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Addressing the Crisis in Community Consultation

David Engwicht & Ingrid Burkett

The Third Space Project

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An open invitation

We believe that 'community consultation' is in deep crisis. It is simply not working. City staff and citizens feel jaded and disillusioned, and in many cases the entire political process has become paralyzed. In his paper we want to propose a reasonably simple three-part initiative - *The Third Space Project* -- that we think will help address these problems. This paper is an open invitation for cities and concerned citizens to join us in the exciting journey of developing new approaches to community participation in decision-making processes.

To understand why community consultation is failing, and to understand the basis of *The Third Space Project*, we start this paper with a philosophical framework. We will then examine a typical example of a community consultation process that failed and has done damage to the entire political process in that city. This story will enable us to further explain what is going wrong in the community consultation and community participation process. It will also allow us to explain how our three-part initiative may work in your city.

A philosophical framework

Paradoxical world VS mono-dimensional world

At present our society treats people as if they have a singular, unified identity with a singular unified set of needs and desires. It is a widely held myth that holding contradictory desires is dangerous to your mental health. Such people are counseled to stop being 'schizophrenic' and to make up their mind what they *really* want.

We believe the opposite. Everyone holds contradictory and paradoxical desires and this is perfectly healthy. For example, we all have a 'motorist' in our head who loves adventure, movement, and speed. And we all have a 'resident' in our head who loves staying home and feeling nurtured by familiar surroundings. The 'motorist' is rooted in the 'hunter-gatherer' part of our psyche and the 'resident' is rooted in the 'gardener' part of our psyche. Contrary to popular wisdom, we believe that forcing people to adopt a singular, unified set of desires by choosing one desire over another is fundamentally unhealthy for both the individual and society. We also believe it kills off creativity in the individual and in the community.

The notion of paradox is fundamental to our understanding of the world. Paradox not only exists in our desires but in every facet of the world and is central to our approach to creativity, decision-making, politics, community development and community consultation. A paradox is a holding together of two or more seemingly contradictory concepts, processes or dimensions. For example, in nature there is a 'law of death' - technically known as the first and second laws of thermodynamics. Everything must wind down and die. But there is also a 'law of life' - expressed within the concept of evolution. Nature has a will to produce life, and not just utilitarian life but exuberant life full of personality and pizzazz. These two paradoxical laws are inextricably bound to each other. Without death there is no impetus for nature to create. As May observed, the truly creative person does not run away from the void of non-being, 'but by encountering and wrestling with it, force(s) it to produce being. They knock on silence for an answering music; they pursue meaninglessness until they can force it to mean'. On the other hand, without life there would be no death to drive the life-force to create. Therefore the law of death and the law of life are bound together in a symbiotic relationship. Everywhere we turn we see this symbiotic relationship between paradoxical opposites -- whether it be the need for chaos (spontaneity) and order in our cities; the need for healthy individuals and healthy communities; or the role of the rational and the non-rational in creative processes. The annoying thing about these paradoxes (at least to modern sensibilities) is that they are unresolvable riddles that move in circles. As Neil Bohr observed 'the opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may be another profound truth'. These unresolvable paradoxes are particularly offensive to our dominant mode of linear thinking in the West which believes that by rational deduction, all riddles can be solved and reduced to one objective truth. This

linear, rational method of thinking certainly has its applications. But applying it to the 'real' world where paradox is the norm results in a gross oversimplification of the issues facing communities.

Rejection of paradox has also resulted in a loss of creativity and wisdom in our communities. Most traditional cultures believed that having contradictory desires was a natural part of life that made life richer and gave life its meaning. The art of living was viewed as finding creative ways to satisfy these contradictory needs without having to divorce one or lock it up in the basement. Wisdom was the art of navigating these contradictory needs with poise and balance. This gave a privileged role to those who possessed wisdom - the elders. It was their role to sit in public spaces or at the city gates and share wisdom with those caught in a dilemma caused by contradictory desires and needs. Inherent in this view of wisdom was also the notion of timing. As the ancient Jewish proverb says: 'To everything there is a season, a time for war and a time for peace, a time to plant and a time to reap...' Wisdom understood that there was an ebb and flow to life. Wisdom could cast its insightful eye over the entire landscape and discern the season, or a coming change in the seasons. The role of wisdom was to work with this rhythm and perform the dance of paradox with great grace and eloquence.

