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Shorts: four brief analyses of citizens' juries and similar participatory processes



8a: Ignoring and suppressing grassroots participation in a northern English town

by TOM WAKEFORD, BANO MURTUJA and PETER BRYANT

In the spring of 2004 we began work on a citizens' jury process that we co-designed with the residents of a town in northern England. One third of its population is minority ethno-cultural heritage communities. The subject of this 'do-it-yourself jury' was to be decided by the twenty volunteers, drawn at random from community organisations and the electoral roll.

At the end of a day-long workshop, the jurors settled on the role of the police relating to drink and illegal drug use among young people. This topic made local politicians nervous, they asked that we postpone the jury until after the local elections in a few months' time. They refused to provide information to the process or cooperate with it.

Having heard a wide range of perspectives from a diverse set of 'witnesses' the jury sought to recommend a number of solutions to the problems highlighted during the process. The jury at no point divided along ethnic lines. The following is an extract from our 2004 report about the process:

We observed that white residents living in areas of diverse ethno-heritage often feel patronised by conventional anti-racism campaigns. Such messages are promoted by the same authorities who seem to have failed to address some of the most urgent problems facing their communities.

Our final report suggested that some Asian and other minority communities might welcome a re-direction of resources towards initiatives that allow them to join together with white community members and bring pressure for change, especially since many of the most pressing social and economic problems affect all the local population regardless of their background.¹

We suggest that the re-building of democratic engagement in northern England, as in many other parts of the UK, will be greatly enhanced by an increase of face-to-face meetings such as those that form the essence of a do-it-yourself citizens' jury. However, such exercises are only likely to be successful when they involve a broad range of local community groups and are not controlled by any one stakeholder or funder.

Though the jury presented their report in person to the council leader, a member of the European Parliament and opposition politicians, the council studiously ignored the process, both before and after the election. As organisers and facilitators we and the jurors fundraised for ongoing activities

¹ See online resources section for links to the full version of the report.

by ourselves, including a stall at the local market. But without the backing of a strong campaigning organisation, our impact on the way in which the local council consulted its population was minimal.

The funder of the jury, a well known UK grant-making foundation, was extremely sympathetic to the jury's desire to make their local council more accountable. They even attended meetings at which council officials expressed interest in working with the jurors. But four years later, jurors have had no contact from the council and have become sceptical that the council has any intention of working with them.

On reflection, we as organisers recognise at least two mistakes we made that allowed the council to domesticate the jury process, even though it was independent of them. Firstly, we underestimated the power of the local council to marginalise the process. By parachuting into a complex local

community and organising a process without it being jointly owned and planned by accountable community organisations that had legitimacy with the council, it was easy for senior local policy makers to portray the jury as troublemakers. Secondly, we wrongly expected that the multi-racial group of individuals that emerged from the jury process would be empowered enough to become activists in their own right, supported by an infrastructure that could easily be organised remotely from outside the region. In reality, the community empowerment our project envisaged required long-term investment in grassroots community work. Despite modest ongoing support from an extremely patient funder we have not yet found a formula that allows us to overcome the suppression of our alternative to the 'pork barrel' politics that dominates the dysfunctional government of an economically deprived town.²

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² 'Pork barrel' is commonly used as a political metaphor for the appropriation of government spending for projects that are intended primarily to benefit particular constituents or campaign contributors. This usage originated in American-English with reference to gifts of salt pork in a barrel by slave-owners to their slaves.

8b: The art of facipulation? The UK government's nuclear power dialogue

'Facipulation' is a recently coined word for the process whereby facilitators and other convenors of participatory processes get participants to produce the result that the facilitators want, whilst making the participants think they are expressing their own ideas.



© Channel 4

Jon Snow presents a Channel 4 News item on the government's nuclear power dialogue.

Transcript of UK TV's Channel 4 News, 19th September, 2007:¹

With just three weeks left to run, the government's public consultation into nuclear power has run into trouble and a complaint to a professional body.² In nine day-

long meetings across Britain two weekends ago, nearly a thousand people were shown videos, presentations, and handouts, and their opinion on building new nuclear power stations canvassed [...]

... now Greenpeace would [be bound to] say that [the



A facilitator from Opinion Leader Research leads participants through a nuclear power dialogue session.

dialogue carried a pro-nuclear bias], you could argue, but independently 20 senior academics too have come forward and will be writing to government with similar reservations.³

They say the consultations were deliberately skewed by linking nuclear to fears about climate change, because the government knew past [market] research had shown it's the only way to get people to accept nuclear, albeit reluctantly.

