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Editorial

Community psychology has concerned itself with social policy since its inception at Swampscott going on for thirty years ago. The range of social policies that have been addressed has been wide and this is increasing (Speer, Dey, Griggs, Gibson, Lubin & Hughey, 1992). There has been a shift away from mental health towards consideration of a broader range of social issues, such as homelessness, AIDS, drug addiction, poverty and violent crime.

This edition is devoted to one such emerging area of psychology’s involvement in setting policy. Social Impact Assessment has grown as a concern of social scientists in the US quite markedly, and is starting to emerge in Australia. Geoff Syme is the guest editor. He has been active in promoting social impact assessment in Australia, and also in developing an awareness among decision makers about the need of involving the public in decision making.

Most of the articles are written by psychologists, but there are contributions by people from other professions. The inclusion of these other professions is done in the spirit of community psychologist’s conception of encouraging the “specialist generalist”. It is also done because of the reality that other professions have been in the field longer than us and we can learn from them.

Guest Editorial
Geoff Syme

There are signs that the age of the "economic rationalist" is on the wane. In areas of policy decision making, it is becoming evident that there needs to be consideration of other factors than pure economics. In areas of environmental management and resource allocation it has been our experience that decision makers are increasingly utilising on social input, although this has been from a low base. This increase has not come without some cost. We have had to lose our psychological purity. To convince economists and planners of the value of social science input, we need to be able to speak enough of their language to be able to convince them that we are relevant.

There appears to be a window of opportunity in Social Impact Assessment and Public Participation (there is a clear distinction between these two areas). Both areas have the potential for considerable growth. CSIRO is increasingly involved in both areas. Australian environmental protection legislation tends to be based on the America National Environmental Protection Act, and as such have considerable emphasis on social impacts. Public participation is becoming a buzz word in bureaucracy. Community psychology is uniquely placed to increase its involvement in these areas, because of our conceptual framework, and because of our methodologies.

SIA impact assessment has some similarity to evaluation, although ideally, SIA is involved in the process earlier and stays longer. Many of the methodologies are similar. The contextually based approach that characterises community psychology underpins SIA.

What is SIA? Basically, SIA is the assessment of the consequences of generally large scale social change (although Drew (this edition) argues for the need to consider smaller changes). SIA is generally performed in association with Environmental Impact Assessment and has traditionally been related to major developments, such as new mines, new housing developments and the like. The process generally involves the following steps:

- Scoping- what are the range of issues involved with a proposed change.
- Problem identification- what are the range of expected problems and what is causing them.
- Alternatives formulations- what are the other possibilities, ie.
different sites.
Profiling- who will be affected.
Assessment and evaluation- what are the impacts of the alternatives and how will the community react. What are the possible trade-offs.
Mitigation- What are the unavoidable adverse impacts and can they be lessened.
Monitoring- How good were our predictions?
Management- Ongoing management and review of the impacts and mitigations.
Finally, who are the winners and losers.

In this edition we have a contribution from Audrey Armour, who is recognised as a world leader in this field. Drew discusses the nature of impacts, and what level we should concern ourselves with. Sherie Coakes examines the relevance of current psychological theory to participation. Bishop warns of doom and gloom (as usual) and he and I discuss the opportunities for our discipline in this area.

One final point that emerges out of becoming involved in social policy is that of ethics. The ethical stances of APsS are more relevant to individual therapy. In this domain, it is extremely important to develop a strong ethical stance that are based on a recognition that while there is often considerable amounts of money at stake, it is in everyone's interests that the researcher is intendant of all vested interests. Even proponents interests are best served by the researcher rigid impartiality, even though they might not see it at the time. SIA reports are usually open to public scrutiny and to be effective, the process has to be open. The researcher has to be able to withstand bitter attacks from many parties, as it is a rare development that is not welcomed by all.

Another ethical consideration that arise out of this type of research is that of providing best guesses even when there is not a substantial research base. The ethical dilemma is do we provide input into decision making when our evidence is sketchy or incomplete, or do we abstain recognising from that decisions will be made in the absence of any social input. It is only through confronting this dilemma that one can appreciate the need for social sciences to be actively engaged in policy making.
SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT: IS THIS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGISTS?

Geoff Syme and Brian Bishop
CSIRO, Perth

There have been a number of psychologists who have advocated the involvement of our profession in Social Impact Assessment (SIA) (Armstrong, 1981; Meissen and Cipriani, 1984). Since then there has not been an overwhelming response to the challenge. In this article we restate the need for psychologists to be involved, and we examine the unique opportunities offered to community psychologists.

SIA does not have a strong theoretical base. It has developed out of practice and there is little incentive for practitioners to spend time developing theory. It is rare for a consultation to have built in follow-up. But there is considerable need for this long term focus. Without follow-up there is little feedback to the profession about how effective the SIA process has been and how well the predictions served the community.

Much SIA is based on previous exemplars and the literature tends to be dominated by case studies rather than theoretical issues. While this may be due to the importance attached to the context, there is a need for the development of conceptual theories. While this approach is partially consistent with Wicker's call for substantive theory (1989), community psychology, and psychology in general, does have a theoretical bases that can be could be incorporated into SIA. Drew and Coakes (this issue) indicate some avenues for theoretical development.

For example, theories of empowerment are of relevance to SIA. There is a heavy reliance on public participation in SIA methodology but and nature of extent of this involvement is in debate. The extremes of the argument can be characterised as follows. Some SIA practitioners see public participation as SIA. The public is seen as the final arbiter and the professionals role is one of providing them with information from which they can make informed decisions. Others see public involvement as a means to an end. People are seen as being only partially able to estimate what the effects a development will have, and as such are to be used as data points in a broader picture that involves professional judgements.
This debate suffers from a lack of a clear understanding of what involvement is. Issues of who gets involved is paramount. Are those who get involved just the "squeaky wheels" that bureaucracy tend to oil, or are they representative of the community at large? This issue has been addressed by psychologists (e.g. Wandersman, Florin, Friedmann & Meier, 1987). Community psychology is an appropriate discipline to deal with these issues, as decisions about the extent to which those involved in public participation programs are representative of the community is not purely a statistical question, but one involving a concept of community. The statistical question would be one of whether the sample is random or appropriately stratified to represent all individuals in the community. This assumes that community consists of the aggregation of so many isolated and independent individuals. Any theory of community would indicate that it is a dynamic entity and that there are opinion leaders and makers who can be seen as key informants.

Moreover, a community perspective of participation also involves the question of what inhibits people from involvement in political participation. This involves questions such as: Are there aspects of the bureaucracy that interfere with open involvement? Is there a history of cooption and control of the involvement process that gives the community a jaundiced view?

There is also the issue of what is participation. Bureaucrats tend to define participation in a narrow sense. It is seen as involvement in the political process of decision making about issues that concern the bureaucrats. From a sense of community perspective, participation is the process that helps give people a meaning to their lives. It does not necessarily involve political decision making at a formal level. Participation involves relating to family, coworkers and people in the street. It used also to mean involvement in rituals and ceremonies of which we have largely lost understanding.

Meissen and Cipriani (1984) pointed to the pivotal role psychologists could play because of their understanding of clinical psychology. While this might appear to be an anathema, psychology's understanding of the aetiology of pathology, stress and coping strategies on individual and broader levels is invaluable for predicting the effects of some adverse impacts, such as forced relocation. These principles would be useful in identifying both the expected types of problems that might be encountered, the way in which these effects
can be mitigated, and what might be the long term effects.

