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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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**November 1999**

## 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:

- Chris Horne, for allowing me extended access to his comprehensive and orderly files
- Jane Dawson, for providing comments on my draft thesis
- Dean McLaren, and other Wellington City Council staff, for providing me access to documents produced and held by the Council
- Vincent O'Malley, for proof-reading the final draft.

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.

# Table of contents

Abstract.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of diagrams.....	vii
List of abbreviations.....	vii
Author's note.....	viii
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 What is a sustainable city?.....	2
1.2 The research question.....	5
1.3 Chapter summary.....	6
<b>Chapter Two: Linking citizen participation to sustainability.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 What is the meaning of citizen participation?.....	9
2.1.1 Some definitions of citizen participation.....	10
2.1.2 Strengths and weaknesses of citizen participation.....	12
2.1.3 How much participation is desirable?.....	16
2.1.4 The tension between representation and participation.....	17
2.1.5 Critiques of citizen participation.....	18
2.1.6 Citizen participation techniques.....	20
2.1.7 New ways of working together.....	21
2.2 The role of participation in the shift to 'sustainable development'.....	22
2.3 Citizen participation in Aotearoa New Zealand.....	26
2.3.1 Attitudes to government.....	26
2.3.2 The Government's approach to citizen participation.....	28
2.3.3 The statutory framework for citizen participation.....	30
2.3.4 Local government interest in innovation.....	35
<b>Chapter Three: The path to Wellington's strategy for the future.....</b>	<b>37</b>
My experiences of <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	38
3.1 What is <i>Our City ~ Our Future: Strategy for the Future of Wellington</i> all about?.....	39
3.2 Strategic Planning in Wellington City Council.....	42
3.2.1 Early steps in WCC strategic planning.....	44
3.2.2 WCC 'internal' planning process.....	46
3.3 <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> Strategy development.....	48
3.3.1 Origins of the city-wide strategy.....	48
3.3.2 First steps for <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	51
3.3.3 The visioning phase.....	55
3.3.4 'Focus on the future' week.....	56

3.3.5 Specialist Working Groups.....	57
3.3.6 Advisory Peer Review Group.....	59
3.3.7 Outreach and strategy development.....	60
3.3.8 Draft Strategy launched .....	62
3.3.9 Our City ~ Our Future Budget.....	64
3.3.10 Preparing for <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> implementation .....	65
3.3.11 Establishing the Advisory Group.....	68
3.4 What has happened since the Strategy was finalised?.....	69
<b>Chapter Four: Our City ~ Our Future on paper?</b> .....	<b>73</b>
4.1 City Steering Group: what happened .....	74
4.1.1 City Steering Group understanding of citizen participation .....	74
4.1.2 Group Dynamics .....	80
4.1.3 CSG efforts shaping the future of Wellington.....	82
4.1.4 What was missing .....	84
4.2 Wellington City Council: what happened?.....	85
4.2.1 The Council's approach to citizen participation.....	86
4.2.2 Council approach to citizen participation in <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	90
4.2.3 Achievement of 'sustainable development' .....	94
4.3 <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> Advisory Group.....	96
4.3.1 Progress toward implementation .....	96
4.3.2 Focus on structure .....	98
4.3.3 Membership of the Advisory Group .....	100
4.3.4 Advisory Group dynamics .....	101
<b>Chapter Five: What was said about Our City ~ Our Future?</b> .....	<b>103</b>
Data collection methodology.....	103
5.1 <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> Strategy development.....	105
5.1.1 Enthusiasm for the process .....	105
5.1.2 Group dynamics.....	107
5.1.3 Project resourcing .....	109
5.1.4 Representativeness of the process.....	110
5.1.5 Design of the process .....	112
5.1.6 The outcome: a "reasonable" document.....	113
5.2 Progress with <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> implementation .....	115
5.3 Barriers to implementation of <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	118
5.3.1 Role of the <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> Advisory Group .....	118
5.3.2 Who is directing the process?.....	119
5.3.3 Leadership of <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	121
5.3.4 Resources for implementation .....	122

5.4 Other key issues raised by participants .....	124
5.4.1 Role of staff in <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	124
5.4.2 Impact of politics .....	125
5.4.3 Where does sustainability fit in?.....	126
<b>Chapter Six: Discussing the findings</b> .....	129
6.1 Evaluation of citizen participation .....	130
6.2 Citizen or council control: exploring the issues .....	131
6.2.1 What was the Council's role?.....	132
6.2.2 Councillor support for <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	134
6.2.3 Internal Council support for <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	137
6.2.4 <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> and the ladder of participation .....	139
6.2.5 External stakeholder involvement.....	140
6.3 Effectiveness of citizen participation .....	142
6.3.1 Citizen involvement in <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	142
6.3.2 Understanding the City Steering Group .....	145
6.3.3 Availability of resources for the development of <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	146
6.4 Outcomes of <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	147
6.4.1 <i>Our City ~ Our Future: Strategy for the Future of Wellington</i> .....	147
6.4.2 Other outcomes of <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	148
6.4.3 Limited implementation of <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> .....	150
6.4 Sustainability and the wider picture .....	152
<b>Chapter Seven: Options and recommendations</b> .....	157
7.1 Recommendations on urban sustainability.....	158
7.2 Recommendations on citizen participation.....	160
7.2.1 The role of council and its level of commitment .....	160
7.2.2 Stakeholder involvement.....	163
7.2.3 Resourcing for participation .....	164
7.2.4 Public outreach .....	165
7.2.5 Other recommendations .....	166
7.3 Further research.....	166
<b>Appendices</b> .....	168
Appendix 1: List of City Steering Group members .....	168
Appendix 2: Interview questions sheet .....	170
Appendix 3: Information sheet .....	171
<b>Bibliography and other documents consulted</b> .....	173
Bibliography.....	173
Other documents consulted .....	183
1) Wellington City Council Committee papers.....	183

2) Wellington City Council committee minutes .....	184
3) 2020 Task Group reports .....	185
4) Our City ~ Our Future papers .....	185
5) Other documents consulted .....	187
6) Newspaper articles .....	187
7) Personal communication .....	188
8) Interviews .....	188

## List of diagrams

Figure 1.1 Arnstein's ladder of participation .....	13
Figure 3.1: <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> Vision .....	40
Figure 3.2: <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> Umbrella Plan for Wellington .....	42
Figure 3.3 : Priority Objectives.....	47
Figure 3.4: How <i>Our City ~ Our Future</i> Developed .....	52
Figure 4.1 Ladder of participation presented to Communication and Consultation Committee..	88

## 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	<i>Our City ~ Our Future</i>
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

WCC	Wellington City Council
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WFF	World Wide Fund for Nature

### **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/](http://www.wcc.govt.nz/wcc/future/ocof/)

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