No solutions

In a world of paradox, the tension between paradoxes can never be resolved. No matter what actions one takes, the tension inherent in the paradox remains. Life is an eternal dance with paradox, a response to a rhythmic push and pull. In a world of paradox there are no 'solutions'. The word 'solution' suggests a final resolution to a 'problem'. 'Solutions' only exists in a mono-dimensional world that has been stripped of all its paradoxes, complexity and contradictions. As such, 'solutions' are simplistic answers to an oversimplified mental construct that bears little relationship to the real world. Take for example a paradox that all humans experience: the desires to be intimately bound to another in a committed relationship and the desire for personal space and independence. Getting married or staying single are not a 'solution' to this tension. No matter what strategy we choose, the tension between these desires can never be resolved. And whatever strategy we choose for today will shape a new and different world for tomorrow. Then we will be faced with a new choice - is the strategy I chose yesterday still appropriate or is there a more creative way of dealing with this tension?

The logic of paradox is one of 'both/and', and involves dancing within the tension of contradiction. It is not about developing compromises between the seemingly contradictory elements. Nor is it about eliminating one of the needs by ignoring it and playing down its significance. Paradox is not about *balancing* the tension. Balance is a static resolution, whereas engaging in paradox is dynamic and involves a constant weaving, an ebb and flow, a dance of the impossible. For example, when explaining the order/chaos paradox to planning

professionals they want to know how you *balance* these two needs. They want to know whether our cities need more order (planning) or more chaos. The answer is both. Paradox is like a pair of cymbals; on one hand you have order and on the other chaos. If you clash them into each other you make music. If you just have one you have nothing. And you can't make music if in clashing the cymbals together one destroys the other. And it doesn't work well if one cymbal is much larger than the other (in this sense balance is important). And you certainly don't have music if you only clash them together once and think your job is done. Music requires a rhythmic clashing of the paradoxes.

Our understanding of paradox leads us to two basic practice axioms.

1. Our responses to paradoxical tension, while appropriate yesterday, may be inappropriate today.
2. There is always a more creative and eloquent way to respond to paradoxical tensions than how we are currently dealing with the tensions.

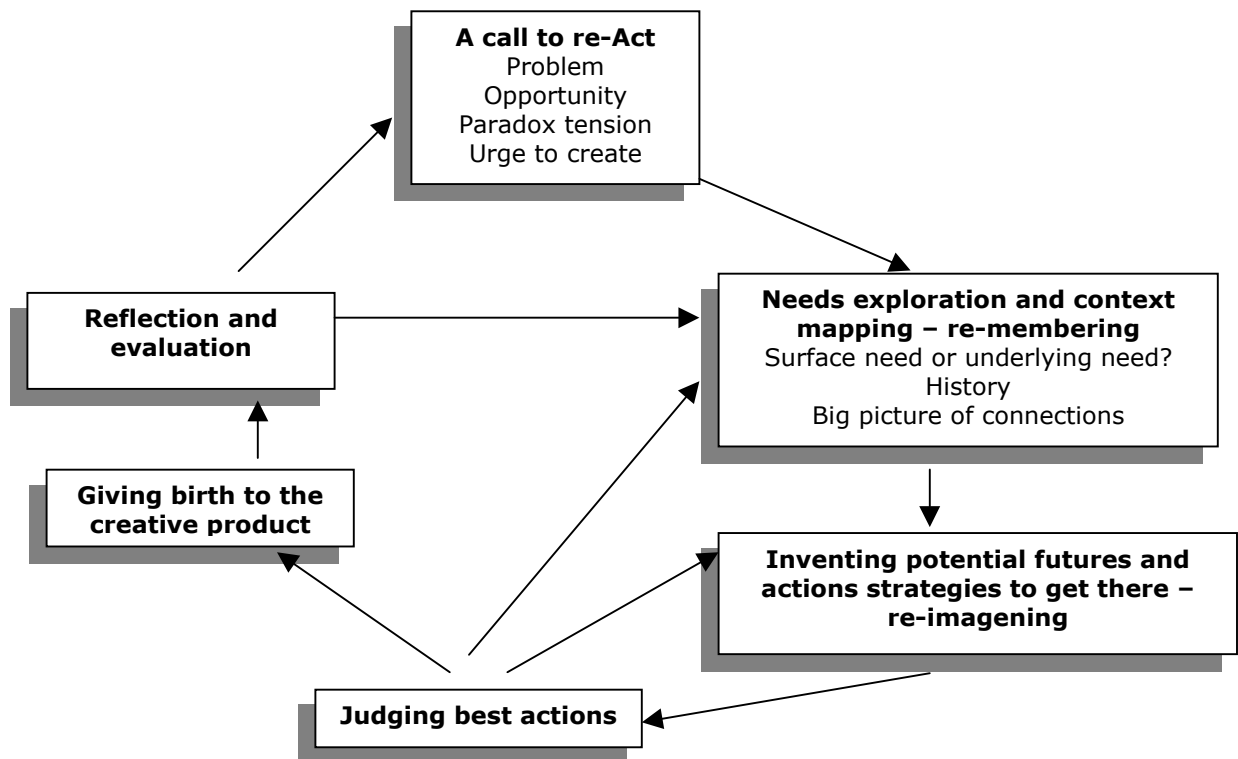
The problem with the term 'problem solving'