An integral aspect of what community psychology can uniquely contribute comes from our integration of sociology, anthropology and psychology. Throgmorton (1991) has indicated that the lack of understanding between the scientific community, politicians and decision makers and community advocates comes from misunderstandings of the rhetoric and constraints governing each realm. For example, politicians are governed by considerations of time, confidentiality and community impression management. Scientists are concerned with "truth", objectivity and reliability. Their discourse is formal and is targeted at the ubiquitous sceptical but well informed lay person.

"This scholarly stance has important consequences. As Klamer and Callander show for academic economists, many scientists pay little attention to the complexities of the 'real world', partly because they fear that extensive contact with that world will compromise the integrity of their work, partly because those complexities make it impossible to solve problems with mathematical models, and partly because attending to real problems is typically defined within disciplines as selling out, or moving away from serious work or risking tenure" (p. 158).

Throgmorton provides the following Venn diagram to show the intersection of these realms. He reanalysed the Love Canal hazardous waste situation and shows the role of mediators who can act at the interface of these spheres of influence. We would argue that community psychology is ideally situated to adopt the role of active mediator, issues advocate or client advocate. SIA has generally been seen in the scientists domain but in practice it falls into the interfaces of the political, advocate and scientist domains. The problems experienced by SIA practitioners, especially those who come from and environmental science background are often those related to being able to make the transition between the domains.

Moving between these domains requires considerable people skills. The difficulties faced by those without people skills in SIA and public involvement programs are great, and usually they vent their frustrations by belittling the community. One particular agency asked us to design a program of public involvement for them because they had experienced previous problems in planning. They were not
convinced that there was any real role for the community in planning, but could not face another hostile community who treated them as idiots. In other projects, we have found that clients display bravado initially when it comes to dealing with the community, but will often become overly concerned and defensive with the community. This seems to stem from a lack of confidence in dealing with the community. It often appears that comments that involving the public in SIA is a waste of time, stems from a lack of faith in the ultimate sensibility of the community. This can lead to a lack of willingness to be open, which is perceived by the community as duplicitous action. The lack of trust of the community feeds the community suspicions and can create, or further fuel divisions between the proponents of developments and project and the community.

The benefits of conceptualising social issues using paradigms such as empowerment and the ecological perspective give community psychologists real advantages in recognising this source of mistrust. The situations we find ourselves having to deal with in SIA and public involvement are not dissimilar to the dynamics discussed in Veno and Veno (1992), for example. By recognising that what we have learned from the variety of situations that community psychology has been involved in, we can also recognise that these principles are applicable to policy development in environmental spheres.

References:


THE CHALLENGE OF ASSESSING SOCIAL IMPACTS

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Introduction

Traditionally, sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists have played little more than a relatively minor role, if any, in planning and development processes. However, over the past two decades, this has been slowly changing. One primary reason for this was the institutionalisation of requirements to conduct comprehensive impact assessments. Proponents are now required to assess the potential impacts of their proposed undertakings, including possible social impacts, as a basis for decision making regarding whether to proceed with the planned development and, if so, what conditions ought to be put in place to prevent or minimise any potentially adverse effects. As a result, social impact studies are becoming a common component of planning processes.

For various reasons, the integration of social science into the planning and development arena has not been a smooth process. And, despite the progress that has been made over the past twenty years, the road ahead is still quite tortuous.

The Nature of Social Impacts

The purpose of a social impact assessment is to determine, for a specific development proposal, what kinds of social impacts are likely to occur, to assess their significance, and to identify measures that may help to avoid or minimise negative effects.

There are many definitions of 'social impacts'. However, it is commonly agreed that social impacts are changes that occur in:

- people's way of life (how they live, work, play and interact with one another on a day-to-day basis),
- their culture (shared beliefs, customs and values), and/or
- their community (its cohesion, stability, character, services and facilities)

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as a result of the development and implementation of a proposed undertaking, and that are experienced by these people as significant events.

With any project, some of the potential social changes will be regarded as necessary and/or desired. Undertakings are usually planned to meet an identified need and to contribute positively to people's well-being. It is the unintended and undesired effects - those changes that create hardships, result in a loss of the use and enjoyment of home and property, or disrupt the way of life of people or a community - that are the main focus of social impact assessment.

Four key factors determine the nature and significance of potential social impacts:

1. **the nature of the proposed undertaking:** each undertaking will have its own set of potentially adverse effects associated with construction, operation and closure.

2. **the characteristics of the people and communities involved:** the specific nature and significance of social impacts depends to a large extent on the sociological characteristics of the potentially affected population - the population's structure and distribution, patterns of daily activity, modes of interaction, community character, economic base, development goals, and available services and facilities.

3. **the attitudes and perceptions of the people likely to be affected and their willingness to accommodate the proposed project:** Regardless of the undertaking, social impacts depend ultimately on people's perceptions and the response they choose to make. Impacts that are perceived to be significant are likely to be responded to as such. Moreover, if people come to feel that they have been treated unfairly, their concerns have not been and/or are not likely to be adequately addressed, or key issues remain unresolved, they are likely to perceive the proposed undertaking and its potential impacts more negatively which, in turn, will influence their response.

4. **the kinds of impact management measures put in place to deal with potential adverse effects:** impact management
measures generally fall into four categories: mitigation measures which aim to prevent or reduce adverse effects; compensation measures which aim to offset unmitigable effects; contingency measures which aim to aid in the detection of and timely response to potential problems; and community relations measures which aim to ensure ongoing effective two-way communication and joint-problem solving to resolve concerns and issues.

On the surface of it, social impact assessment would seem to be a relatively straightforward task. It seldom is.

At its most basic level, impact assessment can be defined as simply a form of 'cause and effect' analysis. A proposed project is assessed to determine whether it will 'cause' any adverse 'impacts'. This conceptualisation of impact assessment belies the complexities that are often involved in assessing social (or environmental or economic) change. It is misleading to think that any proposed project, in and of itself, can 'cause' social impacts. Rather, such impacts are more likely to be the result of a complex interplay between many factors - the proposed project, other developments proposed or underway in the community, on-going social change processes and, as noted above, people's ability and willingness to accept and adapt to changing conditions (a function of their perceptions, attitudes, values and life circumstances).

The challenge, in assessing social impacts, is to gain an understanding of not only how a proposed project (or its alternatives) will change existing social conditions but also how other factors are likely to influence those conditions and how the proposed project relates to those factors. What changes are likely to occur in any case as a result of ongoing social processes or other proposed developments? What changes are likely to result directly from the proposed project? And what are the implications of one for the other?

But it is more than methodological complexity that makes social impact assessment a challenge.

Demands on the Professions

Responding to the call for social impact assessment has not been easy for the social science community. Cernea (1985) identified two key...
factors which have tended to limit the ability of social scientists to contribute effectively to planning and decision-making processes:

Sociologists and anthropologists (and psychologists, Ed.) have little familiarity with the planning process or with the administrative, political and bureaucratic settings of decision-making and resource allocation. They have difficulty inserting their activities effectively in such machinery. And, sociology and anthropology have primarily endeavoured to explain and describe past or existing social structures, rather than look toward the future and project change. They have therefore had little chance to cultivate the conceptual and methodological instruments for planning rural development (p. 9).

Put simply, the professional social scientists were generally ill-equipped to do the kinds of analyses and provide the kind of advice relevant to project planning and impact assessment. Although considerable progress has been made in adapting social science concepts and methods to the rigorous demands of impact assessment and project planning, there is still much to be learned about factoring the so-called 'soft' issues into the decision making framework in a way that ensures such issues are given consideration on par with the more traditional 'hard' criteria.

