped his habitus and his ideas of what it means to be a mayor and a councillor. In contrast, in his current position as an elected representative in a different, much larger council,

> the mayor does almost nothing. The GM does everything. He is the face that goes to the community. When anything is going on, he talks. He is a bit too slick for me… At the top you have this attitude that the organisation does everything and they don't consider the councillors and the councillors don't get in the way because they are just an interference. Obviously, it is the organisation's responsibility to implement the policy, but I am encountering situations … where staff will be vehemently opposed or positioned on a particular thing. There [are], what I would consider to be, policy decisions made at a staffing level. That can only happen if that is the attitude of the GM and it percolates down. I don't think that is the way [local] government should be working.

In a similar vein, Ava, a rural councillor, voiced her frustration with the power of the GM, during a previous term on council, stating that relations between councillors and the GM/directors were extremely poor.

> Directors and GM often entered into the debate in council's monthly meeting and the Chair would not pull them up. Issues raised with the GM by email, would then be shared with Directors without councillor consent, creating further tension.

In Ava's opinion this was done "on purpose, to undermine working relationships established with Directors….or to create a political debate instead of him [the GM] taking ownership."

This level of discontent with the role of the GM can be analysed in terms of Bourdieu's ideas of hysteresis and field. Siegel's framework is also useful for illustrating the various possible configurations of the local government field and understanding where on a continuum between proactive and reactive a GM's actions in relation on councillors can sit. If the GM's actions do not align with a councillor's expectations, then the result is frustration and even anger. Expressed differently, these councillors' understanding of their role (their habitus with respect to their role as an elected member) did not match with the current rules of the field, i.e. the quite substantial role and power of the GM as set out on the *Local Government Act* 1993. Ultimately, this analysis shows that for some councillors the opportunities for communicative-action to take place between the representative body and the bureaucracy are extremely limited.

"Frenemies": community engagement and councillors

In addition to changes to the role of the councillor and GM, recent reforms have also introduced more significant requirements for community engagement. The stated purpose of this engagement is to develop a suite of strategic plans to guide the operations of the council. As outlined in the *Local Government Act* 1993, one of the functions of the council as a governing body is to develop and endorse the community strategic plan, delivery program and other strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council (s. 223), also known as the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework. Councillors are to participate in the development of the integrated planning and reporting framework (s. 232). In particular the mayor, in conjunction with the GM, must ensure "adequate opportunities for engagement between the council[16] and the local community" (s. 226). Sections 402 to 405 of the *Local Government Act* 1993, set out the provisions for this integrated planning and reporting framework. In summary,

> each local government area must have a community strategic plan that has been developed and endorsed by the council. … [This plan] identifies the main priorities and aspirations for the future of the local government area covering a period of at least 10 years from when the plan is endorsed (s. 402).

[16] I.e. the elected members of the organisation.

The plan must establish strategic objectives for the local government area and how these will be achieved. The legislation then goes on to specify that, in order to develop the strategic plan a council must establish and implement a community engagement strategy.

> The council must establish and implement a strategy (its "community engagement strategy"), based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing the community strategic plan (s. 402).

The council, as the elected governing body, has overall responsibility for endorsing the community strategic plan together with the corresponding suite of supporting documents. However, the legislation also stipulates that the GM has key responsibilities in the development and implementation of these plans. Section 335, "Functions of GM", states that the GM is responsible for advising "the mayor and the governing body on the development and implementation of the strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council." The GM must advise the council "on the appropriate form of community consultation on the strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council." And finally the general manger is to "prepare, in consultation with the mayor and the governing body, the council's community strategic plan, community engagement strategy, resourcing strategy, delivery program, operational plan and annual report." In terms of this analysis, through this process of community engagement, it would seem that the legislative framework provides potential opportunities for communicative-action to occur between councillors and the community.

While the requirements for community engagement and strategic planning are clear in the legislation, in practice, the process is complex. On the one hand, the elected members are responsible for ensuring that a community strategic plan and corresponding strategies are in place and for endorsing the content of these plans. On the other, the GM is responsible for carrying out the community consultation to inform the development of these plans and then preparing the documents. This complexity was reflected in my interviews with councillors. The rest of this section considers councillors' experiences as they relate to community engagement carried out by the council bureaucracy.

Research which analyses the tension between community engagement and representation is surprisingly sparse (Hendriks & Lees-Marshment 2019). While there exists a growing body of literature on community engagement, and its various forms, within the Australian local government context (see for example, Brackertz & Meredyth 2009; Christensen & Grant 2016 ; Kluvers & Pillay 2009; Stratford, Armstrong & Jaskolski 2003), there has been little scholarly consideration of the interconnection between approaches involving citizens such as participatory budgeting or citizen's juries (i.e. places where communicative-action among stakeholders is supported and facilitated) and the role of elected representatives. We do not have enough "knowledge about how the context, structure, and design of public engagement in local government change or affect the practice of engagement by officials" (Nabatchi & Amsler 2014, p. 64).

One notable exception is recent work by Thompson (2019) which reviews the existing research on the role of elected representatives with regard to innovations in community engagement. In her chapter she classifies motivations for elected representative engagement with engagement processes as either normative or instrumental. Normative motivation arises from an ideological commitment to strengthening the role of citizens in democratic decision making. Thompson (2019) provides the example of the Premier of South Australia (2011-2018), Jay Weatherill. During his tenure

> Weatherill instituted a number of democratic innovations, in particular, the use of mini-publics to address a range of issues, such as a safe and vibrant nightlife in the capital, managing cats and dogs, and the future of nuclear waste storage (Thompson 2019, p. 260).

The second type of motivation is instrumental where representatives use these processes to achieve particular outcomes (Thompson 2019). In setting out her typology, Thompson does acknowledge that in "the real world, the analytical divisions between normative and instrumental motivations can be messy" (p. 260).

The work for Thompson (2019) notwithstanding, the absence of substantial empirical work on this question, lead Hendriks & Lees-Marshment (2019, p. 599) to conclude that,

> deliberative thinkers paint a simplified picture of this communicative process: elected officials passively and willingly receive public input (whether from their constituents, a public forum or the public sphere), which they deliberate on and then make decisions. Herein lie two important assumptions that deserve unpacking for our purposes. First, that decision- makers value public input, and second that they are receptive to public input.

They develop this question further stating that the capacity of "political leaders to listen to public input is constrained by the realities and dilemmas of contemporary governance, where they have to process and make judgements on diverse and conflicting inputs in complex decision-making processes" (Hendriks & Lees-Marshment 2019, p. 600).

While there appears to be no research on the intersection between requirements for community engagement and representation within the NSW local government system, it has been explored in other contexts. In the UK, Copus (2010) investigated the tension between representation and citizen input. He found that "the attitudes councillors hold towards citizen engagement and how they conduct their representative activities determines whether such engagement will have an impact' (Copus 2010, p. 571). This conclusion draws on in-depth interviews and two surveys of local government councillors in the UK. The surveys asked councillors their views on public engagement. The analysis indicated councillors see decision-making as the distinguishing point between themselves and citizens, i.e. they are responsible for taking decisions, rather than the community through participatory engagement processes. In addition, most councillors felt that people only become interested in local government when an issue directly affects them. There exists a level of cynicism among the elected members surveyed about citizen's motivations for political engagement, i.e. self-interest, if not selfishness. Indeed, a dominant view was that citizens are motivated only by issues that affect them and are focused on the very local. In addition, the surveys indicated that councillors' confidence in the effectiveness of citizen engagement conducted by the council itself was low. Copus quotes a particular councillor in this regard: 'It's all a fad; these focus groups and panels and what not—if I want to know what people think, I'll ask them' (p. 584). Interestingly, one of Copus' conclusions

points to the relative stability of councillors' views of community engagement over time.

> Another striking feature that emerges from the research is that the attitudes councillors hold towards citizen engagement are remarkably consistent over time despite the passage of the Local Government Act 2000 [UK] and the increasing complexity of the governance network within which councils and councillors operate. Councillors' attitudinal framework is remarkably resilient given these changes … (p 587).

In the Netherlands, Klijn & Koppenjan (2000) explored the relationship between local politicians and interactive decision-making mechanisms. They used two case studies as the basis for their analysis. The first concerned the decision-making process for the expansion of the Rotterdam Harbour and the second, discussions carried out to inform the new administrative structure for the Rotterdam region. They found that one of the barriers standing in the way of the success of such processes was the ambiguous attitude of elected politicians: "There appears to be a problematic relation between politicians and interactive decision making. On the one hand politicians often are the initiators of these processes but on the other hand they seem to participate little and view the process as a threat to their power" (p. 374). According to Klijn & Koppenjan (2000) politicians view participatory decision-making processes as a threat to their position as the final and sole decision-makers.

The interviews I conducted suggest that the views of some councillors in NSW, in respect of community engagement, are similar to the views of councillors in the UK and Rotterdam studies. Certainly there was some cynicism about the value of community engagement. The sentiments of Lucas, a rural councillor, towards community engagement were clear:

> I am pretty hostile to community meetings because it is always the same. The bloke with the pitchfork who gets his voice heard. He is the one that has turned up. He has an axe to grind. Those people dominate to the point where other people think there is no point.

In a similar vein, Benjamin, a regional councillor, argued that it depends on how the engagement process is actually carried out. He explained that he came to council in

2011 on a platform of encouraging community engagement, but the "the mayor at the time told me 'don't bother talking to people. They just waste your time. Our job is, to get the job done.'" Since his initial support of community engagement, Benjamin explained that his views have evolved.

> I have to confess that [during] the time I have been on council I have moved closer to [this mayor's] point of view… I don't think you should abandon engagement, but there is a limit … I came from an environment where people are relatively well-educated and they were reasonable when they were engaging. [Once you become a councillor you] suddenly encounter the whole breadth of the demographic spectrum and you [have to engage with] people that you simply can't reason with and so it is really hard.

In my discussions with councillors about community engagement and the development of the strategic plan and their own role and the role of the bureaucracy, I found that their views can be broken down into the following main categories: engaged, attending engagement events but not participating, and criticisms of the heavy involvement of staff in the process. Three of the councillors I spoke to (Olivia, James and Benjamin), were or wanted to be deeply engaged in the process. Secondly, many councillors spoke of attending community engagement events, but only as observers and not participating. Thirdly, and finally, councillors expressed their frustration with the level of staff involvement in the engagement processes.

The life of the party: engaged

Let me now turn to Olivia, James and Benjamin's experiences. I have created this small category because firstly, the fact that they are the exception puts into stark relief, the experiences of other councillors. Secondly, although there were the only three councillors in my sample group to recount this level of involvement or desired involvement in engagement processes, I am optimistic that they are not alone among councillors in NSW as such their experience should be noted. Olivia is a metropolitan councillor. She described her deep involvement in the development of her council's community strategic plan. Regular meetings and consultations with the GM (GM) were key;

> The GM sits down and meets with all of the councillors on a regular basis. I have been able to meet with the [GM] and provide my recommendations as to what I think the priority should be and some of the key ideas that should be included in the next strategic plan.

Olivia has also attended public consultations. Her attendance at these events is as an observer. "I am not participating. I am listening and hearing what the community has to say at those events." In addition, Olivia has hosted roundtables of experts and advocates and people working in different fields, such as community housing. The GM and the relevant members of staff working on the new strategic plan attended these roundtables to ensure that they are able to hear directly from experts and community advocates about the issues that they confront and what they would like to see people address. She sees her contribution to the process as "providing the initial strategic direction and then helping to connect staff and the GM, with sector experts". Olivia's focus is on fostering and facilitating communicative-action to enable information exchange between relevant stakeholders.

James, also a metropolitan councillor, held similar views to Olivia in terms of the importance of community engagement.

> I pushed quite hard for us to do genuine community consultation. One thing that pisses me off is that they [the organisation] will put something up and it's rubbish and they say, 'Oh well, we consulted the community.' Well you've just stood out on the side of the road for a couple of hours. They [the staff] have got a lot better at it now. They do multimodal [consultation]. They will set up in shopping centres at different times of the day, on weekends, weekdays at festivals and then we also have an online system, Facebook, social media. As long as it is multimodal, it should be reaching everyone.

In contrast, Benjamin, a regional councillor, voiced his frustration with the lack of involvement in community engagement and development of the community strategic plan.

> There was, what I believe to be, a superficial involvement of councillors at the end. From my own personal point of view, the input I tried to provide was ignored. I made that statement when the plans

> were finally approved, because I was the only councillor that objected on the basis that critical issues had not been considered… I think there was an expectation that the councillors would just fall into line when it was all done.

