An evaluation of public participation theory and

practice: The Waterloo Region case

by

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A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

in fulfillment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Master of Environmental Studies

in

Planning

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2014

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

At the end of the 1960s, public participation became an important issue where citizens and academics questioned the influence of power in the decision-making process. Since that time, the theory of public participation has raised many questions, but the issue of power remains the main challenge in the practice of public participation.

The thesis collects facts and data from experience, insights, and ideas of practitioners from Waterloo Region, and academics in the planning field across Canada. The intention of the research is to identify the theory-practice gaps by comparing and contrasting the data from the three main sources. A literature review along with online surveys was undertaken to examine the theory of public participation. Waterloo Region is the case study community where semi-structured interviews were conducted with the key informants for identifying the main challenges of applying theory to practice.

The findings suggest that practitioners and academics need to collaborate to better understand the challenges and difficulties associated with transition of theory into practice. Furthermore, this thesis provides recommendations and potential solutions to closing this theory-practice gap.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

The thesis is dedicated to my mother and children: Svetlana, Anastasia, and Sofia.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Over the years, the practice of public participation and the advancement of public participation theory have played a significant role in our society. However, in practice, public engagement in local decision-making seems to lag behind current theories of public participation. In this regard, political, economical, social, and environmental forces seem to challenge the transition from theory to practice. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to explore the gap between the theory and practice of public participation, and examine how this gap could be bridged. Specifically, this research is aimed at obtaining a deeper understanding of the reasons behind this theory-practice gap through surveys with academics and interviews with practitioners, and by comparing and contrasting these findings against the findings from the literature review. In order to achieve these goals, the Waterloo Region was chosen as a case study.

This thesis is motivated by a personal interest in exploring public participation theory and practice, and in recommending ways of improving the linkage between theory and practice. Participation is an integral part of our daily life, and I am interested in evaluating the progress of public participation during the last fifty years. The topic is of interest to me since there is a lack of information related to the practice of public participation.

1.2. Purpose statement

The purpose of this research is to explore the evolution of public participation theory, and to examine how public participation has changed during the last fifty years in urban planning practice. I seek to investigate the progression of public participation practice. The literature review describes the theories and concepts that were designed to be implementable in practice but were not. As such, I am interested in examining the barriers that challenge the transition from theory to practice.

The location of my case study is the Waterloo Region where I conducted a set of interviews with key informants, including city planners, politicians, local officials, and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The research involves qualitative data collection with the main sources being a literature review, online survey with academics, and interviews with local practitioners.

1.3. Research Questions

Is it possible to close the gap between the theory and the practice of public participation?

- How has the theory and the practice of public participation changed in the last fifty years, in the context of urban planning?

- How big is the gap between public participation theory and practice?

- What are the factors that cause a gap between theory and practice?

- How might we close the gap between public participation theory and practice, in urban planning?

1.4. Background

Public participation became high-profile issue in the 1960s when an article about power in decision-making was published (Arnstein, 1969; Hawley, 1963). Until that time, major decisions were made by community leaders or by a small circle of powerful people without citizens' input (Shipley & Utz, 2012). Not much changed until the middle of the 20th century when people became aware of their rights and opportunities (Warren, 1969). Slowly but surely, the theory of public participation was developing, and new authors and scholar enriched the theoretical groundings on which practice had to be based. The progress of practice was not so obvious and constant due to the complexity of the issue and lack of preparation of the government and practitioners to make this transition. The role of power and politics played an important role in challenging people engagement and power sharing, and this can be explained by the fact that historically power meant authority.

Based on the literature review about public participation theory, and having all theoretical statements together, the picture of what theory is can be drawn. According to theory, the greater the number of people involved in the process of public participation, the higher chance that the community will act as a unit. Also, theory states that public participation in the planning process is a major contributor to comprehensive plans. In addition, public participation benefits the plans by bringing new insights and ideas. Regarding the use of techniques for attracting public interest, the theory articulates the dependence of level of public involvement on the opportunities to participate. In summary, the theory states that public participation plays an important role in decision-making process and offers the opportunity to understand the reasons and arguments of opposite parties.

