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Shifting to a sustainable city? citizen participation in Wellington’s *Our City ~ Our Future* Strategy

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Policy at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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Abstract

This study explores the potential contribution of citizen participation in the shift to sustainable cities. Citizen participation has attracted considerable attention, and the theoretical issues are explored. A number of international agreements promote the need for citizens to be involved in achieving 'sustainable development', including Agenda 21. This is something that is accepted by central and local government in New Zealand, with statutory provisions requiring participation included in both the Resource Management Act and the Local Government Act. There is a question as to how effective citizen participation is. In an attempt to assess the contribution to sustainability of Wellington, I evaluate the effectiveness of a city-wide strategic development process in Wellington, called Our City ~ Our Future. This process was initiated by Wellington City Council as a means of addressing Agenda 21, and Strategy development attracted a considerable degree of interest, with up to 2,000 citizens involved over the 18 month period of Strategy development. The final document is considered a 'reasonable' first step and efforts are now being directed at implementation. There is a widely held view that implementation is not progressing as fast or as thoroughly as it could. Key themes that emerge as possible explanations for this include: the representativeness of the process, an uneasy balance between council and citizen control, the lack of internal council support, under-resourcing, group dynamics, council governance, and a lack of understanding of sustainability. The wider economic and political climate also contributes to limited progress. To address the barriers to implementation a number of recommendations are made. Priorities for action include: a change in Council attitude—a genuine commitment to citizen participation needs to be made; adequate resourcing of the Advisory Group which is overseeing Strategy implementation; capacity building and resourcing for community groups involved in citizen participation processes; a need for raising awareness of sustainability; and finding ways to ensure involvement by key stakeholders.
Dedication

The origins of my desire to help make the world a better place can be found in the loving influence of my grandparents. It is to the memory of Lance and Edith Blyth, and Mary and Wally Bampton, whose lives were rich in generosity and love of their families, that I dedicate this thesis.
Acknowledgments

The work in this thesis would not have been possible without the contributions and support of a large number of people. Without exception, I have found a real willingness by those I have approached to explore what has happened with Our City – Our Future, and where it is going. From the collective experience of those involved I have learnt an enormous amount. I owe thanks to those whose suggestions have helped with the development of the themes and insights considered below.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the following people, whose support ensured this research went smoothly and ensured it was a rewarding experience:

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My colleagues in the Community Development Group at the Department of Internal Affairs have allowed me the space to do this study. I hope that the opportunity to do this study will contribute to our work understanding the needs of communities throughout the country, and contributing to their development.

Finally, the guidance and support of my supervisors Dr Christine Cheyne and Dr Martin Sullivan has been immensely valuable. Not only did they help me complete the work necessary, but have made me feel I’ve embarked on a worthwhile endeavour.
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List of abbreviations

ACE  Action on Community and Environment
AG  Advisory Group
APRG  Advisory Peer Review Group
CSG  City Steering Group
IUCN  World Conservation Union
KRA  Key Result Area
ICLEI  International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
LA21  Local Agenda 21
LGA  Local Government Act
LGNZ  Local Government New Zealand
MfE  Ministry for the Environment
OCOF  Our City ~ Our Future
PCE  Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
RMA  Resource Management Act
SWG  Specialist Working Groups
UK  United Kingdom
UN  United Nations
UNCED  United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNEP  United Nations Environment Programme
Author's note

A large number of official Council documents and miscellaneous papers are referred to in this thesis. To distinguish between references to items listed in the bibliography and other documents consulted, the following convention is used: for the former, author is followed by year, eg (Roseland 1998); for the latter, author or corporate author followed by day/month/year, eg (Mowat 20/3/98).

A copy of the final Our City ~ Our Future: Strategy for the Future of Wellington is can be viewed online at: www.wcc.govt.nz/wcc/future/ocof/

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