Benjamin raises an interesting point - community engagement that is not connected to the council as the local representative body, may result in the council bureaucracy missing the opportunity to include councillors' views both on the process of engagement and on its outcomes. Nevertheless, it is clear that Benjamin has a desire to be more meaningfully involved in the community consultation although within his council context this desire has been thwarted.

Wall flowers: limited engagement

When speaking about the organisation's community engagement processes, other councillors tended to describe their own contribution as limited. While they all acknowledged an awareness of community engagement processes, they had limited involvement in the processes and the subsequent development of the community strategic plan. Where councillors were involved, it was generally framed in terms of attending community forums as observers. On the whole, elected members who attended these events did not participate in the exchange or debate. For example, Sophia, a mayor of a rural council, stated that "we had various community events that we went and sat in, but did not engage in. We sat there and listened. Part of that process was understanding what other people were interested in rather than us doing all the talking." Lucas, another rural councillor echoed Sophia's comments "the councillors who were there [i.e. at community engagement events] were … passive listeners so that we could listen to the community's interest."

In terms of the views of GMs, when I asked Amelia, a metropolitan GM, about the level of knowledge councillors had of the community strategic planning process, she replied,

> To be honest, and noting that this is normalised, councillors pay next to no attention to the community strategic plan, the delivery program or operational plan. I think the delivery program and operational plan went through without a single comment [at the council meeting]… Focusing on that big picture strategic stuff … seems to be a challenge for a lot of councillors. They are much better when [dealing with] a

> specific action that falls out of [the strategic plan]. This is where councillors can focus, i.e. on a single and particular issue.

Amelia felt that this was probably more representative of the way the community actually think. The community tends to narrow their concerns down to overdevelopment in a particular area or a desire for a swimming pool in another area. In Amelia's view, "Councillors probably accurately reflect the way the community think and feel about things." In Amelia's words, "I understand, of course, that really councillors are meant to be focusing on the big picture stuff, but they tend to be better off, better engaged and better representative of community on a more narrow bandwidth." Amelia's observations reflect the difficulties some councillors face in playing a more strategic, high-level policy role in the life of the organisation. For example, Logan a regional councillor commented,

> You get all these different reports with different names. You've got the [Toronto] Vision 2021 and then you have the strategic plan. And you think was I involved with that? Is this the same thing? Some of it can be really confusing. [With regard to the] the higher-level stuff, I think the council staff are obviously heavily involved in pulling all of that together …

The interviews showed that for some councillors, their involvement in the development of the community strategic plan was limited to attending meetings and listening to their constituents' concerns.

How councillors view the GM and council staff taking the lead

As discussed, the process of community engagement and the development of the community strategic plan are led by the GM. However, the legislation states that the GM needs to consult with the Mayor and councillors (s. 335.) and several of the councillors expressed their frustration with the dominant role that senior staff played in the community consultation process. Ethan, a young rural councillor, expressed his annoyance with what he perceived as the dominance of the senior staff and the shutting out of the councillors:

> The question became 'who does the community see as the face of the plan?' Well, it is of a senior executive standing up. They are going

> through the PowerPoint and saying, ‘Now we’re ready to take submissions …’ Councillors are often sitting in the back of the room with their community and basically just hearing the murmurings in the corner. Again, it’s perception. It goes back to perception. People are seeing the senior executive of the Council, the paid government public servants basically selling the plan delivering the plan and taking the feedback for the plan.

Ethan’s statement above reflects Jacob’s question above regarding who or what constitutes the council. Is it the organisation or the councillors? This unease reflects the complex relationship between elected representatives and the GM. In this regard Jacob also voiced his frustration with the requirements for community engagement and strategic planning:

> You can’t really start [the development of the community strategic plan] until after the election and it has to be all in place along with the operational plan by June the next year. [This] means there is no time for councillors to actually develop it themselves. The other thing is that they say, ‘It is the community’s plan. It’s got nothing to do with councillors.’ So the community has just gone through a full-on election and elected nine people to represent their views. Then they [i.e. staff and the GM] say, ‘You just sit there in the corner while we go out and we find out what the community thinks.’… I did a terrible thing and voted against it because I did not think it was the community’s plan. I thought it was rubbish.

In a similar vein, Logan, a regional councillor, commented,

> I think the council staff are obviously heavily involved in pulling all of that [the community engagement] together… They do a lot of surveys going out to the community, but I think a lot of it is led by staff. They are basically putting ideas in front of the community that the Council had come up with. So they can say, “Yes, that’s a good idea”. [They do] not just generally go to them and say, “What would you like to see in the town in the next five 10, 20 years? … What are the kinds of things we should concentrate on?”

And when I spoke to another regional councillor, Elija about community engagement and representation, he commented that "those processes are at odds with each other… Recently I started thinking, 'Why am I here in the first place?' They just [listen to] the community … and they listen to them more than they listen to me."

This analysis shows that councillors had mixed views on the value of community engagement, and the role of the GM and council staff in the process. While some councillors were supportive of extensive community engagement, others were sceptical about its value. In addition, some interviewees were frustrated and annoyed that councillors were shut out of the process. The evidence from the interviews indicates that there is further scope to integrate the representative body of local government into community engagement processes to enable communicative-action between these two spheres to take place. Councillor participation and involvement in the analysis of engagement exercises should ideally, strengthen their understanding of citizen's views, experiences and goals for their local government areas, enabling elected representatives to make decisions which better reflect community interests. However, the connection between engagement and representation is relatively weak in several of the councils represented by the councillors interviewed.

How do councillors view representation?

In addition to community engagement, councillors also relate to their constituents through democratic representation. How councillors represent their communities is a crucial aspect of communicative-action. As described in the chapter on theory, some types of representation may be more conducive to communicative-action than others. For example, councillors with a trustee view of representation are more able to consult with communities and make decisions based on the information they have gathered. This is in contrast to councillors who have been elected to pursue a particular mandate. As such, this final section of the chapter analyses councillors' understandings of representation and examines how representation and deliberation as conceived of by Habermas fit together. In terms of the Local Government Act, one of the important roles of councillors is "to represent the collective interests of residents, ratepayers and the local community" (*Local Government Act* 1993 s. 232 d). The literature on democratic representation is extensive and is covered more comprehensively in Chapter Two. For the purposes of this analysis, using Hannah Pitkin's (1967) framework, the

majority of the councillors interviewed could be said to have a formal view of representation. This encompasses the idea of acting as a 'trustee, through which representatives act based on their good judgment, rather than direct orders, complaints, or requests from others" (Bryer & Sahin 2012). This type of representation works within Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy where elected members have to be able to discuss and exchange ideas, and should be free to change their points of view in response to these exchanges.

> As long as we fully equate politics with the balancing of current interests represented by elected officials, the classical discussions over imperative and free mandates, or about whether the representative system mirrors a hypothetical or empirical popular will, lose their point of reference. A difference between the empirical and hypothetical popular will can appear only when the preferences entering into the political process are viewed not as something merely given but as inputs that, open to the exchange or arguments, can be discursively changed (Habermas 1996, location 4022).

Habermas is saying that politics is the art of reconciling competing priorities through deliberation to make decisions about where best to allocate resources. Elected officials are the key players within this context as they are the decision-makers, so their view about how to best represent the interests of their constituents matters. In Habermas's ideal, politicians must enter into deliberations with their colleagues unfettered by particular mandates or directives from the electorate, in order to determine what is in the best interests of the community at large. They must be able to change their point of view through the process of deliberation so that a collective agreement about what is best can be reached. Politicians, who adopt a view of representation which is linked to a particular mandate or set of policy choices, would be constrained in their ability to take on different points of view. In Habermas's model, they would not necessarily be able to determine the best outcome for the community as a whole.

Indeed, when I spoke to councillors, the vast majority of interviewees had a trustee view of democracy. They saw their role as making decisions in the best interests of the people they represent, without being bound to a particular ideology. Logan, a regional councillor, explained that he makes decisions based on what he thinks is best after

taking into consideration what the community says [as detailed in community engagement reports or his own dealings with the community], what staff say [through staff briefings and reports] and all the background information he receives for council and committee meetings. He acknowledged that there are different views and interests within the community and it is not always possible to please everyone.

> There will always be people in the community who want something and others who want something different and the councillors [will also] have their opinion about it. You just have to sort it out for yourself and see how you go…. I am the one that has to sleep at night and I have to make the correct decision regardless of what everyone else thinks is the right way to go. That is the only way you can do it.

Mason, another regional councillor, agreed, stating that he definitely makes decisions based on his own judgement. In his view

> politicians … should lead not follow. We often possess information the community doesn't because the information is confidential for various reasons. … You cannot be influenced by people jumping up and down ... [You have] to be objective… The community may want something but looking at the long-term, that [may] not actually [be] a good idea, or the community may not want something, but actually, it is a good idea for the long-term.

The ability to make decisions independently based on the information at hand was viewed as crucial by many of the interviewees. William, a younger regional councillor, explained that because he did not run on any specific issue he

> is free … to consider each matter on its merits… I listen to what the different arguments are which have been provided by councillors and staff or when I have been contacted by ratepayers…. It's a balancing act. I take those views into account but I still vote in accordance with my conscience.

In a similar vein, Benjamin, an older regional councillor explained that he too, did not run on a specific platform. "I simply said this is my background and I will be responsible. … In this last election when most people were saying 'I'll build this road

for you. I'll seal that road …', I stood up and just said, 'I will be responsible'". What is interesting about these views is the perceived neutrality councillors hold with regard to their decision-making abilities. There is almost no articulated recognition of the role that their own world views and biases, i.e. their habitus, might have on the decisions they make. In addition, they generally spoke of making decisions in isolation based on their own judgement and conscience. But according to Habermas, it is the process of exchange and deliberation through communicative-action that has the potential to mitigate the biases introduced by a councillor's personal habitus in order to collectively identify the best outcomes for the community.

In contrast to the fairly neutral presentation of decision-making presented above by some councillors, the importance of one's personal values in guiding decision-making was recognised by Olivia, a metropolitan councillor. She was very clear that her role was not simply to act as a delegate for the community, i.e. to vote as they would vote.

> This is not direct democracy in that people have elected someone to stand there and vote [on their behalf], like a robot finger. … I am representing a set of values and priorities from the community … I have to balance the competing needs of a range of people and just because 60% of people on this street have said x or y, that does not mean that that is the best overall outcome for the city, or direction for the city.

For Olivia, the challenging part of the role is balancing and weighing competing interests across the different neighbourhoods and constituencies in her local government area, across time (e.g. considering the rights and interests of future generations) and across different needs. "I have to represent … a set of values and what I think the priorities need to be, based on a more holistic view of the whole operation of the city over time."

For the councillors I interviewed, one of the main features of representation was the ability to use one's own judgement to make decisions. This was supported in many cases, by the ability to run for election without a very specific platform. Not having to make promises to address particular issues or uphold a particular political party platform, means that local government councillors are perhaps usually freer than their

counterparts at state and federal level, to enter into decision-making processes with a more open mind and without a predetermined agenda. This observation may be more relevant in rural and regional areas where the majority of councillors stand as independent candidates whereas in metropolitan areas it is more common for locally elected members to stand as members of political parties. However, even when aligned with a particular political party, there does seem to be more autonomy for representatives at the local government level. This flexibility was noted by Amelia, a metropolitan GM.

> I think local councillors' commitment to the party line is a bit more flexible than at state or federal level. To their credit, across the parties, I have certainly seen Liberal councillors put up notices of motion that are in opposition to stated Liberal policy and I see Labor councillors do the same if they feel that it is in the best interests of the community … I do think they have, and they are given, a bit more autonomy and independence. I think that is the way it should be because the state is not always representing your best interests at the local level.

It is the stronger ability for local councillors to vote according to their own conscience that may arguably make it more favourable than the other government levels, for more deliberative approaches to decision-making. In summary, councillors' views of representation fit most closely with Pitkin's formal view of representation in that they tend to have a 'trustee' understanding of this concept - they are generally free to consider each decision on its merits and are not bound by a particular mandate or ideology. While, the trustee view of representation fits well with Habermas's model of deliberative democracy, the explicit link between representation and deliberation remains unexplored. It is to this question that I now turn.

How can representation and deliberation work together?

The literature on the relationship between political representation and deliberative democracy is not as extensive as one might expect. Rinne (2016, p. 29) goes as far as to conclude, "there exists a peculiar explanatory 'void' when it comes to discussing how deliberation exactly relates to political representation." And Schäfer (2017) states that "we still lack a clear analytical understanding of how and under what conditions practices of deliberation and claims for representation facilitate or limit each other in

different institutional contexts, be they formal/electoral or informal/non-electoral" (p. 420).