The problem of integrating social science theory and methods into decision-making processes is not one-sided, however. Engineers, biologists, resource managers, land use planners, and other professionals have generally underrated the relevance of sociology/social anthropology to their efforts. As Cernea (1985) put it, "They remain unprepared to cooperate with the social experts, do not know what to ask from them, and are unaware of what they are entitled, as technical specialists, to receive from the social specialist (p. 18)." The likelihood of this continuing for much longer is low. The increasing intensity and pervasiveness of facility siting conflicts has underscored the high liability associated with sidelining the social sciences in project planning and assessment.

Locally Unwanted Land Uses and Social Impacts

Over the past decade, facility siting has become increasingly conflict-ridden. Although this has been most evident for waste management facilities, all kinds of facilities - group homes, dams, power plants,
transmission lines, hospitals, MacDonald restaurants - have been blocked or delayed as a result of local opposition.

Such facilities have been labelled 'locally unwanted land uses' or LULUs. As Popper (1987) noted, 'these are facilities which always threaten their surroundings by inflicting, or promising to inflict, negative externalities on them' (p. 3). One other characteristic makes such facilities 'unwanted' - they are inherently inequitable in their distribution of costs and benefits. The benefits of such facilities are usually broadly distributed but most of the costs tend to be localised.

Arguably every land use could be called a LULU in that it is likely to impose some cost on someone. What distinguishes a real LULU from other land uses are two things: first, the costs it imposes are environmental in the broadest sense and second, the opposition generally constitutes a substantial body of local opinion, although it may not reflect majority opinion (Popper, 1987).

The high saliency of social issues in facility siting conflicts has opened up many windows of opportunity for the social science community. Unfortunately, at the same time it has also made the challenge of assessing social impacts harder to meet. Assessing the social impacts of LULUs is much more difficult than for other kinds of projects for at least three reasons.

First, in addition to the usual array of social effects associated with any development project, it is also necessary to take into account the kinds of effects that can result from the specific characteristics or LULUs - the threat or risk they pose (both calculated and perceived) and the inequity they entail. Fears about the project’s potential impacts and risks and concerns about equity can lead to feelings of loss of control, depression and on-going stress and anxiety for some individuals. Such reactions, while subjective and perceptual, can result in real consequences for the individuals involved, their families and their community. If prolonged, they can seriously diminish a person’s physical and psychological well-being. This, in turn, can create financial hardships and strain family relationships. The affected residents may come to feel dissatisfied with their community and they may withdraw from community activities or simply move out, thus potentially weakening the community’s cohesion and stability. Currently, it is extremely difficult to predict such socio-psychological effects with the degree of confidence necessary to determine their
relative significance for different individuals and groups. At best, a social impact assessment can only provide an indication of what is likely to happen and why, given the sociological characteristics of the people and communities involved and their attitudes, values and lifestyle expectations.

Second, and following from the above, attitudes and perceptions often become the dominant factor determining the nature and significance of predicted social impacts. At present, there is no consensus on how attitudes and perceptions should be taken into account in assessing social impacts. Should they be treated as independent (attitudes affect the project), dependent (the project affects the attitudes) or intervening (attitudes change over time) variables? The question is a significant one since the answer affects the role given to attitudes and perceptions in the analysis of social impacts. My own experience with LULUs suggests that, in the context of facility siting, attitudes and perceptions are very dynamic and can change significantly over the course of the project planning and approval process. This has implications for the timing of attitude surveys done in the context of an SIA and suggests that surveys should be conducted at several points in the planning and assessment process (e.g. at minimum, both before and after site selection announcements).

And third, when LULUs are involved, the potential for social impacts to occur is not just a function of the project but also a function of the project approval process. The longer it takes for the approval process to reach a conclusion, the more likely it is that people will experience adverse psychological impacts simply as a result of on-going anxiety and stress due to the uncertainty of their situation. Fear and anxiety can also be heightened as a result of the way in which people are dealt with in the approvals process - whether they are given information in a form they can understand and when they need it most, whether they feel that their concerns are understood and are being addressed, etc. It is difficult in the context of a social impact assessment to separate impacts related to the project from impacts related to the process - people's attitudes and perceptions of the process often influence their attitudes and perceptions of the project (Armour, unpb).

The social impact assessment task becomes further complicated when the LULU is to be located in a rural or hinterland area, as is often the case with waste management facilities, energy projects, and resource
extraction industries. The additional complication does not stem from the substantive differences between rural or hinterland and other social settings. In other words, it is not related to the 'ruralness' or 'remoteness' of the setting. Although the specific concerns of people in rural or remote settings will be different from those in urban settings, the categories of concern will generally be the same - social effects (such as way of life, cultural traditions, community cohesion, community stability, community character), risk and inequity.

The complication results from a fourth factor that tends to arise when LULUs are located in rural environments. That factor is justice. It is not uncommon for residents of rural or hinterland communities to feel that they are the victims of exploitation by urban/industrial interests.

From the point of view of rural and hinterland residents, the site selection process for LULUs often appears to be inherently biased towards the selection of less populated areas - areas which are also often less affluent and politically powerful. They point to the fact that population number is often used as a criterion in site selection - the fewer people the better - a factor which inevitably directs the site search to rural or remote areas. Moreover, it is not unusual for the community to suspect that the reason it was chosen for the LULU is because it is relatively powerless. It is difficult, if not impossible, to prove or disprove that the siting decision was motivated by such social bias. Thus, the concern usually festers and adds to people's anxiety and stress.

Thus, in rural and remote areas, the equity concern (that the costs to the local area inevitably outweigh the benefits to the local area) becomes extended into a concern with justice (that the inequitable distribution of cost and benefits is at the expense of the relatively more disadvantaged in society). Few proponents have been willing or able to grapple with either issue. While facility proponents routinely articulate objectives with respect to service, impact, risk and cost, siting decisions are usually made without a deliberate and explicit consideration of equity and justice. The unresolved issues, thus, inevitably surface in the context of social impact assessment.

Conclusion

It is unlikely that these problems will be resolved even before the end of the decade. They are too fundamental to be amenable to a quick
fix. However, recognition of the special set of problems created by LULUs is an important first step. And recognition that the resolution of these problems is not something that a social science professional, regardless of how competent he or she may be, can accomplish alone is the essential second step. More than ever, breaking down the disciplinary barriers that are now so common in project planning teams between the hard and soft professions, will be a critical determinant of success.

References


This article addresses the contribution of the social sciences, and in particular Psychology, to planning. The role of social science theory in the development of social impact assessment (SIA) and public participation, and the relation of SIA to Environmental impact assessment, are discussed. It is argued that SIA needs to establish an independent theoretical framework which not only involves the assessment of impact, but also the processes involved.

Introduction

A feature which appears to distinguish the planning approach from that of other scientific disciplines is that planning, as primarily a generalist activity, must examine development from a number of different viewpoints, and must attempt to integrate these into planning decisions.

Although an extensive body of literature exists on the relationships between planning decisions and the impact of these decisions on communities, researchers from a number of different disciplines have failed to capitalise on the insights offered by other perspectives. Consequently the development of theoretically-driven and methodologically sound research has been poor.

Over the years, the social sciences have made quite a contribution to the broad area of planning. One discipline, in particular, which has the knowledge and methods of use to planning professionals is that of Psychology, particularly the areas of environmental, social, organisational and community psychology. The contribution of psychology to this area is two-fold. Firstly psychology provides an array of established theories which may be usefully applied, but which also provide the building blocks for future research. Psychological interventions have a broad range focus from the individual to the organisation to the community. Secondly, if we are to improve the quality of the environment in which we live and work, and if we are to plan and design environments to meet the needs of their occupants, it is necessary to have an understanding of both the physical and the
social environment. Psychology provides the methodological skills and expertise that are central to both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of social impact assessment and public involvement.