Today, in our democratic society the decision-making process needs to be transparent and open to support citizen participation. The scholars in the literature actively discuss collaboration, use of social media, long-term thinking, and open governance as ways to enhance public participation. However, returning to Arnstein's (1969) ladder, and to the question of level of engagement, we can discover that we have not progressed much beyond the Inform and Consult levels (Bailey & Grossardt, 2007). In spite of the fact that the importance of public participation is well-discussed in the literature with showing benefits for citizens and for the government, it is seen as a challenge for practitioners and of minimal value to citizens.

Some authors argue that public participation is an inevitable part of the decision-making process because we create our future by the decisions that we made today (Fisher & Ury, 1981). In practice, not all people can think in long range, and most of the participants care about the issues that affect them directly or in the nearest future (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The problem is that theory is often too abstract and has very little in common with practice; this challenges the transition and successful application of theory into practice.

1.4.1. Case study

Waterloo Region is known as being innovative and progressive in areas of technology, economics, and government administration (Region of Waterloo, 2011). Collaboration and innovation are indicated as the values of the Strategic Plan 2011-2014. The focus area in the design and implementation of the Strategic Plan is "community inclusion" (Region of Waterloo, 2011). Additionally, Waterloo Region has a rich educational capital comprising universities, colleges, and innovative organizations. With this in mind, and knowing that the population of the region has a significant proportion of

student and young professionals, the region is unique in its characteristics, and is an interesting case study for this research.

The set of interviews with key informants in Waterloo Region has provided me with data on the practice of public participation, and provided insights regarding the ideas and experiences of today planning practitioners. Furthermore, a comparative and contrasting analysis between the findings from the literature review and the online survey with academics assisted me in examining the progress made in the practice of public participation during the last fifty years.

1.5. Thesis structure

The thesis consists of seven chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One provides an overview of public participation theory, including its main theories and approaches. A problem statement explaining the difficulties surrounding the application of public participation theory in practice is also included. A series of research questions clarifies the goals of this research, along with the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on the literature review regarding public participation theory. It describes the main theories and approaches to public participation that have been used over the last fifty years to present day. It also describes the main forces that have affected the evolution of public participation theory.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes the methods used to answer my research questions. This includes a description of data collection: interviews with participants, literature review,

and personal observations. Also, I provide a review of the sampling methods used to identify participants in this research (sampling and criterion-based methods). I also include analysis of the data (e.g., triangulation and coding) with comments about possible limitations of the study.

Chapter Four: Survey Study

This chapter describes the findings from the online survey, "An evaluation of public participation theory and practice" with academics across Canada. It includes a description of the progress of public participation, the challenges in public participation theory, and discussion about the gap between theory and practice. Further, it includes statistical data based on the responses from academic respondents.

Chapter Five: Interview Interpretation

This chapter describes the practice of public participation in the Waterloo Region based on the interviews with key informants (i.e., active practitioners in the Region). I also include an overview of the practice of public participation in the Waterloo Region with participants' opinions and comments on it.

Chapter Six: Findings Analysis and Discussion

This chapter focuses on comparing and contrasting the key findings from three main sources: 1) the literature review, 2) results from the online survey, and 3) interviews with practitioners. The chapter identifies the common and divergent themes regarding public participation.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter describes the conclusions and recommendations aimed at linking the theory and practice of public participation, and possible scenarios joint collaboration. It

also includes a discussion into the significance of the research from both the academic

and practitioners' perspective.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Within democratic societies, public participation plays a significant role in the decision-making process. Although the theory of public participation is constantly evolving with new approaches and innovations, the application of these approaches in practice is seen as a challenge. The question therefore is how has public participation changed during the last fifty years and what are the forces that affect these changes?

The purpose of this literature review is to trace a path to the research topic and to gain an understanding of the theory in order to adequately explore the research topic. Based on the literature review, the researcher can summarize the ideas and knowledge in the research area (Neuman, 2000). In addition, a literature review is aimed at educating the researcher about the ideas from the past and to stimulate the development of new ideas and theories (Neuman, 2000).