Nevertheless, Bohman's (2012), work does provide a useful account of the role of representation within deliberative systems. In his view, representation constitutes an intrinsically modern way of intertwining participation and political judgment, because it plays an important role in modern deliberative systems. In fact, representation promotes deliberation. Any deliberative system cannot do without appropriate claims to representativeness. In any

> deliberation, it is impossible for all [interested parties] to deliberate and hence those who do so are acting as representatives for those who are not participating … Thus, given the limits on number of participants, real-world deliberation is inherently representative (Bohman 2012, p. 76).

Rinne (2016) echoes this analysis. In her view, deliberation is an "intrinsic part of how democratic representation is invoked, sustained, and, more importantly, legitimised." She explores the contingent interplay of political representation and deliberation and offers a preliminary blueprint for how this relationship could be captured. Her focal point is that all arguments, as to their justification and reasoning, are derived from the act of representation itself. For Rinne, deliberative performance occurs in the act of representation and she calls for further exploration of what she calls the "representative turn," that is, how representatives and people form, voice, contest, and judge opinions, perspectives, and points of view in the process of representation.

Finally, Schäfer (2017) describes the relationship between representation and deliberation as fraught with tension. He argues, in line with Bohman and Rinne, that there can be no deliberation without representation. On a practical level for deliberation to be meaningful, it requires some kind of limitation on the number of participants involved. This is achieved through representation. For Schäfer, tension arises because if deliberation does indeed change minds, as described by Habermas, this poses a potential problem. As a result of a change in position, the parties, who did not directly participate in the process, no longer have "reasons stemming from deliberation itself to accept the outcome" (p. 419). A precondition for deliberation is that participants are

able to exchange ideas and are open to changing their point of view in the face of convincing reasons. However, often representatives are chosen on the basis of their pre-established positions, therein lies the tension.

> Whereas, … discursive logic legitimises decisions arrived at through rational justification and argumentative engagement, the positional logic legitimises decisions based on public and partisan representation rooted in democratic elections and which, in turn, can be viewed as the result of deliberative processes about party programs and personnel in the public sphere (Schäfer 2017, p. 426).

As an illustration of this tension, Elija, a regional councillor, explained he was elected to represent the business people who "don't think that they are getting much of a say in this country." On this basis, Elija's propensity to vote for items not seen to be in the interests of business, even if they are deemed to be the best outcome for the whole community, may be limited because the people who voted for him expect him to support the business platform. Perhaps this tension can be partly resolved at the local government level if we consider the role of elected councillors. One of the functions of the council as the governing body stipulated in the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) is "to consult regularly with community organisations and other key stakeholders and keep them informed of the council's decisions and activities" (s. 223). In addition, one of the functions of the councillors as individuals is "to facilitate communication between the local community and the governing body" (s232).

Once decisions are made, part of a councillor's role is to communicate these decisions back to their electorate. For example, when I asked Mason, a regional councillor, about whether he understood his role to be one of discussing council decisions with the community he responded, "Yes definitely, specifically in relation to decisions or forthcoming decisions or decisions that have just been taken, I will try and alert people who have an interest."

Logan, also a regional councillor, put it this way,

> My main role is making those common-sense decisions in the best interest of the community. … [I also have to be] able to justify those

> decisions, so if somebody comes to you the next day and asks, 'What about that?' [I can say], 'Well this is why I made that decision."

Olivia a metropolitan councillor echoed these views. When I asked her if she thought she had a role in communicating councils decisions back to the community she responded

> Yes, absolutely. That is really tricky, but it is really important that you communicate back and explain to people why you made the decisions you made.

Representation and deliberation are, therefore, intrinsically linked. Some councillors endeavour to represent the views and aspirations of their constituents as best they think they can within local government decision-making mechanisms. Elected members' ability to engage with and understand their communities is critical to their ability to accurately reflect their community's interests during these deliberations.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed how councillors conceptualise their role, focussing on the nature of their relationships between the two other constitutive elements of local government: the community and the administration. I examined the possibilities for communicative-action to take place between the various parts of the local government system. The first part of the chapter set out the roles and responsibilities of councillors and GMs. Against this backdrop, I analysed councillors' views on the role of the GM. A number of interviewees voiced their frustration with the power concentrated in the position of the GM. In 1993, the roles and functions of this position were clarified and strengthened with the introduction of a new local government act. This legislative reform effectively 'changed the rules of the game' in terms of who does what in the NSW local government sector. As such, I argue that these councillors' frustration with the power of the GM can be explained by Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis whereby the councillors' habitus (i.e. their implicit and explicit understanding of what it means to be an elected member) no longer aligns with the political field, which ascribes greater power to the role of the GM. In circumstances where a councillor may be experiencing hysteresis, I argue, that the opportunities for communicative-action to occur between them and the bureaucracy are constrained.

The second relationship, I investigated was that of councillors with their communities. I did this in two ways. The first was to assess councillors' views of community engagement as it relates to the development of the community strategic plan. For many of the elected members interviewed, their connection or involvement in the process of community engagement was limited. This is important because this plan is the guiding document for the organisation. It forms the basis for the development of the delivery program, operational plan, and concomitant resourcing strategies (e.g. the annual budget). However, many councillors were unaware of the content of the community strategic plan and were frustrated that the process of community engagement and the development of the plan were led by the GM and council staff. Why does this matter? The requirement for community consultation may offer opportunities for more deliberative processes to take place among citizens, but importantly between citizens and their representatives. In order for the diversity of views and interests to be considered in decision-making processes, representatives must be able to connect with their communities in a variety of ways (Bohman 2012). The opening up of local government to public engagement processes potentially provides opportunity for democratic renewal. Increased public input can also diversify the knowledge available to elected officials as they analyse public problems (Hendriks & Kay 2017).

The last section of this chapter examined the second way councillors relate to their communities - representation. Most of the interviewees had a trustee view of representation in that they were free to make decisions based on their own judgement. This is crucial because for deliberative democracy and communicative-action as conceived of by Habermas to function, elected representatives participating in the process of collective will-formation have to be free to change their points of view. Having examined how councillors relate to the other two fundamental elements of the local democratic system, the organisation and the community, the next chapter considers the process of councillor decision-making within this context.

Chapter 7
Democracy and decision-making: Challenges and possibilities

Introduction

> [Democracy] is imperfect in the sense that decisions are made on either a for or against basis. It is either a yes or no… I understand that that is the simplest way to distil a decision. The simplest way to make a decision is for it to be either yes or no… [But] there are times when I think it is not the best method in terms of making decisions, because life is not as simple as yes or no. There are nuances and factors that go beyond a yes or no decision… It would be much better, if … we could do a roundtable and bring all the different stakeholder groups [together] … to create win-win outcomes (Oliver, councillor).

I have prefaced this section on democracy and decision-making with the quote from Oliver, a young councillor from a metropolitan area, because it provides a succinct analysis of some of the limitations of a decision-making system based on voting and the principle of majority rule. It is these shortcomings that Habermas aims to address. He argues

> …the democratic process [should] have a rational character … voting, for example, should not simply aggregate given preferences but rather follow on a process of thoughtful interaction and opinion formation in which citizens become informed of the better arguments and more general interests (Habermas 1996, location 99).

This chapter's primary focus is to investigate the challenges of democratic decision-making in local government in NSW. The first section examines councillors' notions of democracy. Section two sets out the legislative and institutional context for local government in NSW to determine if these constrain or facilitate deliberative democracy as conceived of by Habermas. The third section moves to an exploration of councillors' experience of deliberation and decision-making within the institutional structure of the council meeting. The purpose is to examine the extent to which their practice of democracy accords with Habermas's ideal. In the final section of the chapter, section

four, I discuss the ideas of lifeworld and system and analyse data from the interviews to assess the ways that elements of the system are present within the lifeworld of local government.

Councillors' definitions of local democracy

In the interviews I asked councillors and general managers to provide me with their definitions of local democracy. Almost all of the interviewees talked about democracy as the process of voting freely. They also framed it in terms of the process of citizens electing local representatives. As Ava, a rural councillor commented, her council is "democratic in the strictest sense [in] that we are elected by the people." Some focused on councillor decision-making. James, a metropolitan councillor, observed

> I think our council gets along quite well. We have five Labor, four Liberal and two independent councillors. There is no clear balance of power. Basically the independents have the balance of power.

And when Lucas, a regional councillor provided his definition of democracy he said,

> I probably lose more votes than I win. Sometimes that's okay. I'm happy to lose because I've expressed an opinion and taken a position. The majority rules…. I am not always right, so I'm happy to lose occasional votes.

In addition to voting, Ethan, a rural councillor, also spoke at length about the challenges of trying to resolve conflict and manage diversity within a democratic context.

> Democracy is not a place where everyone agrees. It's quite often the place where everyone disagrees and has shades of disagreement. … We come together, sometimes we form a compromise. Sometimes we stick to our principles and say, "No. This is what has to happen." … The funniest thing about democracy … is that [if it is] flourishing well, [it] is often … quite splintered. … You have a lot of different views. … Quite often on council, we see that plurality amongst councillors themselves. … They will band together on a particular cause [and] suddenly find themselves at odds with a councillor they never thought they would [be at odds with. Or sometimes they would find] themselves supporting a particular motion by a councillor that they

> never thought they would be supporting. I think that is a really good thing and it indicates that, you know, despite our differences, experiences and values … we come together and have a very open forum of discussion within the council chambers.

For Habermas, it is the process of exchange and deliberation that takes place *before* a vote occurs that is key to making good decisions. Deliberative democracy takes the emphasis away from voting and the aggregation of pre-existing preferences. Instead it emphasises the process of dialogue and the exchange of ideas which happens before a vote is taken. For Habermas, the "…majority decision must be premised on a competent discussion of the disputed issues … Only then can its content be viewed as rationally motivated" (Habermas 1996, location 3980). The process of electing representatives, according to Habermas does not merely transfer the right to vote from citizen to representative, it also confers the responsibility of entering into discussion and deliberation in order to find compromises and make the best decision possible. When "members of parliament are elected… the election does not mean, in the first instance, that just voting power has been delegated" (Habermas 1996, location 4025). "The political balancing of interests requires the election of delegates who are charged with the tasks of compromise formation" (Habermas 1996, location 4055). Furthermore,

> members of parliaments are normally chosen in elections that are free, equal and secret. This procedure has an obvious meaning for the delegation of representatives who receive a mandate to *negotiate compromises*. Participation in a fairly regulated bargaining practice calls for the equal representation of all those affected; it is meant to ensure that all the relevant interests and value orientations can be brought to bear with equal weight in the bargaining process (Habermas 1996, location 4015).

Decision-making in local government: a democratic process?

There has been little research on how councillors make decisions. As Sheffer et al. (2018) argue,

> it is remarkable how little we know about the biases and anomalies that characterize decision making by elected politicians - those who have the greatest impact on most policy outcomes… In fact, large-

scale, directly collected empirical evidence on the basic choice characteristics of politicians is almost completely absent (p. 302).

This section examines how councillors make decisions. Is it done after considered debate in council chambers, or is the process more complex? Prior to addressing this question, I set out the institutional context for decision-making in local government.

Institutional context for decision-making in local government

This section summarises the NSW legislation on decision-making in local government and how it does or does not align with Habermas's analysis of deliberative democracy. Councils work within the laws established by the NSW Parliament. The *Local Government Act* 1993 (the Act), states that "councils should provide strong and effective representation, leadership, planning and decision-making" (s.8A). A question that arises is how to ensure good decisions. To address this, the Act goes on to provide guidance on which principles should be considered in terms of decision-making. These include that:

a) councils should recognise diverse local community needs and interests,
b) councils should consider social justice principles,
c) councils should consider the long term and cumulative effects of actions on future generations,
d) councils should consider the principles of ecologically sustainable development, and
e) council decision-making should be transparent and decision-makers are to be accountable for decisions and omissions.

The third principle detailed in the guiding principles for local government deals with community participation. Stating that "councils should actively engage with their local communities, through the use of the integrated planning and reporting framework[17] and other measures" (s8A).

[17] The integrated planning and reporting framework (IP&R) is an important feature of local government in NSW. It requires local governments to undertake a process of community engagement to develop a long-term community strategic plan, four year delivery program and associated resourcing strategies (e.g. asset management plan, long-term financial plan, workforce strategy etc.) (Division of Local Government NSW 2013).