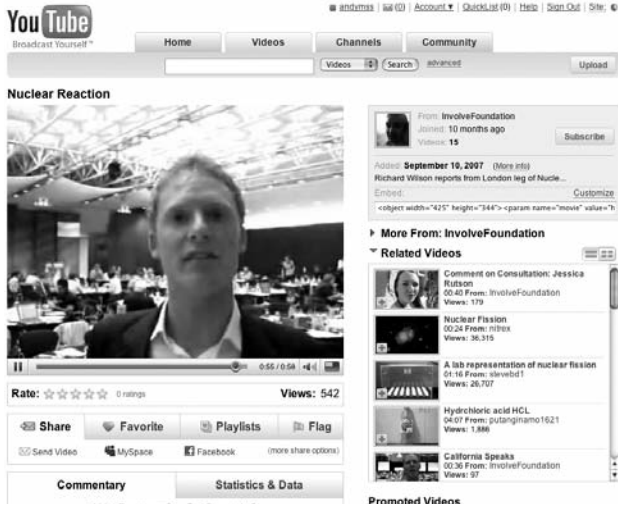
Similar concerns have come from some members of the public who attended – on websites and in unsolicited emails to Greenpeace. [The emails read] 'In the video, alternative viewpoints had doom-ridden music in the background. The government's view was then given against calm, relaxing music,' [said one participant]. 'I feel I have been mugged,' [said another participant].

¹ www.channel4.com/player/v2/player.jsp?showid=9237

² This refers to the UK Market Research Society, which is meant to regulate practice among its members, including ensuring that public consultations, for example, are carried out 'transparently [and] objectively'.

³ A previous UK Government consensus conference on radioactive waste was critiqued by Helen Wallace, then Science Director at Greenpeace UK, in PLA 40, pages 61-63.

**Involve's
youtube film
of the Nuclear
Dialogue.**



Youtube clip: *I'm Richard Wilson from Involve [Deputy Chair of Sciencewise] and I'm here at the Nuclear Dialogue on Saturday here in London.*⁴⁵

[Richard Wilson to reporter]: *We [Sciencewise] did offer our advice. Sciencewise consists of a panel of experts – practitioners, academics etc... Because of the timescale it wasn't practical for us to be involved in the commissioning [of the dialogue process]. But I know that the advice we offered [to the government] wasn't ever taken on.*⁶

Opinion Leader Research said: *We refute the points made in the complaint [from Greenpeace]. We believe our work was carried out to the highest professional standards. Opinion Leader will co-operate fully with the Market Research Society investigation.*⁷⁸

See www.channel4.com/player/v2/player.jsp?showId=9237

⁴ Involve, according to its website 'was founded in 2004 to determine how new forms of public participation can strengthen democracy in Britain and elsewhere'. Involve has its offices in London and is governed by a board chaired by the former head of the UK Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and includes members of a leading market research company, Ipsos MORI.

⁵ Sciencewise is 'a programme funded by the Government to help policy makers find out people's views on emerging areas of science and technology so that they can take these into account when making national policy decisions.'

⁶ Though neither Sciencewise nor Involve complained about the process, Greenpeace UK made a formal complaint to the Market Research Society alleging improper conduct of a consultation process.

⁷ Opinion Leader Research was commissioned by the Government to undertake the dialogue.

⁸ The news story followed an official complaint made by Greenpeace UK to the Market Research Society, which has a code of conduct for its members, which includes Opinion Leader Research.

8c: Genetically modified meetings: the Food Standards Agency's citizens' jury

Extract from a report from the Policy Ethics and Life Sciences (PEALS) Research Centre, Newcastle University (PEALS, 2003).

During April 2003, the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned what it called a 'citizens' jury' from Opinion Leader Research, which is a division of the public relations firm Bell Pottinger (also known as Chime Communications). In contravention of standard practice for citizens' juries, no panel of stakeholders was assembled to oversee balance and fairness in the jury process. Senior staff at the FSA stated that it was itself an independent agency and had been advised by OLR/Bell Pottinger that no such oversight panel would be necessary.

A major disadvantage of not having drawn on a broad range of interest groups for oversight of the jury process became apparent when the question was set for the jury to consider. This was announced by the FSA as: 'Should GM food be available to buy in the UK?' One of the witnesses to the jury immediately objected to this question, commenting that 'with a question like that I can predict a "yes" verdict without even needing to give evidence'. Not only was this question open to the accusation of being skewed, like some opinion poll surveys, towards getting a particular answer, but



Norfolk Genetic Information Network (NGIN) and Friends of the Earth, two organisations who challenged the legitimacy of the FSA's jury process.

it is likely to have severely limited the scope the jurors had to discuss a range of issues relating to the links between GM technologies, the food system and farming that they – rather than the FSA – might have thought were pertinent. Citing advice from Bell Pottinger, the FSA 'disagreed that it is good practice to allow jurors to set their own agenda'.