Social Impact Assessment

The area of social impact assessment (SIA) has developed largely as an element of the broader process of environmental impact assessment (EIA), and may be defined as a process which seeks to estimate "all significant impacts of potential policies, programs or projects on individuals, groups, organisations, neighbourhoods, countries, institutions and other social units" (Finsterbusch, 1985, p.194).

In more recent years the area of social impact assessment has become more prominent within environmental impact assessment largely due to a growing dissatisfaction with planning and development processes on the part of everyone involved - planners, developers, interest groups and communities. Such a process offers social scientists a vehicle to engage in prevention and intervention across a wide range of human concerns, making development not only good for developers and planning authorities but also good for the communities who live with it.

However, despite the apparent usefulness of SIA in identifying the positive and negative aspects of development, its use in the planning process has been relatively inconsistent (Burdge, 1987). It is suggested that in order for SIA to contribute more effectively to impact assessment as a whole it must address a number of important issues. These issues include an absence of theory and method, the role of the impacted community, and SIA's often limited capacity to regulate the development process (Wildman, 1985).

Within the area of SIA numerous case studies exist. These studies clearly lack an organising framework or methodology, and there appears to be little theoretical development or any commonly accepted orientation to the field.

A further concern is the role of the impacted community in the SIA process. To a large degree, SIA still remains embedded within its sister discipline, EIA, and as yet has failed to emerge as an important independent party. Consequently there are few social impact studies that have effectively assessed how positive and negative impacts affect
individuals of different subgroups in the community, and frequently SIAs are written without adequate awareness of community concerns or community involvement.

In the past, the areas of SIA and public involvement have been relatively isolated and it is only more recently that the interrelationships between the two areas have been highlighted. Public involvement is now seen by many planning authorities and developers to be both a necessary and an integral part of the SIA process.

Involving the Public - Public Participation

Despite the extensive literature written within the area of public involvement, there appears to be no coherent body of ideas which may be labelled 'participation theory'. No clear set of questions or answers exists which defines the nature of participation, and the participation literature includes a plethora of undefined terms and characteristically lacks explicitly stated theoretical frameworks. In addition, the questions that are asked about participation, and the answers that are sought, are shaped by various paradigms which come from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, economics, political science and law. As a result, a proliferation of concepts and a divergence of theoretical views exist cutting across both micro and macro issues (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978).

Research within the area of participation outlines an array of issues which need to be addressed. These range from specifying operational definitions of participation in particular contexts, to a consideration of the process and functions of participatory mechanisms (Dick, 1987). A further area of concern in the literature considers the users of participation. What motivates participation? (McKenzie, 1981). Who participates and why? (Gundry & Heberlein, 1984). How representative is participation of the general population? (Hutcheson, 1984). How can participation be facilitated? In relation to this last issue, the social interaction which occurs between the public and the planning authority or developer is very important. It has been suggested that acknowledgment of public attitudes and beliefs may actually help facilitate the participation process (Carlisle, 1987).

Wandersman (1979) has indicated that cooperative participatory mechanisms between the public and 'experts' are possible and in
many cases preferred. To achieve this, it may be necessary for the planning process to become more responsive to the public's values by making planning judgements explicit and less technical (Stewart, Dennis & Ely, 1984). In addition more effective means are required for the public to become involved in the development process. This focus on public perceptions of the planning process is clearly an important one, and is an area which requires further research.

Other issues which appear to be salient in the literature include:

1) When to involve the public in the planning process and at what level should involvement occur?
2) What degree of participation is desirable and feasible?
3) Which segments of the public should participate?
4) What participatory mechanisms are the most appropriate and effective in given situations, for both the authority/developer and the community.

It is therefore important that practitioners working within the areas of SIA and public involvement are aware of who participates in decision making, and which procedures are the most appropriate and effective in involving the public. It is also necessary to determine which procedures are preferred and accepted by the community in different contexts.

The Future of SIA and Public Involvement

In the last ten to fifteen years, changes in the nature of planning have seen planning authorities and developers increasingly required to conduct assessment in the context of values and concerns expressed by the public. As a result, the area of public involvement has developed in order to provide a means for information exchange, and a context for the interpretation and understanding of the effects of impacts of development on communities. In addition when selecting and implementing effective public involvement programs, participant perceptions of the fairness of these programs are very important. If participants perceive that such programs are being used to provide only token input or as a means of co-opting groups, then often the outcomes of such programs are sabotaged or discredited (Freudenberg, 1986). As SIA specifically is filled with attempts to objectively define distributional impacts, we need to understand the perceptions of affected parties otherwise our own views of what is 'acceptable' to the
community are likely to be inaccurate. Therefore within the areas of SIA and public involvement, concerns of justice and equity in both the process and outcome of decision making have a renewed importance.

In relation to the above concerns we also need to be aware of those groups in society who tend to be least effective in using public involvement programs. If organised interest groups, only, are allowed to effectively influence decision making, then such input will only serve to reinforce rather than counterbalance inequities. The planning process must therefore address many 'publics'.

The justice literature in general, which examines how individuals perceive the fairness of the processes and outcomes of decision making, opens up a new research agenda within the areas of SIA and public involvement. This important link may help eliminate much of the uncertainty which currently exists in these areas, concerning the important questions of who participates in decision making and which procedures are perceived to be the most fair in different situations.

In order to integrate SIA and public involvement new frameworks are needed to define planning. In the past planning research and practice has tended to place a much higher priority on rational or incremental approaches to planning which attempt to attain and implement the objectively 'best' planning solution (Syme & Bishop, 1991). However, increasingly a move towards more transactive and advocacy approaches to planning are seeing more face to face contact between affected parties and planners and developers, as well as action determined by the discussion and results of interest groups.

Conclusion

There appear to be many changes in store for SIA and public involvement due to a growing awareness within the community that the public can become a part of the change process. Within both areas there is an increased interest in social measurement and support for the inclusion of community values and preferences.

As Martin (1970) has suggested, the concept of community is still deeply embedded in our thinking. Urban planners, for example, continue to think of cities as systems of local subgroups or communities. Planning authorities do, it seems, have notions of community which enter into various stages of their planning activity.
While their central concern is development, most authorities and developers realise that there is more to ‘community’ than this. A crucial aspect of ‘community’ which needs to be addressed by those involved in community development, is the extent to which social relationships, social ties, or a ‘sense of community identity’ plays a part in the planning process. If community attachment is an important factor in the life of individuals, then these communities and social networks should be receiving greater consideration in the planning of new living environments.

There still appears to be much we do not know about SIA and public involvement. However, this is where the opportunity exists for research to link the areas and provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of societal change. This change does not only refer to large scale project development but may also apply to both local and regional infrastructure facilities such as water, roads, power, transport etc... Public involvement within SIA is relevant at all project levels.

It is therefore apparent that more research is required which focuses on these important areas. Such research may bring us closer to developing optimal models of SIA and public involvement within differing contexts, and may lead to a greater understanding of the planning and development process as a whole.