These principles of local government as set out in the Act, align with Habermas's framework for deliberative democracy. They can be encapsulated within Habermas's requirement that decision-makers take into account a broad diversity of arguments, interests and needs. In his words, "representation can only mean that the selection of members of parliament should provide for the broadest possible spectrum of interpretive perspectives, including the views and voices of marginal groups" (Habermas 1996, location 4045). The Habermasian requisite of diversity is also echoed in the Councillor Handbook, published by the NSW Office for Local Government to enable councillors to better understand their role.

> When a council has to make a decision involving a value judgement, it must do so with fairness and justice. Natural justice requires that the decision be unbiased and that everyone whose rights and interests are affected is given an opportunity to express their views before the decision is made. Adequate notice of the decision should also be given so that any right to be heard can be exercised (Office of Local Government 2017, p. 12).

The Habermasian ideal of compromise formation is also present in the Councillor Handbook, which explains that as all council decisions are made on a majority basis, councillors "need to work as a team to get the best outcome for the community. For this, councillors need good communication skills to state their position, as well as a willingness to listen to diverse views and compromise when necessary" (Office of Local Government 2017, p. 40). The idea of transparency (principle d of section 8A in the Act) is also present within Habermas's framework. "The logic of discourses concerned with self-understanding and justice yields compelling normative grounds for publicity requirements that keep institutionalized opinion- and will-formation *open to the informal circulation* of general political communication" (Habermas 1996, location 4064).

In addition, the Act sets out the roles and responsibilities of councillors as individuals, one of which is "to make considered and well informed decisions as a member of the governing body" (s232). The legislation details how decisions of a council should be made. This process is governed by a code of meeting practice which each council must adopt (s360). The regulations prescribe a model code of meeting practice which

contains both mandatory and non-mandatory provisions which should be included in a council's own code. In terms of chairing meetings, the mayor or, at the request of or in the absence of the mayor, the deputy mayor presides at the meeting (s369). Each councillor is entitled to one vote (s370) but if there is an equality of votes, the person presiding at a meeting (generally the mayor) has a second or casting vote. A decision of council is a decision which is supported by a majority of votes at a meeting of the council (s371). In terms of elected representatives themselves, the Councillor Handbook explains that they are responsible for ensuring their effective participation in council business by making informed decisions through good preparation and involvement and by drawing on the information and assistance that the general manager provides to councillors in making their decisions (Office of Local Government 2017).

This brief analysis of the legislative framework demonstrates that many of the institutional features of the local government system in NSW align with Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy. These include the need to consider a diversity of interests, the imperative for elected representatives to find compromises and the requirement to make well informed decisions through a process of deliberation. Having established that the institutional framework may be considered conducive to deliberative democracy, the next step is to examine the practice of councillor decision-making to determine where this conforms with or deviates from Habermas's ideal.

Council meetings and decision-making

De jure, council meetings are the formal decision-making mechanisms within the local government system: "They are the mechanism through which councillors make decisions regarding policies and programs of the council to meet the needs of the community. Decisions of a council can only be made by resolution at a properly convened meeting" (Office of Local Government 2017, p. 40). Although council meetings are supposed to be the primary decision-making vehicle for councils, several of the councillors stated that they generally do not make the actual decisions at council.

> I try to work off the principle of when I go to a meeting I am 95% sure of what I am going to vote on because I've done a lot of work [prior]. But on the floor of council someone might raise something that you did not think of. In order to do that [i.e. inform ourselves well enough so that we are 95% certain of our decision] we have a briefing session

> [with the general manager and staff] in the lead up to the Council meeting and that is a chance to ask your questions (James, metropolitan council).

A mayor from a regional council, explained that very often the level of extended debate at a council meeting is not necessary. Because councillors are able to ask questions of staff before a council meeting, and many councillors have briefing sessions facilitated by the general manager, which are also an opportunity for elected members to ask questions, they can go to the council meeting very well-informed and briefed:

> Because you've had the opportunity to ask questions, we go to the [council] meeting and things go quickly; motion to seconder. No discussion, so people think it's a done deal. And to some extent you would say it is, but it is because the councillors know what they're talking about. They've read what the item is, and they understand it.

Emma, a metropolitan councillor, had a similar observation, commenting that in her experience, "there is not a great deal of debate" during council meetings because councillors have already been informed of the issues and have made their decisions on how to vote prior to the meeting. If this is indeed the case, then this begs the question of how councillors make their decisions. What is the process, leading up to a council meeting, which allows them to take a position on a particular question or issue? One of the most important elements of good decision-making is access to information. Acting on this premise I now turn to an examination of how information is prepared and presented to councillors. This question is key because, according to Habermas, it should be the force of the better argument that gains primacy in a deliberative process – allowing for the best possible outcome within a decision-making forum (1996).

Decision-making and information from the GM and bureaucracy

What the interviews revealed is the enormous power of the general manager to shape decision-making within local government. S/he provides the information required by councillors to reach decisions. As set out in the *Local Government Act* 1993, a key function of the general manger is "to ensure that the mayor and other councillors are given timely information and advice and the administrative and professional support necessary to effectively discharge their functions" (s335). This is further emphasised in the Councillor Handbook which states that it is "the responsibility of general managers

to provide information, guidance and support to councillors to make good decisions" (Office of Local Government 2017, p. 8). This certainly puts a great deal of power in the hands of the general manager. This is not to say that councillors should accept all suggestions and reports provided by the GM uncritically. Instead, careful and critical reflection is important. However, this can be difficult as the councillors are very reliant on the GM to supply the relevant information. A reflective or deliberative approach is important from a democratic point of view. Deliberation contributes to enlightened understanding, policy efficiency, and knowledge enhancement (Lundin & Öberg 2014). The question is, given the structure of decision-making within the local government system in NSW, is this kind of deliberation possible?

Information overload – an obstacle to genuine democracy?

One of the key mechanisms general managers use to provide information to councillors, is the preparation and distribution of the agenda and accompanying papers for the council meeting. What became evident in the interviews is that, in many instances, the sheer volume of information that councillors are expected to get through, makes it exceptionally difficult for councillors to reach decisions deliberatively. "Council papers are the 'tools' used most often by councillors to make decisions. Meeting or business papers should be of sufficient quantity and quality to allow all councillors to do their job properly and effectively" (Office of Local Government 2017, p. 28). According to the *Local Government Act* (1993, s. 367) "the general manager of a council must send to each councillor, at least 3 days before each meeting of the council, a notice specifying the time and place at which and the date on which the meeting is to be held and the business proposed to be transacted at the meeting." It is within these business papers that the various arguments which the councillors should consider when making a decision are set out. In order to get a sense of the volume of material elected members need to understand in order to make informed decisions; I collated the agendas, associated attachments and previous meeting minutes for three council meetings from eight of the councils which are represented in my interview group. Table 7.1 below provides an overview of the number of pages of information that each councillor was provided in order to prepare for these council meetings.

Table 7.1 Length of Council Meeting Agendas and Business Papers

Council	Type	Total number of pages in council meeting business papers (agenda, attachments, meeting minutes)#			
		Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Average
1	Metropolitan	484	1,487*	464	812
2	Metropolitan	388	283	505	392
3	Metropolitan	968	76	459	501
4	Metropolitan	324	777	703	601
5	Regional	364	300	142	269
6	Regional	900	256	1,471	876
7	Rural	455	505	190	383
8	Rural	305	404	569	426

*includes approval of the council's draft Resource Strategy and Operational Plan
these calculations do not include information which was not made available to the public so in several cases the number of pages will actually be greater.

The data from Table 7.1 clearly demonstrate that councillors need to process a great deal of information in preparation for their meetings. The greatest number of pages given to councillors in preparation for a council meeting was 1,487, the fewest being 76. With regard to the average for each council, these ranged from 876 pages to 269. There are a few points to note with regard to the data presented in this table. Firstly, some of the information will include regular updates on issues such as a register of investments. In this case, councillors may already be familiar with some of the contents and they may not need to read these sections in detail but can focus their attention on particular areas. As Benjamin (a regional councillor) explained:

> I do read the business papers, but it's a lot easier now than it was six years ago because I have an idea of where they are headed. I know where to focus [and] where not to focus. There is some information that has to be there … but you don't actually have to read it every time.

That being said, the material that is contained in these information packages is very diverse. It comprises organisational policy documents, land use planning information including technical drawings and maps, financial statements, etc. As William (regional council) commented,

> It is a lot to take in … particularly noting that a councillor is not a profession. It [sic] is a volunteer with no qualifications in town planning, engineering. If you are considering a report on town water,

> you are relying on the information that is provided to you by the staff who are experienced and qualified.

Thirdly, this data just shows the amount of information given to elected members for council meetings. It does not include the papers that they need to read in order to prepare for committee meetings. Many councillors will also be members of one or two committees.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, councillors stated that reading and understanding the business papers in preparation for a council meeting is a real challenge. "Those business papers entail about 700 pages. It's hard to get your head around all that information and some of it you've never seen before. To do it in a couple of days is really hard" Elija (a regional councillor). Elija's sentiments were echoed by Olivia (a metropolitan councillor):

> The challenge is that we do get a lot of information and there is a lot to go through. We tend to receive the information via Diligent Boards[18] and you only really have not even a week with the material before a … meeting.

Finally, Daniel, a regional GM, also observed that "We probably over support councillors with information now, they are starting to crack in terms of information overload."

In addition, some councillors noted that it is impossible to convey all the information you need to made decisions within the business paper format. "You have to have the business papers, but the thing that is missing is the background. We come into a situation where there is a political dimension to the whole thing" (Benjamin, regional council). This point is important. The legislation assumes that the agenda and business papers can be presented in a neutral fashion, when in fact staff and the GM make decisions throughout the whole process on what information should be included and what should be prioritised. Benjamin also observed that "the business paper does not

[18] Diligent boards is a software as a service company that enables board members of corporations, government organisations and not for profit groups to share and collaborate information for board meetings.

necessarily present you with a logical argument allowing you to actually look and see how things are supposed to go." As Emma from a metropolitan council commented:

> It was certainly not easy to get information or to understand the background for the process because some of these strategies would have been rolling on for a number of years. At the time you get elected it's whatever stage it's up to. It's halfway through and you are trying to understand how this happened and why? I do have to say that at times I felt that a lot of decisions were made by staff and everybody is hoping that you will just put up your hand and say, "Yes, okay". Unless you are there in a full-time capacity and you are fully engaged in informing yourself, it is very difficult to know how or why decisions are made.

The volume of the information contained in the business papers and the short amount of time councillors have to read, digest and consider the reports, data and evidence contained within them (3 days minimum), begs the question of whether councillors are able to determine the best arguments and outcomes for their community. This raises the challenge of information overload which is discussed in further detail below. Having said that, there is recognition within the framework that the council meeting agendas and business papers may not be sufficient in terms of enabling councillors to understand all the matters they must consider. As a result the model code of meeting practice sets out the option for general managers to hold briefing sessions for councillors.

Can councillor briefings and workshops support democracy?

Councillor briefing sessions are set out as a non-compulsory element of the Mode Code of Meeting Practice (Office of Local Government 2018b). The Office of Local Government sets out the following parameters for these sessions (p. 13).

> Prior to each ordinary meeting of the council, the general manager may arrange a pre-meeting briefing session to brief councillors on business to be considered at the meeting.
>
> Pre-meeting briefing sessions are to be held in the absence of the public.

> Councillors must not use pre-meeting briefing sessions to debate or make preliminary decisions on items of business they are being briefed on, and any debate and decision-making must be left to the formal council or committee meeting at which the item of business is to be considered.

Generally, the general manager briefing sessions are held prior to each council meeting. William, from a regional council, observed that these briefings provide the

> opportunity for councillors to ask questions of staff about the recommendations they put forward. Ask them why they have not considered alternatives, [and] to get more into the financial aspects, the numbers of whatever the proposal is. Sometimes it is easier to [ask questions] in that environment rather than in an open council meeting. Particularly for some councillors … who maybe worry that they are going to say something stupid and have it reflect on them.

All of the councillors said that their general manager held these briefing sessions. In addition to briefing sessions, councils may also hold workshops in order to provide councillors with the time needed to explore more important or complex issues in detail. These workshops may involve councillors, council staff and local participants. As James a metropolitan councillor explained, “We do get presentations from [external] groups… For example, TAFE New South Wales, the airport, universities, they will come in and give presentations from time to time if they have something to say.” Mason, a regional councillor, explained that at his council the general manager organises both briefings and workshops:

> We have two types of briefings on our council. Every fortnight we have a workshop … where the council staff will brief us on whatever is on the agenda for that session. [In addition], the day before a council meeting we have a briefing where we can ask questions about what’s in the business papers and potentially ask questions before the meeting the next day.