We not only have a problem with the term 'solution'. We have a problem with the term 'problem' for two reasons. Firstly, in our culture, what we are referring to when we talk of a 'problem' is more often than not the discomfort caused by a tension between paradoxes. Popular belief is that people can resolve this discomfort by 'ceasing to be schizophrenic' and making up their minds what they really want. But we believe that the discomfort caused by paradoxical tension is not a 'problem' but life-enhancing. It is arguable that without this tension, there would be no civilization, no arts, no stories, no new inventions. And there would be no diversity of cultures. Paradoxical tension is therefore not a 'problem' but a wonderful opportunity to raise ourselves, our local community, our city, our society, our culture, our civilization to new levels of maturity and richness. Now we are not arguing that there is no such thing as 'a problem'. If your basement is flooded because a water pipe breaks, you have an immediate problem that needs resolving. But even in this case, lurking just below the surface is a world of paradox that offers opportunities for an enhanced quality of life. Maybe the pipe burst because the tradesperson you employed to install the pipe in the first place cut corners to keep the cost down. The paradoxical tension is between price and quality. If you look below the surface of the presenting problem you may have an opportunity to change your stance to the price/quality paradox. The same applies to societal issues. For example, our society often defines problems in very narrow, technical terms. For example, traffic congestion is viewed as 'a problem' because it reduces the efficiency of the road to move cars. But paradoxically, congestion forces people to use their car more efficiently and is therefore a drive to efficiency. And just below the surface of this paradox lurks another: the moving/residing or motorist/resident paradox. The extra road width and traffic volume will play havoc with the quality of neighborhood life. So what appeared as a 'problem' - congestion - is not a problem but a surface manifestation of an underlying web of paradoxes

(those we have mentioned are just the start). As noted already, the tensions caused by these paradoxes must not be viewed as a 'problem' to be fixed but as an opportunity to create a more creative future.

Concept of futures creating'

For all the reasons discussed above, 'problem-solving' is a problematic concept in that it produces simplistic initiatives that tend to not work in a world of paradox. We believe a more useful model for understanding decision-making is the concept of 'futures creating'. Rather than a linear process with an end point (as implied by 'problem solving'), this is a circular process of continual creation (see diagram below).



The 'Futures Creating' Model

- 1. Call to re-act.** The call to re-act comes from an external or internal stimulus. It may come in the form of a presenting problem - the basement is flooded. Or an opportunity - I think there could be a market for X. Or a paradoxical tension - I feel smothered in this relationship. Or an urge to create - I want to make my house a more inspiring place to live. The term 're-act' is not used in a negative sense of being reactionary. It is the constant call from internal and external stimulus to 'act again'. It

is an invitation to be pro-active and engage in creating the future (or more correctly multiple futures).

- 2 Needs exploration and context mapping - re-remembering.** Here we seek to analyze the call to re-act and place it in its widest historical and present context. Is the presenting problem a surface issue or something deeper? Why did this issue arise? What are the web of paradoxes that lay just below the surface of this presenting problem? If there is an urge to create, the question becomes, 'What needs am I trying to address?' This step involves much more than a balloon-flight to sketch the terrain below. It is a highly creative journey as we use stories and play-acting to try and get inside the skin of our own desires and the desires of others. It involves entering the shadow-lands of desire and making fiends with villains of our own making. It means using our imagination to explore how their history shaped their fears and dreams. It involves finding the demons in our inner heroes and the heroes in our inner demons. This process also involves re-remembering. To explain this concept, we do an exercise with people where we tell them the facts of someone's childhood and ask them to tell the story that this person may be telling themselves about their childhood. Every participant tells a different story, many the exact opposite of the stories told by others. We explain that there is no objective story about our past. How we weave the facts of our past into a meaningful story is at the discretion of the storyteller. This is the act of re-remembering - changing the relationships between past and present 'realities'. In this stage of 'needs exploration and context mapping' we are re-remembering - looking for new ways to tell the story.
- 3 Inventing potential futures and actions -- re-imagining.** Inventing potential futures, and the actions that will take us to those futures, requires entering a playful frame of mind where there are no limits. This is a journey in the imagination and is not based in reason, although it has an inherent logic of its own. It involves dreaming, storytelling, humor, play-acting and conversation. It is true that it does involve some rational processes. But this reasoning must be viewed as a servant of these other non-rational processes. There are 'modes of thought' that can help in this creative process, such as thinking like a child, thinking like a fool, thinking like a rational adult, thinking like a wise old person. This is not some mechanical process of just imagining how a child may think about the issue. Instead it is to forget everything we have imagined to that point. It is to find the child we once were, and climbing inside their skin, to see the world through their eyes and re-imagine. It is to then climb into the skin of the fool, and re-imagine the world through their eyes. (Some of our most innovative inventions have come from thinking like a fool.) Above all, inventing potential futures requires entering 'the third space' - a space of dialogue between paradoxes (explained further below).