2.2. Definitions

Rowe and Frewer (2005) argued that there are several definitional issues associated with the term "public participation." The term is not well defined and can sometimes be controversial for many researchers. The general definition of public participation is the involvement of those who are potentially affected by a decision (IAPP, 2007). Usually, the terms "public participation" and "community engagement" are used interchangeably.

While the definition of public participation is fairly broad, Rowe and Frewer (2005) have attempted to narrow its scope by proposing to use it based on "the flow of information": communication, consultation, and participation (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, p.254). That is, communication and consultation are one-way flow approaches, while

participation is a two-way approach. Participation can be active (e.g., public meetings and conversation circles) or passive (e.g., representative participation). The levels of engagement will vary depending on the power that decision participants have (Arnstein, 1969; IAPP, 2007).

2.3. History of public participation

In the past, public participation was not a part of the planning or decision-making process (Shipley & Utz, 2012). The late 1960s was considered a period of substantial social and political change around the world. For example, the Vietnam War was underway and, as a result, in North America Anti-War movements began to emerge, and African colonies were gaining independence from Europe (Maslin, 2007). Within North America, a social revolution was underway with many groups struggling with materialism and conservatism norms that were in force in 1960s Western society (Maslin, 2007). Civil rights and anti-racism movements along with other changes characterized this period (Maslin, 2007).

The 1960s was a particularly challenging time for planners because their roles were changing from agency advocates to neighbourhood representatives (Warren, 1969). For example, experts that had experience working with communities or showed interest in public participation were more likely to be hired (Warren, 1969). Residents' power also increased in spite of the fact that city administrations were not ready to share it with citizens. As Warren (1969) suggests citizens' power increased because of the frequency of social movements in the cities.

Local officials were forced to share power with residents due to the increased demand for "planning with people" (Wilson, 1963). In an effort to save their power, mayors tried to build strong relationships with neighborhood associations that were very

common at that period, and expected their support during elections (Wilson, 1963). Citizens wanted higher levels of engagement in the projects in their neighborhoods but were not ready for any changes on their private properties (Wilson, 1963).

Hawley (1963) made an interesting observation in the early 1960s regarding power and how each social act or relationship could be expressed in terms of power. Based on his study, the concentration of power (e.g., number of employees involved in a program) was directly related to the success of urban renewal programs in the city (Burke, 1968). The same pattern was found for the community structure: the more people involved in the process, the greater the chance the community would act as a unit (Burke, 1968). Burke (1968) used Urban Renewal programs as a case study to test if his theory worked. In doing so, he proved that Urban Renewal Programs were more likely to succeed in densely populated areas; he explained this by highlighting the fact that higher concentrations of people drives the success of the program (Burke, 1968).

The main problem for planners and other public administrators regarding the encouragement of citizens to participate in decision-making in the 1960s was the choice of strategy (Burke 1968). According to Burke (1968), specific strategies, such as cooptation or community power strategy, could be applied to solve this problem. Most of the strategies that he observed were about manipulation, such as education-therapy or behavioural therapy. He emphasized the importance of applying strategies based on the case's unique characteristics.

Furthermore, Fellman (1969) studied public participation in the Master Plan for Massachusetts in the late 1960s when he discovered that while citizens from low and middle classes were not satisfied with the Plan, they did not know how to complain about it. Armed with this fact, he decided to closely study the social structure in these

communities. Fellman (1969) noted that highways were usually constructed through working class neighbourhoods where people had an inability to complain about the project and gave their power to the representatives from the higher social class (middle or upper class). Fellman (1969) was similar in his observations to Arnstein's and argued about the lack of power in the decision-making process. Fellman (1969) argued that disbelief in local authorities or over trust in representatives led to low levels participation or no participation at all in local projects.

During the planning of the Model Cities Program the question of power was especially acute. At this time, neighbourhoods were struggling with city halls for decision-making power in their neighborhoods (Warren, 1969). Citizens were concerned that very little participation was included in city development programs and called for a shift from "planning for citizens" to "planning with citizens" (Warren, 1969). The residents' demand to be engaged in the planning process was raised earlier by Wilson (1963) where he argued about the importance of citizen participating in the process in order to have a desired decision. The issue of no participation was based on the assumption that anti-poverty programs (running at that time) were for citizens, and Model Cities programs were for City Hall (Warren, 1969).