Alongside many other quality control issues surrounding the use of 'off-the-shelf' processes that their organisers decide to call citizens' juries, the FSA initiative leads us to believe that the practice of giving such juries a one-line question, such as the one given to the FSA citizens' jury should be discouraged and that it is misguided for any organisation organising a jury process to believe itself so independent that it can forgo the transparent oversight mechanism that a multi-stakeholder panel provides.

REFERENCES

PEALS (2003) *The People's Report on GM Crops*. Newcastle University: UK.

8d: If we have time, motivation and resources to participate, does that mean we gain authority and power?

By the RIGHT 2B HEARD COLLECTIVE and SWINGBRIDGE VIDEO

The script of a video contribution to a Joseph Rowntree Foundation conference on participation, November 2007.

All the voices in the video are from people with direct experience of being participants in one or more citizens' jury-type processes.

Narrator: *If we have **time**...*

Simon: *Time? There is not enough hours in the day.*

Trisha: *I don't have enough time for myself as it is at the moment, let alone giving up time for something that I'm not going to see the results from.*

Janet: *How do I find time as a single parent to go out into the community to find out what is needed to be done?*

Jackie: *Time? Where do we get the time to reflect on what we've done? When do we get time to go back and explain what we're talking about at meetings to the public, to the people that we are supposed to be representing?*

Simon: *Time? I only do things if I'm paid, none of this volunteering stuff.*

Narrator: *If we have time, **motivation**...*

Simon: *Motivation? What's my motivation for this scene? Yeah, alright mate, why do I want to come to a session about arts and crafts when I'm absolutely starving? Food motivates me.*

Narrator: *If we have time, motivation, and **resources**...*

Simon: *Please sir, can we have some more?*

Trisha: *Give me £100 and I'll get some community participation. Give the top guy £100 and he'll use it for a round of drinks.*

Anonymous: *They'll get us to organise participation to decide how to distribute what's just peanuts, while all the big money is in their control.*

Trisha: *Why do you start off with a huge budget and by the time you've worked out what the table centres [flowers] are for the men at the top, it gets down to me for community action and there's £3.50 left.*

Narrator: *If we have time, motivation, and resources to **participate**...*

Janet: *They are telling me I have to participate, but I haven't been told what to do since I was 15.*

Joe: *We've been asked, and we've been asked. We've been invited to meetings, we've been invited to participate, but what happens?*

Madhusudhan: *Participation? Participation?*

Janet: *Yeah, right!* (laughs)

Joe: *What's the point?* (laughing) *Why take part in anything? Nothing ever happens, it just doesn't work.*

Madhusudhan: *Participation? Yes!*

Narrator: *If we have time, motivation, and resources to participate, does that mean we gain **authority**?*

Peter: *We need to facilitate the empowerment of citizens through deliberative democracy.*

All: (shouting) *Rubbish!*

Anon: *I don't know who's in charge.*

Simon: *I hate it!*

Narrator: *If we have time, motivation and resources to participate, does that mean we gain authority and **power**?*

Right 2B Heard member Janet and her son Adam.



Swingbridge Video

Simon: (Shouting) *Power!*

Joe: *Power? Empower, isn't that the guy that sends me the bill every month for the electric?*

Trisha: *Power. People go on about power but the decisions already been taken, we're just rubber stamping it.*

Simon: *Power mad.*

Joe: *That and the big stick make me work every day* (laughs).

Simon: *We want more!*

Joe: *Power. If the powers that be see this we're out of a job in the morning.*

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NOTES

Right 2B Heard is made up of people from a variety of backgrounds who have participated in processes of participatory democracy since 2001 – particularly those from communities that have undergone marginalisation in the past.

You can watch the video online on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=eurmFan_a-A

On screen appearances: Peter Bryant, Janet Davies, Si Donnelly, Jackie Haq, Madhusudhan, Joe Thomas and Trisha White. Also taking part but not pictured: Assad Afzal, Farheen Aktar and Jasber Singh.

Facilitated by Hugh Kelly and Lynne Caffrey of Swingbridge Video. Assistance and support from Emma Stone (Joseph Rowntree Foundation) and Tom Wakeford (Newcastle University).