- 4 **Judging the best actions.** Of all the potential futures and courses of actions, which is the wisest? We must not think of this judging as an isolated step but as an iterative process intimately connected to 'needs exploration and context mapping' and 'inventing potential futures and actions'. In other words, the judging phase often asks us to go back and revisit the previous two stages.
- 5 **Giving birth to the creative product.** This is the climax of the creative process - the bitter/sweet experience of giving shape to the future. Nothing beats the thrill of creating something in the imagination, then seeing it take shape in the real world. However, we know that this is 'hard labor' and is far more arduous than the process of planting the original seed.
- 6 **Reflection and evaluation.** Reflection is a process of holding a mirror to our attempts to create the future and to tell the story of what happened. How did the world change as a result of our actions? How did we change? How did the landscape of our paradoxical desires change? What life-lessons did we learn from this attempt at creating the future? This reflection is not just a process of placing ourselves as the central character in the story. It is to climb inside the skin of all the participants and to imagine how they may be telling the story. It is to deliberately visit the margins and tell the story through the eyes of those that inhabit these dark, forgotten spaces. It is to actively seek out our own blind spots. It is to confront the underlying paradoxes in all their nakedness and to wrestle with them until we know their inner landscape as if they were our own. From this reflection we distil wisdom -- wisdom we can use-to make wiser and more creative choices in the future. This reflection results in us remembering the world. It also issues it own calls to act again.

The concept of The Third Space

The current system of thinking which ignores the paradoxical nature of the world results in an either-or battle - either we get into the committed relationship or we stay single, *either* we widen the road or we don't. But we have argued that this is a false battle. The battle (if there is one) is to find the both/and ground, what we call 'the third space' - a space that is neither one paradox or the other yet contains both paradoxes without subsuming them. The closest metaphor we can find to describe this is what happens in a human relationship. When two people enter a relationship they create a third identity - the 'us' identity. The 'us' identity may enrich the two individuals but does not destroy or subsume their individual identities. The 'us' identity is the creation of the two individuals, but takes on a creative life of its own which may be much greater than the sum total of the creative powers of the individuals operating in isolation. In the scientific jargon, this is an 'emergent phenomena' - any arrangement where the bringing together of two or more elements produces a third reality that is larger than the sum of the contributing parts. In the same way, enabling paradoxes to

establish an ongoing relationship of give and take with each other creates a third space - an 'us' identity.

The 'third space' can also be pictured as a 'place of dialogue' - a space where contradictory desires can explore creative ways of finding win-win arrangements. This means creating both mental spaces and physical spaces for dialogue. Creating the mental spaces means training people how to move to the third space, that is, conduct a dialogue in their own head between paradoxical voices - a dialogue between the motoring persona and the resident persona, the environmentalist persona and the pro-business persona, etc. Creating this place of dialogue in people's minds does not mean that it needs to be done consciously. In the past we have used games (such as reverse role-plays) to move people mentally into a third space, without them even being aware that they have begun internalizing tensions that were previously externalized. The Pace Car program is an example of a city program that creates the third space in people's minds without them being conscious that what this program does is create a negotiating table in their head where their motorist persona and their resident persona can get together and enter a more productive relationship.

We also believe that we must create physical spaces in which this dialogue between competing needs is conducted. These physical spaces must be very different in design from the spaces of 'decision and judgement'. Generating potential creations require spaces that encourage play and fantasy. Judgement requires a court-room where reason and wisdom is king (although we believe even here there should be a court jester).

Understanding ideology and adversarial politics

The tension between paradoxes occurs in multiple spaces. It can be an internal tension (my motorist persona versus my resident persona); an external tension (my motoring persona versus your resident persona); or a tension manifest in the design of space itself (a street, by its intrinsic nature, serves both motorists and residents). Where much of the political process and community participation in decision-making comes unstuck is that we often externalize the tensions that belong internal. And paradoxically, we have no skills of internalizing the tensions that are external - the art of empathy.