Although Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation was created more than forty years ago, it is still applicable to many areas today. Practitioners and scholars all over the world are still intrigued by the questions of power raised by Arnstein in 1960s and are still trying to answer them. Sherry Arnstein discussed the difference between empty (non-participation) and real (active engagement) participation, and argued that manipulation and tokenism are the most commonly used methods of public participation (Arnstein, 1969). Distribution of power between have-nots (low class) and "elite" (middle and upper

class) was the main theme of Arnstein's article. The author argued that in order to have real participation, the participants should possess the necessary power to affect the decision; otherwise there is a "therapy" or "manipulation" (Arnstein, 1969).

Figure 2.1. The Ladder of Citizen Participation
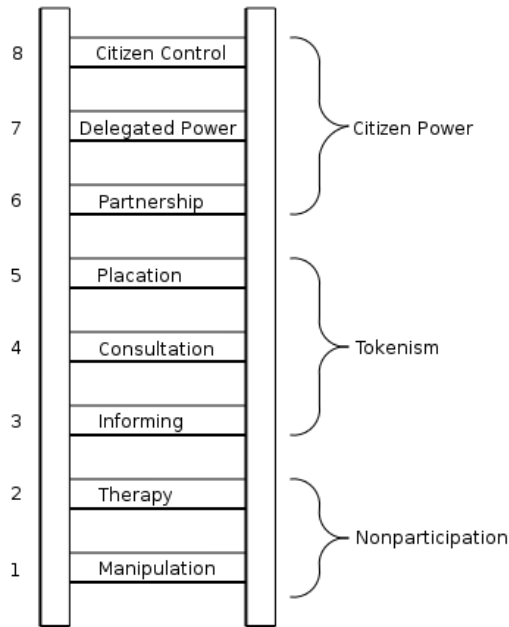
Source: Arnstein, 1969

Arnstein and Little (1975) tried to create a working model for public participation. Their main idea was to conduct meaningful participation based on the participants' knowledge in special areas. This idea shares some commonality with Transactive planning theory where Friedmann (1973) argues the importance of knowledge sharing. Participants had to function as experts and had to be paid for their work. This approach results in positive reaction from citizens - they were actively involved in the process, and negative reaction from the environment organizations - they have not agreed to pay people without special technical experience (Arnstein & Little, 1975).

Collins and Ison (1988) criticized Arnstein for narrowly thinking about changes in the roles and responsibilities (levels of power only) and for linear relationship between non-participation and citizen control (policy-making requires different levels of participation depending on the issue).

As a result of increased citizen inclusion in public administration some problems have been identified. For example, in the administrators' attempt to satisfy everyone's needs in the community, local officials can become distracted from more important problems that require long-range planning (Cupps, 1977). Cupps (1977) suggests that public participation without careful cost-analysis, detailed organization, and desire from local representatives might take the form of costly and timely processes with poor decisions.

Public participation in the 1970s represented one-way communication between local authorities and citizens. Citizens had a naïve sense that they were active participants of the process. After legislative changes in 1968 in Britain, public consultations became a part of the planning process. Hall (1983) argued that these changes transformed the role of the planner in the planning process. The period of 1970s was called a time of missed opportunities for communities to be involved.

At the late 1980s the collaborative approach was introduced as a way to deal with multidisciplinary conflicts (Gray, 1989). London (1995) discussed the potential limitation of collaborative approach, for example, time constraints, working in small groups, and the role of power in the decision. Fairness was discussed as an important element for the decision-making process. Lauber and Knuth (1999) argued that fairness is understood in different ways, and usually when citizens feel that the process was fair they are more likely to accept the decision.

The role of computer-based technologies and the use of social media take leading positions today, and the early 1990s was a starting point, when geographic information systems were used for visualisation purpose (Shipley & Utz, 2012). Since that time the visioning tools were developing and used not only on the local levels. Social media tools such as blogs, forums, Facebook, and Twitter, allow people from broader section to contribute into planning process (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010).

