

C2D2 / IAP2 Lunch and Learn Summary
From Political Won't to Political Will
Building Support for Participatory Governance

After the lunch and learn session (23 April 2010) I committed to Sandra to write up a one-page summary, within 2-days, so that those not able to attend the session could benefit from the presentations and discussions. To get started I thought I should read at least the first chapter of the book (*From Political Won't to Political Will*). Well the first chapter led to the second and third and so on, so I'm a little late, but better informed. This is a great book and one that P2 practitioners should put on their "must read" list.

The *World Alliance for Citizen Participation* is known as *CIVICUS*. *CIVICUS* hosted a conference in Glasgow, in 2008, entitled *Building Political Will for Participatory Governance*. The studies undertaken as part of that conference and subsequent to it provide the basis for the book. The book has a pithy summary and conclusion that draw on eleven case studies and bring them together in an enlightening analytical framework. The case studies are mostly from developing countries, but there are also examples from the City of Guelph, the US and UK.

We were privileged to have the book's author, Carmen Malena (who travelled from Quebec City to join us) to present her book and the conclusions she draws. The book explores why elected decision makers are hesitant to employ public participation more broadly, what the authors refer to as participatory governance. The focus of their analysis is on agenda-setting, policy-making, budgeting, reporting expenditures, monitoring public services and public oversight, and mostly at the municipal level. These areas are established as core public decision-making processes where public involvement is appropriate for "good" governance. The basic operating assumption is that where people and communities are impacted by decision making they have the right to be involved in that decision. The case studies demonstrate that beyond have the right to be involved, their involvement will improve outcomes, not only for those impacted, but also for the decision makers. The case is also made that the public has a responsibly, as citizens, to access these processes.

The analytical framework is a three-part model (political want, political can and political must) that looks at the drivers for public participation at the levels of individuals, organizations, relationships and society. Each "slice" of the model offers insights into the dynamic of why or how participatory governance could fail and leads us towards what might be done to prevent such failure. Slide 6, of Carmen's slide deck (attached) brings these factors together into a comprehensive analytical framework that sheds light on the challenges that practitioners face in bringing the public into the decision making process. What I found so interesting was how many of the lessons learned in the South are applicable right here in Canada.

Follow-up questions and discussions focused mostly on the role of the public servants in facilitating participatory governance in the face of some hesitation by decision makers and in the absence of a regulatory driver to do so. A comment that resonated with the group is the role of the public service to “advise fearlessly and implement loyally”. The consensus was that public servants need to advise minister and seniors about both the benefits and risks attached to actively pursuing participatory governance mechanisms and the potential risks of not pursuing such an approach. Another comment discussed was the gap between “political want” and the “political can”. That is to say, when practitioners are successful in making the case for a more participative decision-making process, this can lead to problems of lack of capacity to engage the public. The conclusion of the group was that “political wants” and “political musts” create a demand to build such capacity and this is required in order that such capacity be built.

We were also very fortunate to have one of the chapter authors join us to present her chapter. Angela Keller-Herzog, while on assignment from CIDA to Transparency International, wrote chapter 14: Experiences in Fostering Citizen Participation and Government Responsiveness. Angela explained the role of Transparency International as an awareness raiser and intervener for communities and members of the public to draw attention to abuses and concerns in the six areas of public policy / administration mentioned earlier. She commented on the importance of having a neutral party, from civil society, to play the “honest broker” role in leveling the playing field on discussions between big government and communities. Her observations about applicability to the Canadian context and the need for “power balancing” mechanisms are required to facilitate inclusive decision-making, i.e. participatory governance.

Thanks to Sandra Zagon from C2D2 and Brenda Pinchette from IAP2 / Health Canada for arranging this lunch and learn and to Health Canada for hosting it. Special thanks to Carmen and Angela for taking time out of their busy schedule to join the group. CIVICUS has created a wonderful resource for practitioners in their website:
<http://www.civicus.org/civicus-home>

Richard Delaney,
Chair, IAP2
St. Lawrence Chapter
delaney@rmdelaney.com