References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development of National Competency Standards for the Psychological Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A copy of a brief synopsis of the project and its history was enclosed with this edition of Network. The Board of Community Psychologists have been asked to participate at a number of stages by the steering committee who are working on setting the criteria. This we did with some reservations. The Board felt that as community psychology is an emerging discipline with theories and practices that vary considerably from traditional psychology, any set of performance criteria designed for all psychologists might not be appropriate for community psychologists.</td>
</tr>
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<td>This concern was confirmed when draft criteria were circulated for comment. The Executive of the Board sent a detailed response to the steering group. Again we expressed the view that many of the criteria were inappropriate for community psychologists and that the criteria reflected a somewhat rigid academic concern for experimentation and the scientist-practitioner model. We also expressed concern that once standards had been set they might be immutable.</td>
</tr>
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<td>More detail of the steering committee's activities can be obtained from Prof. Kevin McConkey through Heather Tatnell on (008) 333497. Details of what the Board's responses can be obtained from Shirley Pellegrini on (09) 387-0242.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTEMPLATING THE KING MIDAS TOUCH IN REVERSE

Brian Bishop

A central theme of this book is that the social context from which a new setting emerges, as well as the thinking of those who create new settings, reflects what seems "natural" in the society. And what seems natural is almost a function of the culture to a degree that usually renders us incapable of recognising wherein we are prisoners of the culture. Those who create new settings always want to do something new, usually unaware that they armed with, and will subsequently be disarmed by, categories of thought which help produce the conditions the new setting hopes to remedy. (While) I accept the proposition that the more things change the more they remain the same, it is not because people will it or because of the perversity of the human personality but primarily because of what we think to be "natural", that is, so a part of us that it is inconceivable that things could otherwise. Nowhere is this more clearly the case than in the creation of a new setting. (Sarason, p. xii-xiii)

Sarason's comment is applicable to the creation and development of the practice of social impact assessment and public participation. Settings refer to structured organisations or conglomerations of people or ideas. A setting can be a partnership (social or business) through to formal and informal organisations or groups. Settings also refer to the ideology of groups of people and in identifying public participation as a promotable activity it becomes a setting.

In developing an ethos of public participation there is the possibility that we can overlook the factors that gave rise to the concept. In failing to do so, it is likely that public involvement will suffer the fate of many innovations. In examining any new social innovation (or setting), the actual theory and practice cannot be isolated from the social changes occurring in the wider community. It is often these

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1 A well respected academic psychologist once made the comment that psychologists often have the King Midas touch in reverse. That is every thing that turns to gold they touch.
changes that create the conditions in which innovation occurs and without an appreciation of these social changes, the model and practice cannot be immune from change and/or being hijacked by other sectors of the community.

There are many cautionary tales that warn of the effect of over zealous and uncritical use of a particular concept. One prime example comes from the mental health field. In the early 60s, the policy of deinstitutionalisation was accepted and promoted by health professionals. The horrors of institutions had been laid bare and professionals argued vigorously for a policy of removing people from state institutions and returning them to the community. This was a period of turbulent change and exuberance about creating a "bold new world" abounded. Deinstitutionalisation was promoted as a radical attempt at social engineering. The mentally ill and intellectually handicapped were to be returned to the care of the community, with the appropriate community based resources. Deinstitutionalisation was not designed as a cost cutting exercise; it would cost more than the institutional care it was to replace. Somehow the idea seemed modern and humanistic.

Twenty five years on, the situation in the United States is worse than it was before deinstitutionalisation. In Washington, D. C., for example, almost 50% of the mentally ill and intellectually handicapped are not receiving any treatment at all. These people are either homeless, in dilapidated hostels, or in prison. The quality of treatment has returned to pre Dorothea Dix times for many people (Warner, 1989).

What happened to the grand social experiment? Unfortunately for the handicapped, competition for economic resources became fierce towards the end of the 60s. The Vietnam War drained the US coffers and a succession of conservative administrations ignored or overlooked the less visible but burgeoning problems faced by the mentally ill and intellectually handicapped. The reduction in available funds required the rational allocation of resources and policy formulation became dominated by economic concerns.

The case of deinstitutionalisation does not only represent the heartlessness of government, but also the ineffective conceptualisation of social policy on the community. What is most frightening about the example of deinstitutionalisation is that the professionals engineered
the policy, and also failed to recognise the impact the policy was having on the very people it was meant to serve. To suggest that the health professionals of the time were well meaning but naive would fail to recognise what was occurring. The professionals saw deinstitutionalisation as a major revolution in which they were participating. They were also participating in the myth of radical revolution. Their enthusiasm blinded them for twenty five years. There was a growing number of critics who, in retrospect, characterised the whole exercise as a cost cutting exercise. These critics simplified the issues and argued that the professionals who had set out to provide better services for the mentally vulnerable were actually agents of state control, involved in reducing services.

Moreover, these same professionals did frequently adopt the jargon of the economic rationalists in applying for funding for their deinstitutionalisation programs. They failed to recognise that there was a fundamental incompatibility between the philosophy underlying economic rationalism and deinstitutionalisation.

Does the experience of mental health workers have any relevance for those promoting public participation. We need to understand why public participation is developing and the social dynamics that gave rise to its development. We need to be reflective about our own actions, for without professional self-reflectiveness there is a lack of appreciation of what is driving the creation of a new setting. Not understanding what are the driving forces leaves professionals and lay people alike, vulnerable to influence of myth and unacknowledged assumptions.

There were at least three myths or unacknowledged assumptions involved in the rise and fall of deinstitutionalisation. These were; the myth of unlimited resources, the myth of professionalism, and, the myth that through appeasing economic devils, good can prevail.

The myth of unlimited resources is the common assumption that when a new setting is created resources will be maintained or increased. Resources here can be social or economic. When a group of people decide to get together to promote some concept or practice they generally wrongly assume that while they start small, economic resources will be attracted. They also generally fail to recognise the extent to which their own energies and activities are resources. It is only when they tire or are replaced that these social resources are
appreciated. In adopting a new approach, the resources for maintenance and growth must be factored in. In the case of deinstitutionalisation, this was clearly not the case.

The second myth is that the professional knows best. Even while deinstitutionalisation was about acknowledging the communities’ abilities (with support) to look after the ill, this was done from a professional perspective. Deinstitutionalisation also failed because the professionals did not really know how to engage the community in helping the ill.

The final myth deals with the assumption made by many professionals in the 60s and 70s, that by promoting their proposals in the language of the dominant economic rationalists, they could still do good. The term "goodness" is used here advisedly, as professionals tend to see their activities as being in the “public good”, or as nobles oblige. There is a strong moral ethic to professional practice that is rarely mentioned by professionals. In the case of the promoters of deinstitutionalisation there was a general feeling the economic rationalists would come to see the error of their ways because the professionals were doing what was "good and right". The irony for them was that in uncritically following this course, they actually did a disservice to those they were attempting to help.

Are there lessons to be learned for those promoting public participation? Do we underestimate the resources required for public participation? Do we recognise the cost to us as professionals of really letting the community start making decisions for themselves, especially if these decisions do not agree with our assessments? Is the professional promotion of public participation a middle class concept with little meaning or relevance to the rest of society? Is the concept and direction of “public involvement” actually antithetical to the public actually being involved? For example, even the term "public involvement" implies some paternalistic view of an apathetic public being grided into action. This tends to ignore the two to three hundred year history of the rise of bureaucracy and the intentional or unintentional disenfranchise of the community. The rise of the middle classes through education and professionalisation has meant a concentration of decision making in the hands bureaucracies and professionals (Parry & Parry, 1976). It can be argued that the lack of involvement by the public is due to the stranglehold of decision making by middle and upper classes, and to invite the public to
participate is too little too late.

A critical approach is required because without examining the negative aspects of the action of professionals, a sustainable practice is difficult to create. When professionals work closely with the community, it is difficult for the professional not to see themselves as defenders of the community. The values of the professionals need to be identified and examined. It is too easy for professionals to develop practices from a particular ideological basis which defends them from scrutiny. One way of beginning to understand our values and ideologies is to listen to those who do not like us.