Daniel, a general manager from a regional council, outlined what happens during the briefing sessions he facilitates for councillors.

> [Before a council meeting] we hold a briefing [for councillors] and walk them through the agenda, what things to look out for, who is likely to turn up [i.e. members of the public] and ask questions and [the councillors also] ask questions of us. A lot of … issues get resolved. … They do get a lot of the silly questions out of the way. Likewise, we hold workshops every week as well. We try to organise it so [we will hold a workshop on] the big strategy, policy, project stuff. [This allows for] a fair bit of Q&A and often robust discussion.

Matthew, a general manager from a rural council, explained that during these briefings councillors "can seek some clarification from staff prior to getting into the public space and trying to get that information from staff in a public arena which is very messy." Noah, a mayor from a regional council, put it bluntly when he commented that "the idea of briefings is that … you don't stand up in a public arena and make a goose of yourself about things that you should know, [about] what people expect you to know." In addition, Matthew observed that exchanges among councillors and staff during these briefings were "much better in terms of … dialogue and being able to get to a real understanding of the issue." He also emphasised that councillors did not make their final decision at these briefings workshop. Explaining that while staff or councillors may have supported a particular position during a workshop "this does not mean that they are going to follow that line when we get to the actual decision. But that is fine as long as they have the understanding necessary to be able to make that decision." This is in line with the official regulations which stipulate that these workshops should not be used for detailed or advanced discussions in order to reach agreements or decisions. Any detailed discussion or exchange of views on an issue, and any policy decision from the options, should be left to the open forum of a formal council or committee meeting (Office of Local Government 2017).

Several of the councillors interviewed, noted that these briefings and workshops often took place during work hours, constraining the ability of some elected members to attend. Logan, a regional councillor, recounted his situation:

> On Tuesday afternoons before our two main meetings of the month … they have a catch up with the general manager and other staff. But because I work full-time, I never go. I know other councillors do

> which is good and sometimes they will ring me up and tell me anything I might need to know. But I just ask questions at the meeting because I have to.

Emma, a metropolitan councillor, voiced a similar frustration. She explained that while members of the community are able to come and speak to councillors on particular items at workshops which are open to the public, these sessions were held "during the day. [This means that]… from a community perspective and for people working, that is really hard." The inability of councillors to attend briefing sessions and workshops to inform themselves about the issues before council has important implications for Habermas's notion of democracy which requires that elected members have access to good information in order for the force of the better argument to triumph within the deliberative process.

An important feature of councillor briefings held by the general manager is that they are closed to the public. There was some disagreement amongst the interviewees as to whether holding these briefings behind closed doors was in the public's interest. William (regional councillor), objected to the closed nature of the briefing sessions:

> [I object] from a transparency and public accountability point of view. Whereas other councillors have different views, they say that [briefings are] an opportunity to ask those more detailed questions or the questions that they may think are silly, just to save face essentially. I say it's too bad. No question is a silly question and it should be on the public record. And the answer should be on the public record.

William's point of view accords with the Habermasian perspective which calls for a high degree of transparency in decision making which should be public and accessible by everyone (1996). Although William objected to the closed nature of these meetings, other interviewees felt that it was important for councillors to have the opportunity to ask questions, discuss and debate, outside of the public's view. Ethan, from a rural council, explained that having a closed door debate before going out into the public is essential, commenting that "verbally brawling" may "make for good newspaper headlines but it does not make for a good debating process … [and having the] furious debate behind a closed door before we get together in a public forum … allows us to

formulate better positions on a policy." Amelia, a general manager from a metropolitan council agreed.

> I absolutely believe the briefing sessions should be private. Firstly, it allows for full and frank conversations… Councillors should be allowed to ask the stupid questions. I do not want to have to explain to my councillors … the difference between a planning proposal and a DA [development assessment] on the public floor of council. That does not look great for democracy. Also, some of the fight that otherwise gets played out on the floor of council can be resolved during the briefing sessions. I think they absolutely, critically, need to be in private.

There is some research on the question of transparency of decision-making and its impact on the trust of citizens in political representatives and institutions (see for example, de Fine Licht 2011; Grimmelikhuijsen 2010). However, research on the impact of transparency on the quality of deliberation and decision-making among politicians is sparse. Stasavage (2007) argues that decision-making in private may "actually do more to reduce polarization of opinions in society than will public decision-making." He concedes that his conclusion "runs contrary to the common suggestion that public discussions will produce greater social consensus" (p. 61). He justifies his stance, arguing that when the public is able to directly observe what a representative says during deliberations and how he or she votes with regard to policy, then as long as the representative is concerned about maintaining a reputation for acting in the public interest, he or she is more likely to support policies preferred by the public. He concludes "the potential problem with transparency is that it can … prompt representatives to ignore any private information they may have which indicates that the public is misinformed" (Stasavage 2007, p. 62). The question remains, that in the case where deliberation occurs between elected representatives, "whether publicity might prompt members to refrain from expressing their true opinions, in which case one of the principal goals of deliberation, improving the quality of decisions, is undermined" (Stasavage 2007, p. 63).

Simone Chambers' (2004) has a different analysis. She begins by arguing that all theories of deliberative democracy contain something that could be called a "publicity

principle". For example, Habermas states that the practice of reaching understanding must be "public and universally, accessible" (1996, location 4039). She sums up the arguments in support of decision-making being conducted in public by stating that the fact of "having to defend one's policy preferences in public leans one towards using public reason" because "publicity, and especially critical accountability, encourages participants to examine their own beliefs and arguments" (p. 390). This means politicians have to articulate their positions carefully, to defend their positions against other arguments, take opposing points of view into consideration, to reveal the underlying logic behind their argument and to be open about the principles upon which their position is based. In addition, to the impact of public debate on how a politician formulates and defends his or her position, Chambers argues that more transparent decision-making has important implications for the question of legitimacy. "The logic here is that publicly arguing for a policy on the grounds, say, that it makes you better off … will not get very far within a modern liberal democratic public sphere" (p. 391). In this way, publicity helps to ensure that politicians make decisions based on a greater good rather than personal gain. In summary, "publicity is thought to have a positive effect on deliberation by promoting a democratic mechanism that pushes participants from private [interests] to public reason" (p. 392).

Stadelmann, Portmann & Eichenberger (2014) tested the effect of transparency of political processes on the quality of political decisions. Their results showed that full transparency does not necessarily increase the quality of political representation and concluded that there is no clear support for the common belief that transparency always increases accountability. It is clear from the literature, and from my discussions with councillors and general managers that the benefits and effects of decision-making by politicians in public and behind closed doors remains contested. However, it does appear that in many instances the councillor briefings benefit from being held behind closed doors. Local government councillors are not professional politicians. The majority of them do not have the support of a political party, nor do they have (with the exception of very large, well-funded councils) the benefit of support staff system to provide them with advice or guidance. Thus, they largely draw on their own experience and the advice of the general manager when considering the matters put before them. As such the opportunity to ask questions and gather further clarification is key and this needs to be done in private to allow them to ask what might be perceived as "silly

questions". Of course, a critical factor is the competence of the GM. If the general manager fails to give adequate information or the information conveyed is biased, this will impact on the capacity of the councillors to reach rational decisions.

Even more information! Councillor request services and general manager updates

In addition to the business papers, briefings and workshops, the councillors and GMs interviewed, mentioned other formal channels through which councillors could ask questions and obtain further information. James (metropolitan councillor) explained that his GM is always adamant that he does not need to wait for the briefings. They have a councillor request service through which councillors can email questions and receive written responses. These questions and responses are shared with all councillors so that all elected members receive the same information. He finds this service useful because

> there are things that you can say one-on-one or via email that you may not be able to say on the open floor of council. There are issues of confidentiality and privacy. So you need to get as much of the answers as you can before the council meeting.

Amelia, a metropolitan GM, added that in addition to what they are required to do in terms of the business papers, she does a weekly update which "contains relevant memos from staff, circulars from the office of local government, information from our Regional Organisation of Councils, and information from peak bodies." This update usually runs between 80 and 100 pages and comes out every week.

In summary then, councillors receive a good deal of information upon which to base their decisions. This material comes through many channels. The primary channel is the agenda and business papers prepared by the GM which need to be made available to councillors at least three days before the council meeting. My analysis of the agenda and business papers for the last three council meetings for eight of the local governments represented in my interview sample, showed that councillors are given a great deal of information to read and understand, within a relatively short space of time. Councillors will also have additional reading as most are on committees within the council structure and will have to digest the relevant papers. Also, GMs may provide supplementary updates and information to keep councillors abreast of what is happening within the organisation, region and sector. In order to help councillors understand this

information, all of the councils represented in my sample held briefing sessions before council meetings to enable elected members to ask questions and get further clarification. The large volume of information that elected members must process in a relatively short space of time begs the question of their capacity to digest this large amount of material in order to make good decisions. It is to this issue that I now turn.

Habitus, information and decision-making

This analysis of the local government framework for decision-making, and the processes by which councillors are given the information upon which they make their decisions, raises some important questions in terms of Habermas's ideal of deliberative democracy. While the legislative framework may be conducive to deliberative processes, or at the very least, may not constrain deliberation as conceived of by Habermas, the implementation and practice of the legislation and regulations do throw up significant challenges. Perhaps most significantly, the sheer volume of material that councillors are expected to read and digest has significant implications for decision-making, both in terms of an individual's capacity to read and understand the information but also in terms of diversity and who is able to participate in these kinds of processes. Let me now turn to a more considered analysis of the question of information overload.

While there is some examination of the problem that politicians have in trying to process this large amount of material, there is minimal research on "the question of how individual politicians go about selecting the information they need to make decisions" (Sheffer et al. 2018; Walgrave & Dejaeghere 2017, p. 231). Elected members need to gather information quickly and effectively, often in highly charged political atmospheres but as human beings, policymakers do not have the time, resources or cognitive capacity to consider all information, all possibilities, all solutions, or anticipate all the consequences of their actions. In their analysis Baekgaard et al. (2017) show that politician's prior attitudes and beliefs affect how they perceive and interpret new information. They conclude that "the interpretation of even unambiguous information in political decision-making is not a neutral process, but one in which attitudes matter greatly" (p. 1131).

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research which links psychology and political decision-making, Cairney &

Kwiatkowski (2017) provide a useful overview of this research which shows that politicians' ability to process information may differ according to their familiarity with things. They use the bounded rationality framework as set out by Herbert Simon (1976) for their analysis which asserts that humans are very selective in what they pay attention to. They may pay more attention to an issue or evidence if they already possess some knowledge of it and find it relatively easy to understand or recall. Similarly, they may have an emotional connection to an issue which means they are more likely to pay attention to it. In their analysis, Cairney & Kwiatkowski (2017, p. 3) conclude that "policymakers respond to bounded rationality by relying on quick gut-level, instinctual, emotional, and moral choices" rather than making their decisions solely based on the evidence before them. The nature of bounded rationality means that in a context where people are under continual pressure to reach decisions, their decisions will reflect not only beliefs about 'what works' but judgments about what is feasible as well as elements of ideological faith, conventional wisdom and habit. Their decisions are also constrained by resource limitations in terms of brain power, time and financial inputs (Botterill & Hindmoor 2012).

Bounded rationality and Bourdieu's habitus have a lot in common. As such, Collet's (2009) article comparing the two theoretical frameworks is useful. He explains that according to Simon,

> agents are boundedly rational in the sense that they are limited in their ability to retrieve, store and process information. They attend to particular pieces of information, ignore others, and settle for "good enough" or "satisficing" solutions to the problems they face, partly on the basis of their past experience (Collet 2009, p. 422).

He observes that "both Simon and Bourdieu believed that the social environment influences perceptions and expectations. Environment conditions experience. This experience serves as a compass that orients future behaviour" (p. 424). However, there are also some crucial differences. According to Simon, people rely on their expert memory although this is not done consciously. However sometimes people may need to break a habit and this is done consciously, Collet provides the example of a driver having to consciously stop herself from braking when skidding on ice. In contrast, Collet explains that for Bourdieu, a person's reaction will always have an element of the

unconscious to it, even if they think of their actions or decisions as conscious. In addition, Simon's view was more analytical he viewed habits as a calculated analysis. Habitus, on the other hand, does not necessarily involve calculation or analysis.