2.4. Public Participation in Planning

Public participation is now a key element in the planning process. Some theorists argue that public participation in the planning process leads to better plans, while others criticize planners for poor citizen incorporation in the plan-making process (Brody, Godshalk & Burby, 2003).

Relationships between public participation and planning process are complicated. Planning needs public input on the one hand to make the process successful, but it cannot afford it on the other hand (Day, 1997). Public participation benefits the planning process by making the plan comprehensive and improves it by bringing in new insights and ideas (Day, 1997). A lack of resources (i.e., time, labor, money) and time limits (i.e., deadlines) are common within the planning process and reduces the effectiveness of public participation (Day, 1997).

Synoptic planning that represented the planning in the 1960s was a continuation of blueprint planning. Synoptic planning acted as a starting point to participatory planning with more opportunities for public engagement in the planning process (Lane, 2005). Advocacy planning was a response to synoptic planning failures (Lane, 2005). The central ideas of advocacy planning were equal rights for all people to be part of the planning process with reduction of political power (Mazziotti, 1982). Advocacy planning

called for planners to be local representative and to provide service for neighborhoods (Davidoff, 1965). The contribution of advocacy planning represented progress toward public participation in the planning process (Lane, 2005).

John Friedmann introduced transactive planning in the early 1970s as a new approach to planning. Friedmann (1973) emphasized a gap between clients and planners. He argued that planners communicate using highly technical language (e.g., graphs, tables), which makes people uncomfortable and frustrated. Transactive planning sought to transform knowledge gained from communication between professionals and people into action (Friedmann, 1973). Mutual learning is a process by which people learn from each other by listening, respecting, and being open to others (Friedmann, 1973). Friedmann (1973) characterized American society in the 1970s as a power-centre and proposed transactive planning as a way of changing this dynamic. .

Rittel and Webber (1973) referred to planning problems as wicked problems that could not be solved using standard solutions. Each planning problem is unique and requires a careful approach to solving it; a solution for one problem might be a problem-generation for another (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The same observation was made by Burke (1968) where he underlined the importance of unique characteristics of each case and the impossibility to solving different problems with one strategy. The challenge of wicked problems is that planners never know what solution will work better and, at the same time, they could not apply many solutions because consequences from each of them might bring different repercussions (affect people's lives or financial resources) (Rittel & Weber, 1973).

The public sector was faced with a set of challenges after the Second World War such as implementation, management, and the challenge of rationalism (Kettl, 1990). For

example, the literature about implementation theory was based on the analysis of failures only (inability to achieve the goal) where the terms of success and failure were abstract and difficult to analyze (Kettl, 1990). Public management schools were based on the role of local officials and the programs they set (Kettl, 1990). Principal-agent theory was aimed at assisting in selecting the best agents but did not recognize the role of power inside the organization (Kettl, 1990). Kettl (1990) argued that agencies have to be recognized more than the instruments and that their behaviour varies depending on the information, environment, and structure. Another important conclusion made in the 1990s was that different variations of agencies' behaviour produce different outcomes and there is no ideal model of the process (Kettl, 1990).

Public participation in the planning process can be beneficial for both citizens and local governments. Clear and specific state growth management can improve the quality of urban plans (Burby, 1997). A study conducted by Dawkins and Nelson (2003) proved the connection between growth management programs and urban development. They found that cities with growth management programs attract new construction activities more frequently (Dawkins & Nelson, 2003). Planners argue that early stages of the planning process are the most effective (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003).

The planners have to target stakeholders and interest groups based on the contribution they can make in the planning process (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). Planner's choice about what method of public participation to use affects the level of citizen involvement in the process (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). Some theorists are of the opinion that the more methods and techniques used to attract public, the greater the level of public involvement. A group of scientists proved that the method planners choose

for public participation process (e.g., hearings, open houses, surveys) affects the level of participants' engagement (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003).