As professionals we need to listen to the critics, because failure to do so will ensure that the critics will be right. It is easy to say that the critics are self-interested or unwilling to change entrenched or bureaucratic views. It should be remembered that the critics of deinstitutionalisation were frequently employees of the large institutions and they saw their conceptualisation and the very nature of treatment as under threat. Most critics have vested interests of one sort or another, and so do professionals working on public involvement. Both institutions sponsoring this bulletin rely on public involvement for their existence, in part or in full. Comments to the effect that public involvement is a pointless exercise need to be taken seriously. Negative views need to be addressed as they represent legitimate points of view that are being expressed in the community. If we are to champion public involvement we must be able to come to terms with a section of the community saying that public involvement is a waste of time. Without being able to cope with this type of comment, we will not be able to understand the relation of public involvement to broader social changes. More, listening to these critics will help the professional to be aware of broader community concerns and to attempt to manage a sustainable public involvement.

References:

COMMUNITY IMPACT EPISODES:
PSYCHOLOGY AND THE INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY OF SIA.

Neil Drew
Edith Cowan University

By most common definitions Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is concerned with predicting the effects of changes which occur as the result of policies, programs or developments on the people in the target community. The SIA literature, with its intra impact focus, proposes a diverse range of strategies or methods for quantifying potential impacts. Shields (1975), in an early attempt to quantify impacts, suggested they should be examined with reference to six general categories: displacements & relocations, demographic, institutional, economic, impact on community cohesion and impact on lifestyles. Others have variously described impacts as positive or negative; long term or short term, spatial or temporal; reversible or irreversible and primary or secondary (Clark & Gilad, 1984; Dillon, 1985; Finsterbusch, 1985; Finsterbusch, Llewellyn & Wolf, 1983 and Wathern, 1988).

Wildman (1990) reviews four clusters of SIA methodologies which he claims amongst them capture the major assessment methods and techniques. He seems to favour the double impact tree methodology which uses a tree diagram approach, in two stages, to articulate the potential impacts, with each path guiding the exploration of relevant impact categories. In a sense, these can be seen as attempts to provide rigorous typologies of potential impacts, such that any SIA can confidently claim to have thoroughly explored the impact domain. However, despite the increasing sophistication of SIA methodologies, the field continues to be criticised as lacking a clearly articulated theoretical base; that it is a composite of techniques and technologies bereft of a common or cohesive conceptual framework. SIA, it seems, was reluctantly born as an offshoot of the Environmental Impact Assessment field and has yet to shake off the mantle of 'poor relation'. Why is this so? A number of factors may be called to account

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2 I would like to thank Flavia Lenzo for her tireless assistance with data collection and entry.
including:

* The nature of the birth of SIA. The SIA field evolved as an offshoot of EIA, born of necessity and even by some accounts, under sufferance.

* SIA developed primarily in the context of large scale projects. The net result has been a limiting of the range and diversity of impacts investigated.

* SIA as an essentially applied field suffers no doubt from the traditional and apparently intransigent rivalries between the 'pure' and 'applied' research areas.

* Finally, and perhaps most importantly, for the most part SIA's are driven by commercial imperatives which mitigate against sustained research endeavour beyond the immediate concerns of the decision makers and developers.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that SIA is entirely devoid of scholarly theorising. Rickson, Western and Burge (1990), for example, stake a convincing claim for the applicability of sociological theories as a useful framework in which to embed the SIA process. They argue that it is essential to understand the social structure in which the assessment is conducted and that sociology offers community and organisational theory to facilitate such understanding. The social theories of Durkheim, Weber and Marx have also been proposed as useful theoretical underpinnings of SIA (Taylor, Bryan and Goodrich, 1990). Taylor et al. (1990), however, go beyond the classical social theories of Durkheim, Weber and Marx, which they describe as 'human exemptionalist' perspectives (p.44), and locate the substantive theoretical framework for SIA in the 'new' environmental sociology paradigm which has obvious parallels with the development of environmental theory in Community Psychology (see for example Heller, Price, Reinhart, Riger & Wandersman, 1984).

In many respects the theoretical debate in SIA also parallels that in the Planning literature more generally with the distinction between procedural and substantive theory (see for example Poulton, 1991). Most attention in the SIA literature has been focussed on the procedural or process factors or theories with (to date) scant regard for the substantive milieu in which SIA is necessarily and inextricably
embedded. Psychology is well placed to contribute to the theoretical development of SIA with a number of well articulated theories regarding the relationship between individuals and society. Psychology also has a unique opportunity to contribute to the debate about individualistic verses social explanations of behaviour which has particular relevance to the SIA process. The perception of psychology as adopting an exclusively intra individual focus (see for example Rosnow, 1981; Sarason, 1981 & Sampson, 1983) has been ameliorated by contemporary approaches which more explicitly locate the explanations of behaviour in the social world. These approaches are discussed in more detail below. However, the problematic relationship which has evolved between the social sciences and planning continues to mitigate against maximising the contribution of Psychology.

SIA, as a process of informing decision making can be located broadly in the planning arena. The history of the use (and abuse) of social research data in the planning process extends as far back as the London poverty surveys of 1886 (Whip, 1977), and yet by 1984 Churchman and Ginsberg, amongst others, were moved to provide a rather gloomy assessment of the potential use of social science research in the planning process. Their concerns derived from an assessment of the ideological divide between planners and social scientists and also from an analysis of limitations inherent in the planning process itself. It is not clear whether their concerns have been addressed, much less resolved, in the intervening period. In a survey of local government planners in Perth, Fenton (1991) found that whilst there was overlap between the uses planners could envisage for social research and the areas that social researchers currently investigate, the "present lack of communication is so significant that neither profession can readily define the role of the other" (p 164).

Fenton’s observation is echoed by Throgmorton’s (1991) suggestion that the different players in the decision making process represent different ‘interpretive communities’ which are generally not aware of what is required to engage in ‘normal discourse’ with the others. Attempts at communication are thus flawed at the outset. The communication problems may also be likened to tribal groups discussing common concerns but with different dialects. They know they are talking about essentially the same thing but on important points of explanation, procedure or protocol, communication breaks
down. Chase (1990), for example, expressed some pessimism that the world views of engineers and anthropologists could be reconciled to provide a mutually advantageous contribution to the development of the field of SIA. Syme and Bishop (1991) on the other hand demonstrate how psychology can accelerate its learning curve by penetrating and learning from the interpretive community of Planning. In this way psychology can begin to move from 'experience distant' to 'experience near' (Throgmorton, 1990, and maximise the potential for normal discourse with the other players in SIA.

Psychology (like the other social sciences) is confronted, then, by a twofold challenge; firstly to articulate its potential contribution, secondly (and perhaps most importantly), to seek ways of locating its endeavours within the interpretive community of planning and SIA. To this end psychology may be instructed as much by the failures as by the successes in the discipline. In the early social psychological literature, for example, there are many examples of the failure to fully appreciate the complexity of various domains of interest culminating in the crisis of confidence during the late sixties (see for example Smithson, Amato & Pearce, 1983 for a discussion research on helping behaviours). The charge in the early seventies that social psychology was becoming increasingly irrelevant was easy to sustain in a research milieu where the more evidence that was accumulating, the muddier the picture became. Social psychology seemed to be studying more and more about less and less with inevitable consequences evidenced by a lack of faith in the potential contribution it could make to society (and to social change).