Lets deal first with the externalizing of tensions that belong internal. As discussed earlier, our culture portrays those with a single, unified set of values and desires as being mentally healthier than those who hold contradictory values and desires. People are therefore pressured (unconsciously) to choose which of their paradoxical desires they will privilege and which they will bury in the basement. It is only natural that other people in society will choose the opposite and privilege the desires that others have rejected and vice versa. To make ourselves feel more comfortable about our particular choice, we construct an ideological support for our choice. Others that chose differently support their choice with an ideology that by very definition will be in opposition to ours. The tension between paradoxical desires, which rightfully belongs within our head, is now externalized. The paradoxical tension

is expressed as a conflict between people and ideology. This leads to an adversarial form of politics and what we have labeled 'the politics of blame'. This externalization of paradoxical tensions in our society undermines the creative power of paradox for the paradoxes are split off from each other and sealed in their ideological containers. This either/or split leaves no room for the third space. We believe one of the major reforms needed in the political and decision-making process is mechanisms that help us re-internalize the paradoxical tensions we have externalized. In other words, tensions between people in a community is often a pointer to an internal conflict between paradoxical elements that both sides find too difficult to embrace.

However, as we indicated above, the opposite is also true. We lack the ability to internalize the tensions that are external. Let us illustrate. For thousands of years, the street has been used for children's play. Children learn very important citizenship and placemaking skills from street play - lessons that cannot be learnt to the same degree in park play and certainly not in organized sport (for more details see *Street Reclaiming* - David Engwicht). However, children playing in the street is an impediment to adult motorists who have important 'work' to do. At one level this work/play paradox is an external tension manifested between two social groups (adults and children) and also in the design of the space (streets are both a place of movement and a neighborhood socializing space). However, we cannot find creative strategies to deal with this tension if we allow the paradoxical tension to remain externalized - the adult motoring persona will simply drown the voice of the child. Creative strategies will only emerge if all the players are able to internalize this external tension (while still preserving the integrity of those doing the internalizing). In other words, the adult motorists must find the playful child in their own minds and 'feel' the tension between their own needs for play and work. They must conduct an internal dialogue between the child and the adult in their own head. What they may discover through this process is that while it is true that this is an external tension, it *reflects* a range of internal paradoxical tensions -- work/play, adult/child, and planned/spontaneous. In our western culture, these paradoxes are generally out of balance (in the sense of one having a greater voice than the other). Generally, our culture believes that childhood is a temporary state, the training ground for becoming a productive adult. As productive adults we outgrow the need to play - or to be more accurate, play is something we do after work. We split the paradox and work is privileged and play marginalized. However, as Huizinga contended, play, rather than work, is the formative element in human culture and humanity's most serious activity belongs to the realm of make-believe. Nothing can be created in work that is not first constructed in our imagination. The act of future creating must start with play and fantasy. As a society we have lost sight of the fact that the miracle of life is not that rational adults give birth to children, but that children give birth to rational adults and that they do it through play and fantasy. Therefore, confronting the external tensions caused by the multiple roles of streets requires an internalizing of tensions, while at the same time recognizing that these are but a reflection

of the external tensions. In this way we create a third space in our own mind, a space where the paradoxes can clash and release their creative potential.

The Story

This story takes place in a typical North American city of about 80,000 residents. The Downtown Business Association decided to push for a new parking structure. The City Councilors asked the engineering department to investigate and report to the Transportation Commission. After doing a range of technical studies, they concluded that there was indeed a parking shortage in the downtown and that a new parking structure was the most logical answer. So the city instructed the engineering department to begin a public consultation process. This started with a public meeting at which the engineering department shared the results of the technical studies, including a range of very impressive graphs. They then asked for feedback on a number of possible locations and designs. Some participants argued that they didn't want a parking structure at all. They wanted the money spent on public transport. The city staff responded that the focus of their study was parking need, not public transport. After considering all the public input, the staff recommended to the Transportation Commission their preferred option for a parking structure. The community was now galvanized into two camps and organized to get numbers at the Transportation Commission meeting where the parking structure was on the agenda. Residents were invited to stand at a podium and plead their case -for or against. The Transportation Commission then debated the issue (weighing the community input) and endorsed the city staff recommendation. Having lost the first two rounds, those opposed to the parking structure got even more people to give testimony at the City Council meeting that debated the Transportation Commission recommendation. The councilors in this city were divided along ideological lines. Three were 'environmentalists' and four 'pro-business'. The parking structure was passed four-three.