While these differences are important, I would argue that the use of habitus and bounded rationality to understand how politicians deal with large amounts of information leads to the same conclusion. Habitus or bounded rationality shape the way councillors seek and process information. The habitus of councillors influences how they perceive information, what items they pay attention to and ultimately how they make decisions. For example, Matthew, a general manager from a rural council, stated that "[some] councillors are more influenced by representatives from the community than others and make decisions based on what the community member might've told them." This may mean that these councillors pay more attention to information from the community than the material that is provided in the business papers when then make their decisions. When relating her experience of being a younger female councillor in a metropolitan council made up predominantly of older males, Grace explained that her interests were more related to issues facing younger families in contrast to her colleagues. She observed that

> [With regard to] some of the things I raised at council, you could see that they [i.e. the other councillors] had not a clue about what I was talking about. The pram curbs were just a simple example of that. They said, "What is wrong with [the pram curbs]?" I said, "What is wrong with it is, if you have a kid in a pram and [you are] probably hanging onto a toddler, it is actually really hard [to get over the curb]." A lot of [my fellow councillors] did not have a perspective at all about family needs because their kids, if they had them, were adults.

This is significant as ultimately the way that councillors receive and process information has a bearing on their ability to deliberate and to pay attention to and assess different arguments. Habermas concludes that discourses, "require a background political culture that is egalitarian, divested of all education privileges and thoroughly intellectual" (Habermas 1996, location 9786). However, Bourdieu's analysis precludes this level playing field. All councillors will have a specific habitus and particular configuration of capital (social, cultural and economic) which will influence their priorities and decision-

making processes. While we can work towards an ideal of deliberation, this study indicates that it may be unattainable.

Debate and deliberation

While access to accurate and comprehensive information is perhaps the first element councillors need for a good decision-making process, the second important step is deliberation. "Deliberation means the extent to which politicians make an effort to understand information, critically scrutinize it, and are prepared to change positions if there are convincing arguments" (Lundin & Öberg 2014, p. 35). A deliberative approach to policy advice means that politicians make an effort to understand information, critically scrutinise it, and are prepared to change positions if there are convincing arguments (Lundin & Öberg 2014). However, the nature of deliberation within government bureaucracies remains under-researched particularly deliberation among elected members themselves (Schäfer 2017, p. 421). One notable exception being the research of Bächtiger, see for example Ercan & Bächtiger (2019). During this interview he explains that at higher levels of governments, i.e. parliaments it is useful for researchers of deliberative democracy to observe policy negotiations within the committee system. Observing these negotiations within different institutional contexts allows researchers to determine under what conditions high quality deliberation can take place – thus informing institutional reform. In addition to institutions the attitudes of politicians themselves, also have a bearing on the quality of deliberation within parliaments. Some elected representatives have more deliberative mindsets than others. According to Bächtiger (2019), both a willingness on behalf of individuals to deliberate and favourable institutional frameworks need to be present for high-quality deliberation to occur.

This being said, several of the councillors said the level of debate was high and the deliberation with their fellow councillors was sound. This may be linked to Bourdieu's observation that people from higher socio-economic groups are better able to "take control of discursive situations because the devices for doing so are derived from their own linguistic habitus" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 255). Lucas, from a rural council, emphasised the capacity of his fellow councillors to compromise and listen to each other:

> Look, we regularly amend [our views]. We are probably a bit untidy. Council regularly amends motions mid-debate. A motion [will be] moved, someone will comment and the mover may say, "Well I will include [x], if you move that amendment." I will accept that amendment into the motion. There is an effort amongst eight of the nine to try and find a good outcome … There is always goodwill.

Liam, a metropolitan councillor, also said that he and his fellow councillors had lively discussion, and that there was also a lot of agreement amongst the group, even between people who do not normally agree. He felt that the evidence for this agreement was in the voting, stating that "if you look at the voting on council there is a high percentage of either unanimous decisions or sort of eight-two, something like that." William's, a regional councillor, experience of the deliberative process, is also interesting:

> You go to a council meeting and you think this is how I am going to vote. My view is the right view. Everyone is going to feel the same because it is logical and then you hear the views put forward by the different councillors and your vote changes. If it were just you running the show, you could have made a big mistake. Something could have gone through Council when it should not have. When it should have been deferred. When it should have had different amendments to it.

Oliver, a metropolitan councillor, made an interesting observation about the consequences of deliberation:

> We talk about politicians back flipping. On the other side of that same coin is that they heard the arguments and they have listened to the other side and were able to appreciate what they had not previously and they took into account those factors and changed their mind.

The process of debate within the council meeting itself is very structured. In total there are 31 different rules which structure the debate and detail how motions can be made and discussed. The meetings are chaired by the mayor or deputy mayor. This means that the tenor of debate and meeting dynamics are very dependent on the mayor's ability to ably chair the discussion. As Amelia, a metropolitan general manager explained,

"The mayor has the primary relationship in terms of [the management of the council meeting], not me. … I am very fortunate. I have a very seasoned mayor in terms of chairing and she just manages it." With a few exceptions, councillors can only consider items at the meetings which have been included in the agenda and business papers. Only questions which relate to the items in the agenda and business papers can be asked within a council meeting. A motion or an amendment cannot be debated unless or until it has been seconded. This means that at least two councillors have to agree that an item merits further discussion. In terms of debate and the right to speak, the Model Code of Meeting Practice (Office of Local Government 2018b, p. 34) sets out the following limitations.

> A councillor who, during a debate at a meeting of the council, moves an original motion, has the right to speak on each amendment to the motion and a right of general reply to all observations that are made during the debate in relation to the motion, and any amendment to it at the conclusion of the debate before the motion (whether amended or not) is finally put.
>
> A councillor, other than the mover of an original motion, has the right to speak once on the motion and once on each amendment to it.
> A councillor must not, without the consent of the council, speak more than once on a motion or an amendment, or for longer than five (5) minutes at any one time.

The objective of these meeting procedures is to "contribute to good public decision-making and increase council's transparency and accountability to its community" (Office of Local Government 2017, p. 45). There are aspects of the rules of debate which are clearly about maximising efficiency. For example, a councillor who has not moved a particular motion can only speak to that motion and any amendments to it once during the debate process. In addition, a limit of five minutes is set for any of these interventions (Office of Local Government 2018b, p. 34). As Daniel, a regional general manager observed, "The code of meeting rules are really all about chairing and rules of debate rather than one of incentivising participation." That is to say that the rules focus on ordering the debate rather than ensuring that everyone has a chance to participate. In

addition, time constraints in terms of the ability to speak to a decision put before council also applies to the public. Logan, a regional councillor, explained:

> At our council meetings the community gets five minutes, if you can put your point across in five minutes…A lot of the time they're very passionate about what they want to talk about. It's about where they live. They only get five minutes, and we can just choose to ignore every word that they say if they want.

These meetings are formal and structured and the culmination of a process which has three main formal stages. Firstly, the agenda and business papers which contain reports, information and recommendations from staff are sent to for councillors to consider. Secondly, councillor briefings and workshops provide elected members with the opportunity to discuss the matters at hand, ask questions and further inform themselves. Council meetings can, therefore, be described as the final step in the decision-making process where elected members make their choices final and public after a preceding process of information gathering, consideration and deliberation. There are many aspects of the current framework that facilitate deliberation as conceived of by Habermas. However, the experience of councillors highlights several challenges with implementation which arguably diminish the quality of deliberation and decision-making within the NSW local government system. These are elaborated in the next section.

Lifeworld, the system and decision-making

In this section I use Habermas's ideas of lifeworld and system to analyse councillors' experiences of decision-making. According to Habermas the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system takes place in two main ways, colonisation by power and colonisation by money. Power refers to the bureaucratic administration as well as the pursuit of political power, while money correlates to economic interests.

> …like the bureaucratic state, the capitalist economy, too developed a systemic logic of its own. The markets for goods, capital, and labor obey their own logic, independent of the intentions of human subjects. Alongside the administrative power incorporated in government bureaucracies, money has become an anonymous medium of societal integration operating above the participants' heads. This *system*

> *integration* competes with the form of integration mediated by the actors' consciousness, that is, the *social integration* taking place through values, norms, and mutual understanding. The *political integration* that occurs through democratic citizenship represents one aspect of this general social integration. For this reason, the relation between capitalism and democracy is fraught with tension, something liberal theories often deny (Habermas 1996, location 9990)

The systems of public administration and the economy have their own social structures. And because these systems are anchored in the lifeworld, it is possible for influence to travel both ways – for the lifeworld to influence the systems and vice versa. "The rationalization of the lifeworld makes possible the emergence and growth of subsystems whose independent imperatives turn back destructively upon the life-world itself" (Habermas 1984b, location 4238). Habermas explains that when the imperatives of the system (e.g. power or money) make their way into the lifeworld they are like "colonial masters coming into tribal society and force a process of assimilation upon it" (Habermas 1984b, location 7842). "Structural violence" is the result of this colonisation. This comes about because the system constraints instrumentalise a communicatively structured lifeworld which then takes on the character of deception, of objectively false consciousness. This

> structural violence is exercised by way of systematic restrictions on communication; distortion is anchored in the formal conditions of communicative action in such a way that the interrelation of the objective, social, and subjective worlds gets prejudged for participants in a typical fashion (Habermas 1984b, location 4255).

When power and money colonise the lifeworld of local government, the effects can result in less authentic communication amongst politicians and subsequently poorer decision-making. This is because the elected members are no longer representing the interests of their communities but rather they are being guided by the influences of power and money. In this part of the chapter my focus is on assessing the extent to which elements of the system have colonized local government decision-making mechanisms with a view to identifying possible ways to address this infiltration. This is important because, as Habermas argues, the interests of money and power invariably do

not align with the interests of citizens and good decision-making should be free from system constraints.

Power and personal political gain

A key question is whether the effects of power as an organising mechanism (rather than communicative action) are present within local government. Perhaps not surprisingly, none of the councillors interviewed mentioned using their position as an elected representative to further their own personal or political power. However, many did state that their colleagues used the position to fulfil personal or political ambitions and motivations. Sophia, a rural councillor, commented that some councillors viewed their own personal ambition, for example, to be the mayor, as more important than the community good. Lucas, another rural councillor, lamented that one of his colleague's goals was "promoting herself, [being in the limelight] and being the centre of attention." Matthew a regional GM, echoed this experience commenting that sometime councillors lose sight of the fact that they should be making decisions for the greater good rather than based on the interests of particular constituents in the area:

> They say, "I'm representing the community". I'm not saying it happens all the time, but it happens quite regularly where they lose the fact that this decision-making should be for the greater good, for the broader community, not for the individual. They think they are [making decisions for the greater good] in serving the individual. In some cases they are, but in other cases they are specifically just championing the issue that has been raised by the individual [due to] personal connections… When it comes to the nitty-gritty of a constituent raising an issue with them, they lose a little bit of their perspective, thinking, 'Yes I need to sort this out for that particular person.' … I think it's subconscious, in representing the individual's issues they think they're representing the whole community. Or they take the view that representing one of their constituents on an issue of concern is representing the community, which it is not.

Matthew's observation perhaps shows that sometimes, at best, councillors are not aware of the presence of elements of the system in their decision-making processes. In addition, a councillor's perception of interests of the community and themselves can

change over time affecting the quality of deliberation within the group. Emma described the evolution of her interactions with a colleague during their time in office.

> When we started as councillors, we were all green[19] and much more open to talking things through and sharing [information with] each other. As time went on, the party lines kicked in. The Liberals were holding onto their party line. Even the independents would toe their party line. Some become more entrenched and more difficult to go back to [in order to have a] more conciliatory collaborative process. It's just the nature of the game as people start to realise they [are developing a public] profile … [One councillor] became very prominent and needed to toe the party line. [She] became more aggressive and forceful … during meetings. They [became] quite different individuals. Literally, a very different person, from [when she started as a councillor] to [where] she ended up.

Emma's reflection illustrates how for some councillors, local government is viewed as a stepping stone for a career in state or even federal government. For these councillors toeing the party line is crucial.