The last fifteen years or so in social psychology, however, have been years of rebuilding and exploration; rebuilding the eroded confidence of those both within and outside the discipline and exploration for models of research and practice which redress the shortcomings of the experimental tradition which was seen by many to have precipitated the crisis. One of the critical insights of contemporary social psychology is that for much of the early research, an essential stage in the research process was missed or worse ignored. This stage has been variously labelled the constructivist stage, the pre theoretical stage or more recently the stage during which the substantive domain (phenomena of interest) is specified (See for example Smithson et al., 1983; Wicker, 1989). Proponents of this view argue that research had proceeded without due regard to carefully specifying the phenomena of interest. The end result was that the plethora of studies could not
be located, or embedded in a larger context. Interpretation and comparison of equivocal research findings became difficult and increasingly atomistic studies proliferated, adding a great deal to ‘knowledge’ per se but little to understanding. It is in this elaboration and exploration of the substantive domain that the interpretive communities of psychology and SIA can begin to interact.

The lesson from social psychology is that we ignore the substantive domain at our peril, yet a perusal of the SIA literature shows clear signs that it has fallen into the same trap; a function of its intra rather than inter impact episode focus. In SIA there exists the danger of concluding that there are as many explanations as there are things to be explained. Such an exclusively ideographic position rather defeats the purpose of attempting to develop SIA as a predictive enterprise. This may be partly because research in SIA is generally predicated on case studies from a very small area of the domain of potential impact episodes i.e. large scale development and change. Clearly from the point of view of legislative requirements, policy and decision making this is not an unreasonable position, yet it would be erroneous to conclude that the domain is adequately defined by the range of impact episodes reported in the literature, which from almost any perspective is somewhat ad hoc. A perusal of any Community Newspaper will yield examples of changes in the community which, though often ‘small’, raise the ire of residents and the blood pressure of decision makers. They attract neither research interest nor the funds for thorough SIA.

In June 1992 in the Western Australian city of Kalgoorlie a man entered the local Council Offices armed with a shotgun. Within ten minutes a much admired city engineer was dead and the town terrorised. The gunman also killed himself. Newspaper reports of the time reported that he was angry at a Council request that he modify plans submitted to Council to conform with work he had done on his property to a retaining wall. Questions of possible individual psychopathology (yet to be established) aside, this tragedy underscores the potential for immense social ramifications of local government decision making regardless of the apparent scale of the decision in question.

Another thankfully less tragic example occurred in 1990 when the front pages of a local Community Newspaper in the Perth metropolitan region were dominated by an event which divided the
local community. What was the dramatic event? The building, without planning approval, of a two story children's cubby house adjacent to a neighbourhood boundary fence. From the point of view of someone interested in social impact assessment, events such as this seem, intuitively, to 'belong' with the larger events as part of a largely unexplored domain of impact episodes. An investment of research effort in the constructivist phase may yield rich dividends in the development of SIA.

Smithson et al. (1983) in their study of the dimensional structure of helping behaviour provide one model for exploring substantive domains in a way which marries psychological theories and methods with the interpretive community of respondents. They produced what they called a pre-theoretical framework for understanding how different types of helping were related to one another. Using multidimensional scaling techniques they produced a cognitive map of helping behaviours which they interpreted along a number of salient dimensions, such as spontaneous verses planned and serious verses nonserious (Smithson et al, 1983). Using the interpretative frame thus derived they were able to reconcile apparently contradictory findings in the literature and plan studies which were more sensitive to the contextual demands in the helping arena (see for example Amato, 1982).

**Specifying the impact domain:**

Following the Smithson et al (1983) example Drew, Fenton and Syme (1990) initiated a project to attempt to model the impact episode domain in local government planning. Continuous sampling from 18 Community Newspapers in the Perth metropolitan region over a three month period yielded a sample of in excess of 1400 episodes of change resulting from policies, programs and developments initiated by others. The list was pruned for redundancies and resulted in a list of 700 unique episodes. A telephone survey to assess the veracity of the data (and its source) yielded no additional episode types thus confirming the stability and representativeness of the list. The sample was content coded into categories derived from the planning literature (see Table 1).
### Table 1
Incidents of social impact episodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Base</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land use</td>
<td>Public facilities</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Industry facilities</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rubbish &amp; landfill</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Road</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rail</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>general</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Services</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>783</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some examples from the list were:

* A $35 Million commercial and community office park is proposed.

* Plans are announced to extend the local waste disposal facility.

* Plans are underway to amend by-laws regulating the number of cats allowed on residential properties.

* A local bus stop has been moved.

In Local Government Planning the impact domain has been broadly defined, at least structurally, by the planning literature with categories such as land use, transportation planning, social planning...
etc. The content coding of the sample suggests that these structural typologies are useful, but do they tap the perceptions of these events held by people in general? Is a physical structural typology sufficient for the needs of decision makers concerned about the impact of these changes on members of the target community? A preliminary Multidimensional Scaling Analysis of peoples' perceptions of the possible effects of different episodes yields some unexpected results (see Figure 1). For example, the proposed development of a $35 million commercial and community office park was seen as very similar in its potential effects as a plan to pump sewerage waste onto nearby land to help trees grow!

It is far too early to draw firm conclusions from this data however it does appear that people do make sense of the range of possible impact types and categorise them in ways that may not be readily apparent to planners, developers and decision makers. Future studies are planned to explore the impact domain in a more explicit way by construing peoples' judgements about impact episodes as attitudinal statements drawing on three sources of information; cognitive, affective and behavioural (cf Zanna & and Rempel, 1988). The attitudinal data will serve as input to a multidimensional scaling solution into which individual scales can be introduced as vectors. Thus the impact episodes may be differentiated from one another according to their relative location on attitudinal variables. This approach is consistent with practitioners increasing interest in the role of attitudes (cf. Armour, 1992).

It should be clear that this project is an attempt to model impact episodes within the local planning arena. There is undoubtably overlap with regional and central planning concerns and the methodology itself may be useful in other planning contexts. It should also be clear that a constructivist phase such as this may be necessary but is certainly not sufficient for an understanding of this extremely complex area of inquiry. This approach represents just one of many paths to substantive relevance. The hope is that research of this sort will provide the beginnings of a framework and an approach which will facilitate further investigation into the nature of social impacts and social impact assessment across the entire domain. It also represents an attempt to bring contemporary theories and methods of psychology to bear on this important area of social inquiry. The substantive approach, as noted, offers the double chance. Firstly, to make a positive theoretical and methodological contribution on behalf
FIGURE 1: ALSCAL THREE DIMENSIONAL SOLUTION
STRESS = 0.134; RSQ = 0.875

LEGEND:
1. Plans are announced to demolish an old club building and replace it with a restaurant.
2. A request has been made to build a pedestrian bridge to link the local school and the railway reserve.
3. A railway crossing is to be moved.
4. A rate increase of 10% is announced after the council brings down its budget.
5. Loud warning bells have been installed at a nearby railway pedestrian crossing.
6. A boundary fence between you and your neighbour has been removed.
7. Plans are announced to use a local sports field as the site for a new library.
8. Your street is part of a proposed new bus route.
9. Calls are made for the establishment of another police station.
A. Your local council take over the development of an Industrial park.
B. Road closure barriers are erected diverting traffic down your street.
C. A proposal to pump sewerage waste onto land planted with fast growing trees is announced.
D. A retirement housing development is proposed.
E. A new Civic Centre is to be developed.
F. Plans are announced to build a dell.
G. Plans are announced to extend the local waste disposal facility (tip).
H. A house is purchased for use as an emergency accommodation shelter.
I. Calls are made for the introduction of all night street lighting.
J. Plans are announced to rezone some land from single residential to duplex development.
K. A $35 million commercial and community office park is proposed.
of psychology and secondly to open up the lines of communication by not only locating research within the interpretive community of SIA, but also by deriving interpretations from that same community.