Selection of participants is an essential step for engaging the right people who care about the issue, or who have special knowledge or experience that can be used to make better decisions. There is a challenge to attract some target groups; for instance, young people are more likely to participate through the Internet and computer-based technologies (OECD, 2009). Local authorities have to be careful about the methods they choose because different groups of people may respond to different public participation techniques.

The number of people involved in the process directly affects the time that the process will take (Stewart & Sinclair, 2007). The time spent on communicating with the community varies from case to case. It often takes at least four weeks to complete a public participation process (DETR, 2000). For more complicated cases, it may take a longer period of time, which may result in decision-making delays. Citizens can face time and money constraints as well. Transportation expenses and time spent on the road are not taken into consideration by agencies when they conduct public participation meetings, but they can be the reasons for people's non-participation.

2.5. Public Participation in the Decision-Making Process

Public participation is widely practiced in the decision-making process. Public participation can benefit agencies by supporting their decisions, and by bringing new ideas and solutions to the process (Smith & McDonough, 2001). Public participation in the decision-making process is aimed at bringing fairness to the process. The most effective way of communication is by sharing of the information in personal face-to-face

communication with a person or a group (OECD, 2009). Two-way flows of information gives the participants an opportunity to express their opinions, see the reaction, and receive feedback on their comments. For a good decision-making process, the interaction between citizens and government has to be meaningful.

Public participation practice has received considerable profile following the conference in Rio de Janeiro where the importance of citizens' engagement in environmental decision-making was highlighted (Rio Declaration, 1992). The importance of public input in the policy decision-making process arose not only from the democratic principles but also from the understanding that unwanted policies may cause citizens' concerns and increasing distrust in local authorities (Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

Another big step toward engaging the public in decision-making was the Aarhus Convention that was signed in 1998 by European countries. The Convention gives the public the right to have access to information about environmental issues and participate in decision-making about the environment (Aarhus, 1998).

Fairness is a cornerstone element in the decision-making process (Smith & McDonough, 2011). The authors call us to be more attentive and serious to public participation as it is rooted in justice theory. Participants' concerns touch upon questions of representation, logic, and outcome. During the study conducted by Smith and McDonough (2011), the participants of the focus groups were asked about their public participation experience. For example, one of the participants expressed his opinion about the logic issue in the way that he is more comfortable with undesired outcome if it is logically explained. Fairness of the process can return citizens' trust in local officials. People do not trust politicians, administrators, and government representatives due to the decision-making process, which was closed to the public for a long period of time.

People are not willing to accept decisions made by someone else. In order to come to an agreement, people should feel the ownership of the idea or at least to be part of the decision-making process (Fisher & Ury, 1981). People are different by their nature. To handle these differences people use negotiation that helps them to get what they want from others (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Fisher and Ury (1981) identified two types of negotiation: soft negotiation that is aimed at avoiding personal conflicts and as a result makes people feel better, and hard negotiation that looks more like a competition with a goal to win and usually ends up with deteriorated relationship between opposing groups.

Citizens are more likely to participate in the process if they can see how their input can change the decision or if the decision could affect their lives (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). The issue of power in the decision-making process raised in the late 1960s is still central for people today. If citizens have a limited number of ways to be engaged in the process, they often feel that the local government does not care about their opinions in the policy-making process (OECD, 2009).

Public participation in Environment Impact Assessments (EIA) was recognized as an integral part of the decision-making process (Palerm, 2000). The theoretical approach is found in democratic principles of public participation (Palerm, 2000). These rights include the right to be informed, to be consulted, and to have a chance to express an opinion about the decision (Day, 1997; Burke, 1979; Arnstain, 1969). Habermas's theory of communicative action (TCA) is recognized as a major and earliest concept at which the model of public participation was based (Palerm, 2000). Palerm (2000) emphasizes the importance of equality in citizens' rights to participate. He argues that the level of erudition or language incompetence shouldn't be a barrier for people to participate. The only aspects that have to be taken into consideration are willingness to participate and

capacity (Palerm, 2000).