Feeling that the above process was flawed, the 'environmentalists' collected enough petitions to force the issue to a citizen referendum. They won the referendum. This not only created deep animosity between the rival groups of councilors, but undermined the city staff's confidence in the community consultation and political process. The city manager believed that the political process was entirely dysfunctional. Both sides were so skilled at using the political and legal processes that even a simple initiative like a parking structure or round-about could become mired in process for years. He felt like his only option was to sit on his hands and wait for the Councilors to sort out their ideological differences.

What is going wrong and what needs to change

There are some that will argue that even though the above process is slow and messy, it is just part of the price we must pay for a democratic process. Everyone has a right to express their point of view.

But are there other ways of running this messy process that would deliver better outcomes? Could some small additions to the process in the above story have generated a wider range of possibilities for dealing with parking problems in the downtown? Could we have built consensus in spite of the different points of view? Could we have avoided creating animosity and avoided wasting vast amounts of community energy?

To answer these questions we must analyze what went wrong.

Inadequate examination of 'the call to act'

The first step in future creating is to examine the nature of the 'call to act'. Is the presenting 'problem' the 'real' problem or just a surface problem - a symptom of deeper issues? In the story above we see an example of an inadequate interrogation of the presenting problem. The proposal for a parking structure from the Downtown Business Association was their idea of the best way to respond to a 'problem' which they stated as a shortage of downtown parking. The city engineering department accepted this definition of the 'problem' at face value. To verify that this was the problem they undertook a range of technical studies. The technical studies confirmed that there was indeed a parking shortage. (Note, these same technical studies could have been interpreted an entirely different way: there was enough parking but too many people were bringing their cars downtown.) Before spending a lot of money on these technical studies, the engineering department should have interrogated the merchants to see what lay at the back of their call for a parking structure. The dialogue may have gone like this:

City: So why do you think you need a parking structure?

Merchants: Because there is a parking shortage.

City: But why do you see a shortage of parking as a problem? Some cities see this as an advantage because it puts a cap on the amount of traffic clogging the downtown streets, which many people feel degrades the shopping environment?

Merchants: Well the large mall on the edge of town has unlimited free parking, and we need more parking to compete with the mall.

City: So is your real need more parking or more customers?

Merchants: Well, yes, but not just more customers. We need more customers with more money in their pockets.

City: So is your underlying need more customers or increased sales?

Now if this dialogue had concluded that the underlying need for the merchants is more sales, then there are a million ways to make that happen. Increasing parking (which may or may not work) is only one possibility (for example, if people didn't have to own a car and drive downtown, they would have more disposable income to spend at the stores when they got there.) But if the underlying problem is seen as a shortage of parking, there are very few ways of addressing this, and all of them require an engineered solution.

This of course demonstrates precisely why the problem is viewed in narrow technical terms. The moment the engineering department begins exploring the underlying needs they will be taken outside their area of expertise - or more precisely, outside their job description. We would argue that the engineers (thinking as a community member rather than engineer) have much of the generalist knowledge that would allow them to explore this territory, but that the organizational culture and wider societal culture prevents them from doing so.

This argument that there was an inadequate analysis of the presenting need is not a criticism of the engineering and planning professions. It is a societal problem. While increasing specialization delivers many benefits it has an inherent weakness. It is very easy for specialists to lose sight of how their work fits into the bigger picture - the complex web of paradoxical desires. To compound this problem, we have created 'disciplines' that reinforce the split between paradoxes. We create one profession that looks after us when we are in our motoring persona and another to look after us when we are in our resident persona. We create another profession to look after concerns for the environment and another to look after economic development. Then we create departments in the government structure which institutionalize these paradoxical splits. This is why Mumford argued that a society of specialists also needs 'generalists'; people who know no disciplinary boundaries and can weave specialist knowledge into a holistic picture. It also suggests that there may be a number of important institutional changes that could help us heal the split between paradoxes. (However, we would caution that these institutional changes must follow or be done in consort with mental change - an embracing of paradox and the tension this brings.)

Most community participation processes we have witnessed never include this needs exploration or context mapping phase. This is because before the community consultation process starts, the technical people on city staff feel it is their responsibility to quantify the problem - which is inevitably done in narrow technical terms. The public is then asked to debate the merits or otherwise of a particular technical 'solution' to the narrowly defined technical 'problem'. This misses one of the central contributions the general public have to offer any organization of specialists. When the general public meet to discuss community issues, they usually think more like a 'generalist' than a specialist (even those with specialist knowledge in other fields). Instinctively they call into question the assumptions about the nature of the problem or the need to be met. If there is no mechanism for discussing this before city staff attempt to quantify the problem in technical terms, they feel cheated because they have been cut out of the most vital stage of the decision-making process. By

the time they get involved they feel like the horse has already bolted and the direction of inquiry set in concrete.