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Environment and Behaviour, 7 (3), 265-283.
PARTICIPATION IN PERTH COMMUNITY GROUPS: POLITICS, PROCESSES AND PEOPLE

Janet McCreddin
Curtin University

Investigations into voluntary participation in planning have an important place in community psychology because of the positive relationships found with two prominent concepts, empowerment and "sense of community" (Sarason, 1974). Through its effect on sense of community and empowerment, participation can be used to prevent social problems. This has led to the belief that everyone will want to participate and that this should be encouraged (Wandersman, 1979).

However, more recent interest in the negative aspects of participation (eg. Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich & Chavis, 1990) raised questions such as: Is participation inherently good? If it is so good why does not everyone participate? (Wandersman, 1979). Why do community groups not last forever? Would everyone participate if given the opportunity? Is it feasible for everyone to participate at the same level anyway? Perhaps a more practical approach is needed.

Although voluntary participation by its nature has little or no remuneration (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988) there are other rewards or positive effects for not only the individual but also interpersonal relationships, the community and the nation. As mentioned, empowerment and sense of community often increase and there may also be increases in feelings of efficacy, self-acceptance, control and sense of control. Skills, knowledge, and social and political understanding may improve and interactions with other community residents frequently increase. (See Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Wandersman, 1979).

One of the few studies to look at both positive and negative effects of participation is by Prestby et al. (1990). A bi-motivational typology was supported, dividing benefits and costs into personal versus social/communal or social/organisational, broadly characterised as personal versus social. Some personal and social benefits are listed above. Personal costs may include time, effort, neglecting personal or family matters, and financial sacrifices. Social costs for participants have included interpersonal conflict, lack of social support, lack of
participation or interest in the organisation, lack of organisational progress, disagreement with organisational goals or activities, and scheduling and communication failures.

Prestby et al. (1990) performed a factor analysis on the data they obtained from leaders and members of 29 block associations (voluntary organisations employing collective action strategies in a small area or block). However, there are more substantive ways of finding what community members think. For example, Price (1990) suggested we ask community members for their theories of what is wrong with their community and how to make it right: "it is interesting to speculate on how we might combine the insights of community members with more formal theoretical formulations" (Price, 1990, p.165).

In the current research this idea was used to interview 20 highly involved Perth community group members (mostly executive members of Residents and/or Ratepayers Associations but also of Community Associations, Progress Associations and Action Groups). In response to open-ended questions they discussed their ideas of what is wrong with their community, what attempts they have made to improve the community, what they perceive as the benefits and costs of participation, and their suggestions for improvements to the participation process.

Participation in their respective groups began because they were not satisfied with some aspect of their local environment and believed getting involved in the organisation would allow them to help change the situation. There was also a sense of them wanting to "give something back" to the community or "improve things for the next generation" and "feeling part of the community", in other words, having a sense of community. Determining whether this is a motivation or result of their participation is difficult because sense of community plays a part in both these roles (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).

While approximately half originally joined to input into the general development of the community the other half were interested in a single issue. Half of this latter group then stayed after realising there were other issues they found to be important. All of those who stayed with the group perceived their experience as positive while most of those involved in a specific issue perceived their experience as
negative. The reason given was that by not remaining involved there was no opportunity to experience ‘wins’ on other issues, in other words reinforcement for their participation which the long-term participants found so important.

Using the bi-motivational typology supported by Prestby et al. (1990) and similar to their study, the most common personal benefit was learning skills in communication and how to tackle problems (this sample definitely did not save money). Also mentioned were the interesting issues, how their participation has led to other interests and the occasional small rewards (eg. getting to keep newspaper photos).

More than half of the group reported the social benefits of meeting people (especially "interesting" or "genuine" people) and the satisfaction arising from achievements. Also mentioned were sharing knowledge, giving something back to the community, helping the community, gaining information (about the community, where to go for information, how bureaucratic processes work, how the community is developing and the history of their area), respect for their contribution and camaraderie. While these were reported by Prestby et al. (1990) other advantages were not found, such as: the opportunity to do something worthwhile, give feedback to the council and keep an eye on them.

The principal personal cost was the same as that found by Prestby et al. (1990), the amount of time spent on work for the group. The remaining costs in general differed greatly from those in the Prestby et al. (1990) study, mainly in their severity. Many of the subjects objected to the label "costs" because they saw the negative aspects more as obstacles to overcome or accept. Other personal costs were the financial cost, neglecting family and personal life, the effort, not being able to get involved in everything that sounded interesting, work suffering, and even sometimes wondering "if there is any point at all".

The dominant social costs were decisions being made without reasoning or logic and the lack of participation by others. In addition there was some frustration at the political games played, "run-ins", danger of a few people doing all the work, "opponents" not listening to the community, the slow rate of change and the interest of too many people in single issues rather than general development.

Persecution (real or perceived) was experienced by some members of
this group. For example, one group leader explained that at the
beginning of the community comment about a residential development
his land was not planned to be resumed but after his opposition to the
proposal the plan was changed to resume his land after all. In
addition, it was revealed by three people that they believed their
phones had been tapped at some stage. While they were no longer
distressed by it, they had once been very upset at the thought of
people listening to their private conversations. The tapping was
thought to have been done either for "opponents" to get information or
to try and scare them off the issue. Despite their acceptance of the
situation it can be very distressing for some people, for example, one
woman has quit the community participation because of the phone
tapping and "believes the CIA are onto her" and that "they are out to
get her" (whoever "they" may be).

The disappointment, sometimes anger, expressed at the lack of
participation by other community residents is paradoxical considering
current participants were not always involved themselves. The anger
perhaps comes from the desire to convince others of the benefits of the
experience because they wish they had realised earlier or simply from
the need for more support to achieve goals. As one man said "it is
disappointing that you can't get them involved but that's life, they
have other commitments and if they ever want to get involved they
will. It doesn't achieve anything getting angry".

Many of the participants gave suggestions for improvements that
could be made partly in order to attract more people to the group.
Most importantly, the participation process itself needs to be become a
real process instead of just being paid "lip service". Furthermore, if a
"we attitude" was adopted rather than an "us and them" point of view
a lot more could be achieved. The groups also need more time during
any public involvement process to learn group skills. In order to
achieve this, people within the groups themselves need to be
convinced that training in group skills is necessary, especially in new
ways of conducting meetings. Communication skills are also very
important, especially when dealing with the media.

Various ways of ensuring continued support were seen to be giving
credit and praise for good work and giving new people positions to
keep fresh ideas flowing. Participation was seen by many of the
interviewees to be most effective at different levels for different people
because it would be impossible, and too much work, to have everyone
coming to all their meetings. Paraphrasing one man's opinion, simply voicing support may be all some people feel they can offer which is perfectly acceptable. This is still extremely valuable because groups can then demonstrate to authorities that they represent the opinions of more people and reinforces the efforts of the group.

The literature on voluntary participation tends to evaluate participation as being extremely positive and leading to the prevention of many kinds of social problems. The findings that participation has negative effects as well as benefits for participants could lead to the conclusion that it is not the cure-all some suggest. However, from the ideas of these 20 Perth community group members it appears that perhaps participation can be empowering despite the negative aspects because overcoming these difficulties is empowering in itself. "Psychological empowerment may develop more readily from activities aimed at influencing political decision making, but involvement with others, increased responsibility, and organisational problem solving are also expected to contribute to one's sense of empowerment" (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988, p.726). It seems a more pragmatic approach is needed rather than further research on whether or not participation is needed (Wandersman, 1979). Maybe everyone can participate and gain some of the benefits these highly involved people have through different types and levels of participation, suited to individual needs and abilities.

References:
Behavior, 11, 185-208.
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