Deliberative democracy in decision-making is about creating a respectful dialogue between participants (Parkins & Mitchel, 2005). The issue of representation is central in deliberative democracy. People have to decide whom they will trust and give the power to make decisions (Parkins & Michel, 2005). Principled negotiation is seen as a key concept in solving conflicts. Principled negotiation is a process where parties are looking for the mutual agreement and the process should be based on the fairness (Fisher & Ury, 1981). In order to get a mutual agreement people have to follow four principles of the negotiation process: separate people from the problem, which means that personal feelings and emotions should not be a barrier in solving a problem; the focus should be on interests; creation of alternatives gives more chance to satisfy both sides; and the use of objective criteria (Fisher & Ury, 1981). A quarter of a century later, a group of authors argued that "getting to maybe" is the best way of action in our changing world (Westley, Zimmerman & Patton, 2007). We are players of the future changes; todays' actions will reflect in future changes. In order to have a desired future, people should act together (Westley, Zimmerman & Patton, 2007).

2.6. The Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory begins with Dewey's Theory of Knowledge where he emphasized the approach of "learning by doing" (Friedmann, 1987, p.188). John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher who gained most of his knowledge from reading European and Chinese literature. Social learning at the local level (communities, neighborhoods) was his main idea about politics in America (Friedmann, 1987). Actors and learners are the same in social learning – individuals, organizations, small groups,

and communities (Friedmann, 1987). Transactive planning introduced by Friedmann (1973) was focused on the same principles. Social learning theory is based on two main theories: the theory of reality and the theory of practice (Friedmann, 1987).

Social Learning theory is rooted in an attempt of Sears, Bandura and other researchers to get an idea of how people act in certain situations and how these actions change peoples' behavior in the future (Grusec, 1992). Sears tried to find answers about human behaviour in psychoanalytical theory, while Bandura rejected psychoanalytical ideas and based the theory on information-processing theory (Grusec, 1992). Sears and Bandura emphasized the importance of attention, memory, and imitation in Social learning theory (Grusec, 1992).

Bandura (1971) argued that an individual, the behaviour, and the environment could influence each other. Observation, imitation, and modeling are the central approaches in social learning theory (Bandura, 1987). People can learn by observing others' behaviour and by observations of the consequences of specific types of behavior (Bandura, 1987). Aggression can be learned through models, i.e., children become more aggressive when they observe or live in an aggressive environment (Bandura, 1987).

Learning is a central element in public policy-making (Daniels & Walker, 1996). In the late 1980s, planners introduced collaborative approaches as a way to reduce disparities in the public-private sector (Gray, 1989). Collaborative learning is a new approach in the public participation process, which involved dialogue and open communication with sharing ideas (Daniels & Walker, 1996). Learning should always be a part of the process even if high-quality and experienced professionals are involved in the process (Daniels & Walker, 1996).

When people are actively involved in the process they are more likely to learn than when they passively observe (Daniels & Walker, 1996). Active learning respects the knowledge of others (Daniels & Walker, 1996). The challenge of social learning is not in solving the conflict but more about working in conflict environment (Daniels & Walker, 1996). People learn in different ways. There is no "right" or "wrong" way of learning; there are different levels and different styles (Daniels & Walker, 1996).

2.7. New Approaches in Public Participation

In the last few decades the public participation process has been studied and analyzed from different angles, but the distance between citizens and government has remained the same (Plein & Williams, 1998). Based on the anonymous surveys of participants made by Bailey and Grossardt (2007) in the transportation department, citizens were willing to be engaged in the process but not to be decision-makers. The desired level was the same for citizens and for professionals – partnership. The Arnstein gap is a difference between the current (mean) level of public participation (between Consultation and Placation) and the desired one (Partnership) (Bailey & Grossardt, 2007) (See Figure 2.2. below). In addition, the gap indicates that citizens are willing to have planning process to be more responsive to their needs and wants.