Contradictory needs externalized, not internalized

The second element of 'context mapping' is to see how the presenting need is connected to other paradoxical needs and paradoxical realities. In the story above these paradoxes remain buried. There was no exploration of the motorist/shopper paradox. (As a motorist we want to park our car close to the shops. As a shopper, we want to walk past interesting shops, not parking structures. Instead of cars in the street we would prefer that the streets were alive with interesting activities and people.) There was no exploration of the exchange-space/movement-space paradox. (Exchanges spaces are places like shops where social, cultural and economic exchanges take place. Movement space is the roads and car parks that allow us to visit these exchange spaces. Creating more movement space means reducing the amount of exchange space - in other words, we destroy the exchange spaces in the act of getting to them and there is nowhere worth moving too.)

Our current forms of community participation do not provide mechanism for citizens to grapple with these paradoxes and the paradoxes that exist in their own contradictory desires. As discussed above, we force people to adopt a singular, unified identity with an oversimplified and unified set of needs. In the story above we see how this then hardens into ideological camps and an adversarial form of public discourse and politics. Three of the Councilors were publicly known as 'environmentalists' and four were known as 'pro-business'. This gross oversimplification ignored the fact that the 'pro-business' people care about their environment and that the 'environmentalists' care about making enough money to live. This adversarial form of public discourse was further reinforced by the hearing process at Commission meetings and City Council meetings. Set up as an adversarial courtroom, people were expected to choose which side they would testify for.

We believe this polarization of the community results in a trivializing of public discourse and an alienation of the majority of the population. It creates a false debate and a false either/or choice. Those who want to debate the deeper issues and search for 'the third alternative' are automatically excluded from this process.

But isn't this adversarial form of politics and public discourse a natural part of the democratic process? Only if we insist on treating community issues in a narrow, mono-dimensional way. However, adopting the more complex paradoxical view of the world will not reduce conflict and tension. It may actually increase tensions, because to embrace paradox is to embrace tension as a positive drive to creativity. In addition, there will be vigorous debate about the nature of the various 'desires landscapes' which are complex and fluid. Some desires are stronger than others, depending on the circumstances of our life. The relationship between desires changes over time and even from moment to moment. Other people and other neighborhoods will have very different desire landscapes. This is bound to raise

disagreements and misunderstandings. However, the essential difference with the adversarial model is mental attitude - how we deal with our contradictory desires. In the adversarial model, tensions are externalized. In the futures creating model, these tensions are internalized. In the adversarial model it is someone else that needs to change to fix a 'problem'. In the futures creating model, it is 'we' that must change. In the adversarial model, discussion of issues is surface and superficial. In the futures creating model there is an attempt to grapple with complexity and the muddy swamp of human desires. In the adversarial model, we are faced with an either-or decision. In the futures creating model we call upon the immense creativity and wisdom of the entire community to create a third space and fashion the future.

No 'inventing futures and potential actions' phase

The story we told above started with the Downtown Business Association suggesting a solution' - a parking structure. The problem or need this was designed to address was almost an after-thought. This is not unusual. It is part of the way our brain works - we often think of a 'brilliant idea' without fully articulating the need it is meant to meet. We then have to work backwards and examine the perceived problem in the cold light of day. When we do this we often find that the brilliant idea is not so brilliant. However, the initial idea is very useful as a starting point for evolving a raft of truly innovative ideas.

Too often in the decision-making process in cities, the narrow technical study confirms the 'validity' of the perceived problem. This is then seen as automatically legitimizing the 'solution' which started the process - in the story, the parking structure. The only discussion within the engineering department and with the public is what is the best design and location of this parking structure. The public is therefore excluded from the most exciting part of the creative process - inventing tomorrow and telling stories of how they may get there. Take the parking structure example we explored. If participants had concluded that the underlying need for the merchants was profitability and that for residents it was easy access to a vibrant downtown, then both merchants and residents could have brainstormed ways of creating this kind of a future. What would have emerged would be several promising stories - each connecting past, present and future. Some of these stories may have included a parking structure, others may not. However, in those stories that did include a parking structure, it would have been integrated into a much larger strategy, not left as the beginning, middle and end of the story.