Another aspect of a systemic use of power which councillors identified during the interviews was the occurrence of block voting. Block voting occurs when a majority of councillors (e.g. five on a nine member council) agree to make decisions collectively and vote as a block. This behaviour is specifically addressed within the Model Code of Conduct and is prohibited: "Councillors must not participate in binding caucus votes in relation to matters to be considered at a council or committee meeting" (Office of Local Government 2018a, p. 13). The Code explains that a binding caucus vote occurs when a group of councillors are compelled by a threat of disciplinary or other adverse action to comply with a predetermined position, irrespective of their own personal views. Mason, a regional councillor, explained that proving the idea of disciplinary or adverse action is very difficult. While it is illegal to caucus, the definition is fairly tight. It means that you will be punished for not voting in a particular way, but "there aren't many ways of proving that." He went on to state that, "people are voting as a block because that is how they want to vote. If they are meeting up at somebody's house …

[19] 'Green' as in new to the job, as opposed to 'Green' as in the political party.

and deciding how they are developing their … speeches and responses to motions, no one will know." The Code does clarify that these regulations do not prohibit councillors from discussing questions prior to considering the matter in question at a council or committee meeting, or from voluntarily holding a shared view with other councillors on the merits of a matter (Office of Local Government 2018a, p. 13). Elija, a regional councillor, justified his participation in a voting block as follows:

> You need the voting block in order to [achieve your goals] … If you have not got the voting block, there is no way you are going to change … decisions. We have the voting block now … but it's difficult when you are in a voting block, to not vote the way you feel [i.e. vote in line with what the block has decided rather than according to your own conviction].

Logan described his experience of being part of a regional council where the Mayor is part of a voting block: "On most things that come to Council [we] are unanimous. [But] when it comes to controversial things, where we might have a point of view, the Mayor decides what is going to happen, and the other five put their hand up." He voiced his frustration with the situation stating that the local election results meant that they

> had one group that had by far and away the most votes. They have four people elected from their group and it was clear right away that they made an alliance with two other councillors. Those six councillors … run council. … Me, being not one of those six, [I] get to a point where [I am] just going through the motions. I turn up to meetings and I think I'm really there as the old "keep the bastards honest" sort of thing… The councillors that are not part of the ruling block get disenfranchised. They don't put much effort in, because they say, "What is the point?" So they don't put their hands up to be on committees. They don't come to workshops. They just go through the motions…

In addition to gaining control of council, Matthew a general manager of a rural council, explained that occasionally there are voting blocks for personal reasons: "Sometimes you can see that there has been a personal issue and that probably interferes with the democratic process. Sometimes people will vote against something just because

somebody else has put something up." Block voting is not unusual. There are several examples across Australia of councillors accusing their colleagues of this practice (see for example, ABC Regional News 2014; Thomson 2017 ; Williams 2010). By impeding a councillor's freedom to make their own judgement, block-voting as an expression of power within the political/administrative system undermines the discursive, deliberative process.

There are other examples of councillor interaction which demonstrate the presence of the system, in the guise of power, within the lifeworld of local democracy. Daniel, a regional general manger, was of the view that experienced councillors can sometimes use their knowledge of regulations to intimidate their colleagues.

> We have a lot of very savvy councillors who are totally tuned into the Code of Meeting Practice. They are always pulling up the Chair, who tries to get other people involved by inviting comment. And even though you [should] pause and wait for [someone] to compile their thoughts, [the discussion will go over] their heads and someone will say, "Motion put", because they want to cut that process out. It can be cruel, but that is politics, even local politics.

In summary, although no councillor was open or self-aware enough to discuss their own political ambition in these terms, many were willing to state that their colleagues placed their own political objectives above community interests. For example, the pursuit of personal gain through agreeing to vote in a certain way to obtain other councillors' support for your bid to become mayor clearly undermines the objectives of deliberative democracy. In addition, the phenomenon of block voting also weakens a council's ability to make decisions based on the best argument. These elements provide evidence of the system influencing the deliberative space at the local government level.

Conclusion

The key question addressed in this chapter has been whether the decision-making process in local government reflects Habermas's notion of deliberative democracy. The interviews suggest that the process of decision-making in local government is a complex and at times fraught process. It is evident that while the institutional architecture as described in the legislation may be conducive to deliberative democracy, the practice may in fact inhibit true exchange and collective will-formation (i.e. deliberative

processes councillors undergo to identify and agree on the best option put before them) amongst elected members. We actually know comparatively little about how politicians make decisions (Sheffer et al. 2018). In order to address this gap, this research examined the question of decision-making by elected members in NSW. One of the key findings was that the amount of material which is presented to councillors for their consideration, through the agenda and business papers, makes it difficult to see how they are able to digest all the material necessary to identify the best options for their communities. Habitus also has a role to play in influencing what kind of information a councillor may pay attention to and what material may go unheeded. In addition, the question of transparency was also examined in relation to the briefing sessions held by GMs in advance of council meetings. These sessions are closed to the public and give councillors the opportunity to ask questions and gather further information before the process of debate and voting at council meetings. While the literature on the effects of transparency on decision-making is limited (see for example, Chambers 2004; Stasavage 2007), given that the position of councillor in NSW is held on a part-time and voluntary basis, these closed briefings are important opportunities for elected members to discuss things and ask questions away from public scrutiny. Finally, it is evident from the interviews, that elements of the system are present in the lifeworld of the local government decision-making mechanisms. This is apparent in the political machinations of elected members who may trade votes for support in their quest to become mayor, and in the practice of block voting. In summary, while on paper the possibility for deliberative democracy to occur at the local government level exists, in practice there are many challenges to overcome in order to enable better deliberative processes to take place.

Chapter 8
Conclusion

This study investigated why individuals decide to become councillors and their perceptions and experience of local democracy. It did this in three main ways. Chapter Five examined councillors' motivations for standing for election drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital. The implications for deliberative democracy as defined by Habermas, particularly the challenges of achieving better descriptive representation, were then considered in light of this analysis. Chapter Six examined the relationships councillors have with the two other constitutive elements of local democracy, namely, the bureaucracy led by the general manager and the community. The dynamics of these relationships were examined in order to analyse the potential challenges to communicative action (a necessary condition for deliberation) between the councillors and the community and councillors and the council bureaucracy. Finally, Chapter Seven considered the complex nature of decision-making at local government level, in particular the challenge of information overload.

This concluding chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines the contributions that this research makes to our knowledge and understanding of the local democracy in NSW. The chapter then concludes with a section which discusses the research and policy implications of these findings.

Key contributions to knowledge

Theoretical contributions

To begin the reflection of the outcomes of this study, I provide some observations on the theory I used to frame the analysis of local democracy in NSW. I used Habermas's concepts of deliberative democracy, communicative action, system and lifeworld and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field, capital and hysteresis to guide the consideration of the interview data. Habermas's model of deliberative democracy facilitated the exploration of the institutions of local democracy in NSW. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field were used to understand councillors' decisions and behaviour within this context. The concepts of habitus and capital demonstrate that perhaps Habermas's ideal of deliberative democracy is not attainable as inequalities are deeply embedded within Australian society (see for example, France & Roberts 2017).

However, and on a more positive note, Bourdieu's framework also provides clues with regard to the types of research and policy approaches which could be pursued in order to achieve a more equitable and deliberative local government system. For example, Bourdieu's ideas of habitus suggest that in order to foster more diverse political representation, policy initiatives should consider working with young children through the education system in order to provide them with the cultural capital necessary for them to engage in local democratic systems as adults. Similarly, with regards to decision-making, the current system of agenda and business papers which provide extensive background material for councillors to consider in advance of the council meeting is prima facia in line with Habermas's theory. In his vision of deliberative democracy, councillors would have access to and be able to consider all the relevant arguments in relation to the matter under consideration. However, in a context of 'information overload' individuals may not be able to pay heed to all the material before them and instead rely on intuition and previous experience to guide their decision-making. This insight is valuable. It may help researchers and policy-makers to identify more effective ways of providing information to councillors and facilitate more robust processes for decision-making by elected members. In summary, using both Habermas's and Bourdieu's conceptual frameworks to examine the institutional and behavioural elements of the local democratic system proved to be a very useful analytical approach for my research.

Why people become councillors

In terms of findings, this research examined the experiences of 21 councillors in NSW with a view to identifying ways in which to strengthen local democracy. The first part of the analysis looked at why people become councillors. A review of the literature demonstrated that Fox and Lawless's conclusion in 2005 that "no broad empirical work explores the dynamics underlying the initial decision to run for public office" (p. 624) is still relevant. As such, this study helps to address this gap. The interviews revealed that councillors had a range of often overlapping motivations for their initial decision to run for office. Place attachment played an important role for many councillors. This was expressed in several ways. For some councillors a primary reason was meeting their local mayor through their strong involvement in the local community which led them to stand for election as the mayor asked them to be on his or her ticket. A second group spoke of pride in their hometown. A third group expressed a desire to make a

difference and improve the place where they live. In contrast, the last group of councillors articulated their motivation less in terms of place attachment rather they spoke about the influence of family as their main influence for running.

The analysis of the interview data also showed that broadly speaking councillors possessed high levels of social and cultural capital. This was evidenced by the many community and volunteer clubs and organisations that councillors were involved in, in addition to their role as a local representative. This social capital was important in for councillors. Because they were well known in the community, it contributed to their electoral success and helped them to understand the needs and wants of their constituents. In terms of cultural capital, the councillors interviewed tended to be highly educated with 18 out of 21 (86%) having completed a bachelor's or higher degree. This is in comparison to the broader NSW population where 23 per cent of people have university degrees (ABS 2016). In general, councillors in NSW tend to be older, professional men (Office of Local Government 2014). Cultural capital was also important in terms of motivating councillors to stand for office as citizens from higher educated socio-economic groups tend to be more likely to be politically engaged. Consequently, in terms of their gender, ethnicity, profession and age councillors do not reflect the profile of the NSW population.

Why does this lack of descriptive representation matter? In Habermas's model of deliberative democracy all those concerned by an issue should have the opportunity to participate in the deliberations. This enables us to justify and underpin the political decisions we make. One way of ensuring that all those concerned are involved is through better descriptive representation. Descriptive representation means that councillors are in themselves (i.e. their age, gender, ethnicity, social class, etc.), in the lives that they lead and in their experiences (i.e. interests, professions, family structure etc.), in some sense typical of the larger community they represent. Younger councillors represent younger constituents, small business owners represent other small business owners and so on. In this way descriptive representatives are able to make more appropriate decisions for their electorate (Mansbridge 1999). But the current profile of councillors does not adequately represent all those concerned in decision-making processes. In particular, none of the councillors interviewed came from low-income households and this is reflective of councillors in NSW more generally (Office

of Local Government 2014). The absence of this social group from local decision-making processes is a concern and most likely has implications for councillors' understanding of the issues facing low-income households.

Councillors, the bureaucracy and the community

According to Habermas (1984c), for democracy to function well, communicative action, i.e. the ability for actors to exchange views without the influence of power or money, must occur among stakeholders. The examination of the relationships between councillors and the bureaucracy and the community revealed the various challenges to achieving this objective. One of council's key responsibilities as the governing body of the organisation is to appoint a general manager or GM (*Local Government Act* 1993, s. 223). As illustrated, the GM, as the head of the bureaucracy, is a powerful position. They are jointly responsible with councillors for the development of the community strategic plan which identifies the long-term strategic direction and priorities for the organisation. In addition, they set the parameters of what is discussed at council meetings as they are responsible for putting together the agenda and associated business papers which inform councillor decision-making during council meeting. Finally, they have overall responsibility for running and managing the staff and bureaucracy. I used Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and hysteresis, to examine councillors' experiences of working with the GM. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis it was evident that for some councillors the rules of the field did not align with their habitus. A particular area of dissatisfaction for some councillors was the level of power ascribed in the legislation to the GM. As head of the organisation, the GM's responsibilities include running the bureaucracy, providing councillors with the information they need to make decisions through the council meeting process and carrying out community engagement to determine the strategic objectives for the organisation. Some councillors had strong objections to the behaviour of the GM. They felt that s/he had too much power within the organisation and, related to this, councillors had too little power.

The other key relationship councillors have within the local government system is the one they have with the community or their constituents. My review of the literature revealed that research which analyses the tension between community engagement and

representation is surprisingly sparse (Hendriks & Lees-Marshment 2019). In the NSW context this is particularly important because local governments are required to carry out community engagement in order to develop a long-term community strategic plan to guide the activities of the organisation. This engagement process is led by the bureaucracy. The interviews indicated that councillors can be detached from the community engagement activities which are carried out by council staff to inform the development of the strategic plan. This is a concern because as elected members they are ultimately responsible for the implementation of this plan. Councillors' views about the usefulness of community engagement were mixed and more work could be done to understand how to improve the alignment between these two processes of democratic representation and engagement.