Judgement phase bogged down in battle of egos

Because the 'needs exploration and context mapping' and 'inventing futures and potential actions' were not done properly, the judgement phase becomes totally dysfunctional. The Commission hearings and City Council meetings should be the judgement phase, the time for the wise elders to pass judgement on which actions will most eloquently and creatively meet

the complex array of needs. This phase should be a battle between the benefits and disbenefits of potential action strategies. Instead, for all the reasons outlined above, it becomes an ideological battle with individual and group egos at stake. Who will win and who will lose? But as we saw in the story above, even if one party loses this battle, the war is not necessarily over. There are yet more legal and political theaters where the war can continue to be waged.

This scenario means that the judgement phase, which is absolutely essential to the creative process, is sapped of its powers to perform its true functions.

The Third Space Project - a modest proposal

The Third Space Project is an experiment to establish a new culture for decision-making and for community participation in decision-making. *The Third Space Project* has three elements to its strategy. We are currently looking for a number of cities willing to join us in this exciting experiment.

1. Workshop/retreat with political leaders

If a city is to move beyond adversarial forms of decision-making and community consultation, then political leaders must lead the way. The first step in this process would therefore be a workshop/retreat with political leaders to explore ways of moving beyond adversarial forms of politics and community discourse. An important task of this workshop will be for political leaders to decide how they will translate this into the real world of decision-making and community consultation. For example, we know that if politicians decide to relate to their former 'enemies' in a new way, they will be perceived by their supporters as having 'sold out to the enemy'. Part of the challenge of the workshop will be to devise action strategies to cope with these inherent difficulties in moving to a different kind of future. We have ideas that may help, but the action-strategy needs to be one that is owned and implemented by the political leaders.

2. Workshop for Staff

The second step is a series of workshops with city staff to explore ways of enriching the decision-making process so it becomes more creative and innovative. Besides learning new 'thinking techniques' these workshops will need to grapple with workplace changes that will allow this new mode of operating. We do not think these changes need to be extensive as a change in mental mindset is the most crucial element. We have suggestions for these workplace changes, but again we believe that it is the staff themselves that must construct an action-strategy to build a more creative and innovative workplace.

3. Establish a 'Third Space' for Community Discourse

If Commission hearings and City Council meetings are the judgement phase in which reason dominates, then we need to create a public opportunity for participation in 'needs exploration and context mapping' and 'inventing futures and potential actions'. As discussed above, these should be playful spaces and non-adversarial. Because our society has become so conditioned to adversarial forms of dialogue based in rational argument, we believe that we need processes and spaces that are very different from 'public meetings' and 'community consultation workshops'. We believe that what is needed are formats which are unlike anything that people have experienced before in the community participation arena - formats that takes people into *The Third Space*.

In the past we have used play (games) as a means of doing this and have found them remarkably successful in moving people into a third space. We are keen to experiment further with similar approaches, especially developing processes that help participants internalize the conflicts between their own contradictory needs and explore creative ways of engaging these tensions.

One form that *The Third Space* may take is a scheduled event that may even be broadcast on community television just as other Commission and Council meetings are. However, we want to work with political leaders, city staff and residents in inventing the most innovative and efficient ways of establishing these third spaces. In other words, we would attempt to model the idea of the third space in the very act of exploring ways of creating third spaces.

Benefits

We see the potential benefits of the *Third Space Project* as:

- Helping clarify underlying problems and mapping needs contradictions
- Generating a greater range of potential futures and actions for decision-makers to choose from.
- Encouraging greater participation in decision-making by citizens, particularly those who are not attracted to the current adversarial style of politics and public discourse.
- Provide an opportunity to build consensus on the best course of action and lessen community division on final decisions.
- Reduce staff workload by reducing the ad-hoc nature of community consultation. *The Third Space* would provide a regular, centralized event for exploring larger community issues. This should give participants a range of skill to resolve their own issues at the local level.
- Increase the effectiveness of Commission and Council meetings.

How we would work with your city

We propose a five-day program in your city facilitated by Ingrid Burkett and David Engwicht. This would implement the workshop/retreat with political leaders, workshops with staff, and demonstration 'third space event' with the community.

From this five days we would hope to evolve a holistic action-plan. This may or may not involve us continuing to work with you over a period of time. If it is decided that we should continue working together, we can provide ongoing support and coaching through follow-up visits, video conferencing and email.

Conclusion

We believe that the current processes are not delivering anywhere near an optimum outcome because of basic flaws in the total decision-making process. We also understand that our suggestions are not some magic panacea that will thrust community consultation into a golden era. It will still be messy and full of conflict and human emotion. Yet we believe there is a golden opportunity here to pioneer new approaches to decision-making and community participation in decision-making. Our goal is to help create creative communities and be an incubator for social innovation.