Democracy and decision-making

Finally, the findings of this research provided insight as to how councillors make decisions. At present, research in this area is limited (Sheffer et al. 2018). The analysis of the legislative framework for decision-making by local representatives found that many of the institutional features for decision-making within the local government system in NSW align with Habermas's conception of deliberative democracy. These include the need to consider a diversity of interests, the imperative for elected representatives to find compromises and the requirement to make well-informed decisions through a process of deliberation. In terms of process, council meetings are the formal decision-making mechanisms within the local government system. However, within this context what is evident is that the GM has a great deal of power in terms of shaping decision-making because s/he provides the material required by councillors to reach decisions. The main mechanism GMs use to provide this information is the preparation and distribution of the agenda and accompanying business papers for the council meeting. My examination of these papers demonstrated that the sheer volume of information councillors are expected to read (for example, for one council meeting I examined, elected representatives were expected to read and digest 1,487 pages of information) may make it more difficult for councillors to reach decisions which are in the best interests of their community. In order to understand how councillors make decisions under these conditions, I used Bourdieu's concept of habitus in combination with Simon's concept of bounded rationality. Both indicate that when people are faced with a great deal of material, they will generally pay greater attention to information

with which they are already familiar. As a result politicians may make decisions based on quick gut-level, instinctual, emotional, and moral choices rather than making their decisions solely based on the evidence before them (Cairney & Kwiatkowski 2017). In the face of information overload, therefore, the practice of decision-making by councillors may be far removed from Habermas's ideal of thorough deliberation where the better argument wins.

Implications for policy and further research

This study adds to the small body of analysis which uses Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital to explain why councillors run for office and their homogeneity in terms of gender, race, class and age. My analysis shows that habitus and capital (particularly social and cultural capital) play an important role in shaping a person's motivations to run for local government office. While a person's habitus can change over time, generally speaking, it tends to be stable. The result is that the possibility that an individual may decide to run for office may be determined early in life as a function of their family background and education (Bourdieu 1986, 1990b). In terms of policy responses to address councillor diversity, this finding indicates that we need to think about addressing this challenge very early on in people's lives. I suggest that this may be achieved through the school system, but more research needs to be done on this question. In order to increase the possibility that people from groups who do not traditionally run for elected office (e.g. people from lower socio-economic back grounds, ethnic minorities etc.) consider running, we may think about focussing efforts at primary school level. This type of approach may provide students with the cultural capital necessary to enable them to participate more actively in democracy later in life. However, more work needs to be done to better understand the lack of diversity among councillors. Perhaps a gender and class analysis of the motivations of elected members could prove fruitful in terms of identifying barriers to running for office. Evidence which shows how these barriers may be overcome with particular reference to changing a person's habitus may be hard to find. Nevertheless, these kinds of analysis would inform the development of further research to identify barriers to elected office for minority and/or disadvantaged groups. Further research should be undertaken with female councillors, those from low-income households and councillors from other under-represented groups to understand what in their lives (with a particular emphasis

on the factors that shaped their habitus, i.e. the influence of the family and education) led to them standing for office.

The organisational structure of local government whereby the council appoints a GM to run the organization is called the council manager form (Mouritzen & Svara 2002). While the relationship between elected representatives and the head of the bureaucracy has been relatively well researched in other contexts (see Chapter 6) in NSW, and indeed in Australia, this aspect of the local democratic system remains under-researched. This exploratory study, drawing on in-depth interviews with councillors and GMs, illustrated the difficulties and challenges around this relationship. However, further work needs to be done with a much larger sample of councillors and GMs to understand how they interact and the dynamics of their relationship. In addition, the sector would benefit from the identification and documentation of examples of good practice in this regard. Findings from this further research could inform the development of policy guidelines which focus on improving the working relationships between councillors and the bureaucracy. In addition, there appears to be additional scope to integrate the representative body of local government into community engagement processes so that these two elements of the local government system are better able to support each other. However, the connection between engagement and representation appears to be relatively weak and there is little provision for establishing a strong connection between these two elements in the legislation. In addition, guidance from the NSW Office of Local Government with regard to this matter is limited.

The analysis of the volume of material that councillors must read and digest in order to prepare for council meetings suggests that more work needs to be done to facilitate better decision-making. How councillors actually use the business papers needs further study. Given that it is likely that councillors do not read the business papers in detail, we need to understand which elements of this material they do pay attention to and why, as well as the implications of this selective reading for deliberation and decision-making. In addition, research needs to be done to identify better practice with regard to providing councillors with information. An interesting question is whether there are local government organisations in NSW, in other Australian states or internationally, which have successfully developed better ways of informing their elected representatives so that they are able to make more considered decisions? For example,

some local governments may operate in a similar way to the federal or state cabinet system; councillors could have responsibility for a particular portfolio e.g. parks and recreation, land-use planning, waste management, economic development, etc. This may enable councillors to focus and acquire specialist knowledge and expertise enabling them to make more informed/considered recommendations to their colleagues. What can we learn from these examples that could be applied across the local government sector in NSW?

This thesis has examined the functioning of local democracy using two different, theoretical lenses. The juxtaposition of Habermas and Bourdieu throughout this analysis has provided a valuable mechanism for understanding councillor behaviour within the institutional context of local government in NSW. The results have provided insight as to why councillors behave the way they do, and have pointed to areas for further exploration in order to strengthen local democracy and enable better decision-making by our elected members. This exploratory study has demonstrated that while there is scope to strengthen democracy at the local level, more research and policy work needs to be done in order to enable local government in NSW to fulfil its potential so that it can better represent and serve its communities.

Appendix 1: Local Democracy at Work? Interview Questions

Topic 1: Motivations for becoming a councillor?
- Have you always been interested in politics?
- When did you first decide you wanted to become involved in local government?
- What were your primary influences?
- What other role such as community service, volunteering, church/religious, sporting groups do you perform in your community?

Topic 2: Elected members' perceptions of local democracy?
- Do you think your council is democratic?
- Do you think councillors represent the whole community, their party or particular interests/groups?
- How should local democracy function?
- What are the mechanisms for facilitating democracy? How do you go about facilitating and strengthening local democracy?

Topic 3: Role and function of councillors
- How do you view your role as a councillor? What are you main responsibilities/tasks?
- What are your primary objectives?
- Do your fellow councillors have similar views?
- Tell me about the division between a strategic role for elected members and their role in making more day to day, operational decisions? Does this mean anything to you if so what? How does it work in practice?
- What contributions/achievements are you most proud of in your role as a councillor?

Topic 4: The functioning of the council
- How does your council function as a group?
- How are decisions made among councillors?

Topic 5: How elected members view their role and function in the context of the new legislation?
- What is your understanding of what legislation says is the role of a councillor? What do you think about this?
- What do you think are the main functions of a councillor under current legislation? Have you got a sense of how this has changed over time?
- What are the advantages, disadvantages of having a fewer number of councils in NSW?

Topic 6: Conceptualising and going about community engagement
- What is the role of residents/the community in a democracy?
- What has been your role in general in the development and implementation of the Community Strategic Plan? What should the role of a councillor be in the development and implementation of this plan?

Topic 7: Demographic data

- Age
- Gender
- Education
- Profession
- Length of time as a councillor
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander
- In which country were you born?
- Marital status
- Number of dependents at home

Type of council

- Number of councillors
- Rural/Regional/Metro

Appendix 2: Participant information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
Local Democracy at Work?

UTS Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: ETH17-1146

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Su Fei Tan and I am undertaking PhD at the University of Technology Sydney.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is to find out how locally elected representatives view their role in the context of the legislative changes on the role of councillors. It also examines how councillors engage with their community.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

If you say yes to participating in the research I will ask you to participate in an in-depth interview (see questions attached). This should not take longer than an hour to complete and with your consent will be audio-recorded. When the research is written up you will not be identified. In addition to the PhD thesis, the research may be used for conference papers, academic papers, and reports.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

There are very few if any risks because the research has been carefully designed. However, it is possible that you could find a question uncomfortable in which case you are under no obligation to answer the question concerned.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

You have been approached because you are a local government councillor.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

No, participation in this research is voluntary.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

You don't have to say yes to participating, and if you say no, there are no consequences and you will not be contacted again about this research.

IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind at any time and don't have to say why. I will thank you for your time so far and you will not be contacted again about this research.

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 me Su Fei Tan, email: sufei.tan@uts.edu.au telephone [redacted] or my supervisor Alan Morris, email: alan.morris@uts.edu.au, telephone 9514 4880.

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 ETH17-1146. Any matter raised will be treated confidentially, investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix 3: Ethics consent form

CONSENT FORM
Local Democracy at Work? ETH17-1146

I ____________________ agree to participate in the research project Local Democracy at Work? (*UTS HREC approval number ETH17-1146)* being conducted by Su Fei Tan, UTS PhD candidate, Institute of Public Policy and Governance, UTS, mobile [redacted].

I understand that the purpose of this study is to examine the role of councillors within the context of local government reforms. This research aims to understand how councillors view their roles and what they think about democracy.

I understand that I have been asked to participate in this research because I am a local government councillor and have an indicated a willingness to participate. Participation in this research will involve a semi-structured interview of about 45 minutes in length which will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Su Fei Tan will take all steps possible to ensure that the data and presentation of the analysis is de-identified. There is a very small possibility that I could find a question unsettling. If the interview evokes any distress it will be terminated.

I am aware that I can contact Su Fei Tan if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that Su Fei Tan has answered all my questions fully and clearly.

____ ____/____/____
Name and Signature (participant) Date

____ ____/____/____
Name and Signature (researcher or delegate) Date

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.

Appendix 4: Ethics approval email from HREC, received 8 March 2017

Dear Applicant

Thank you for your response to the Committee's comments for your project titled, "Local Democracy at Work". Your response satisfactorily addresses the concerns and questions raised by the Committee who agreed that the application now meets the requirements of the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). I am pleased to inform you that ethics approval is now granted.

Your approval number is UTS HREC REF NO. ETH17-1146.

Approval will be for a period of five (5) years from the date of this correspondence subject to the provision of annual reports.

Your approval number must be included in all participant material and advertisements. Any advertisements on the UTS Staff Connect without an approval number will be removed.

Please note that the ethical conduct of research is an on-going process. The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans requires us to obtain a report about the progress of the research, and in particular about any changes to the research which may have ethical implications. This report form must be completed at least annually from the date of approval, and at the end of the project (if it takes more than a year). The Ethics Secretariat will contact you when it is time to complete your first report.

I also refer you to the AVCC guidelines relating to the storage of data, which require that data be kept for a minimum of 5 years after publication of research. However, in NSW, longer retention requirements are required for research on human subjects with potential long-term effects, research with long-term environmental effects, or research considered of national or international significance, importance, or controversy. If the data from this research project falls into one of these categories, contact University Records for advice on long-term retention.

You should consider this your official letter of approval. If you require a hardcopy please contact Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au.

To access this application, please follow the URLs below:
* if accessing within the UTS network: https://rm.uts.edu.au
* if accessing outside of UTS network: https://vpn.uts.edu.au , and click on " RM6 – Production " after logging in.

We value your feedback on the online ethics process. If you would like to provide feedback please go to: http://surveys.uts.edu.au/surveys/onlineethics/index.cfm

If you have any queries about your ethics approval, or require any amendments to your research in the future, please do not hesitate to contact Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Beata Bajorek
Chairperson
UTS Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Research & Innovation Office
University of Technology, Sydney
E: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au

Appendix 5: Extracts from reflective notes

Pseudonym	Type of Council	Date of the Interview	Location	Quality	Comments
Alexander	Rural	18 April 2017	Alexander's home	7/10	Interview was long and a bit rambling I am very pregnant and this is my first interview Mike is an older retired man from xxx - I explained that my husband is also from xxx.
Ava	Rural	26 April 2017	Written answers followed up by a face to face interview in Ava's home	8/10	I am very pregnant, Ava tells me she is also expecting. Ava had pre-prepared responses to the interview questions and sent them to me in an email. She was busy at the time of the interview looking after two children and getting ready for the council meeting later that week so there are a few interruptions from children and other councillors calling to discuss matters before the council meeting takes place but Ava does not seem to mind the busy-ness/chaos.
Benjamin	Regional	27 July 2018	National Library	7/10	Interview was long and the first I have done for over a year. Benjamin felt comfortable in the library as he explained he had spent time here researching family history and while his son was studying. I got the impression that he was not very comfortable having the interview recorded and may have left out some details to avoid his data being identified later on.
Liam	Metro Council	15 Jan 2019	Over the telephone	7/10	The interview was carried out in two parts as Liam was interrupted by an unexpected visitor. I don't think this affected the quality of the interview, in fact it may have improved it as I had started asking questions so he had an idea of the content I was focussing on and he had some time to reflect on this before we started again. He placed great emphasis on the lack of support or policy direction from state government and how often state government actually undermines local government. As an architect he had a great deal of knowledge about urban planning and the DA process.

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