Figure 2.2. The Arnstein Gap

Position on the Arnstein Ladder
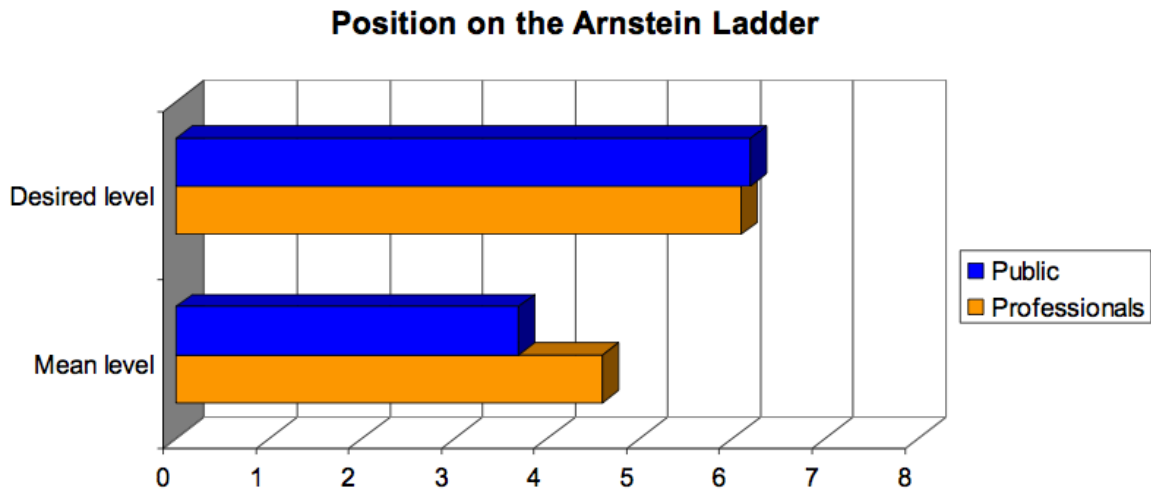
Source: Bailey & Grossardt, 2007

Communication and trust between government and citizens are the key aspects for creating open and meaningful policy-making (OECD, 2009). Distrust in local government is a strong force that keeps people away from participation in community meetings (Smulovitz, 2003). People do not feel as though they have power in the decision-making process, which makes them feel unwilling to participate in the public participation process.

A new form of citizen participation in planning named "Organic Planning" has emerged. Organic planning is controlled by citizens, oriented on the long-term prospective, and is aimed at improving local communities (Plein & Williams, 1998). The main goal of organic planning is to improve the connection between citizens and local government (Plein &Williams, 1998). For example, strategic planning can help in coming

to an agreement by focusing the participants on the idea of future generations and planning for them (Plein & Williams, 1998).

Innes and Booher (2004) argue that traditional forms of public participation are not effective and may negatively shape the relationship between citizens and government. The reasons why traditional methods are not working anymore relate to: the lack of actual participation, limited number of involved public in the process, and the unfriendly atmosphere (Innes & Booher, 2004). Hearings are the most commonly used method and are required by law (Innes & Booher, 2004). This has been criticized as one-way communication, for role that citizens play (to react on issue), for control of agenda, and the lack of respect for citizens' comments (Innes & Booher, 2004). The Planning Act (2004) has a minimum requirement of holding one public meeting for the new development applications and official plan development. Adams (2004) criticized public meetings for the lack of actual influence on the decision.

Speaking about increased demand for public involvement in the administrative processes, public managers have to find the ways to approach these involvements (Thomas, 1990). The question of what issues require public input and what issues are not have been raised (Thomas, 1990). Thomas (1990) suggests applying small-group decision-making theory in order to decide what public to attract and at what level to involve them. Based on the Vroom and Yetton (1973) theory, any discrepancy between desired and actual involvement reduce the effectiveness of the outcome. Thomas argued that time constrain is not an obstacle in achieving effective decision (1990). The author proved that the managers in balancing increased demand for public participation could adopt the theory (Thomas, 1990).

Castell (2012) argues that environmental issues, economic globalization, and public-private partnerships, which were not on the table in the late 1960s, now challenge today's public participation processes. Despite many new challenges, urban poverty and social exclusion will never lose their significance (Castell, 2012). According to Castell (2012) the old style of Ladder that represent levels of public participation has to be transformed into the new five-step model – Inform, Consult, Dialogue, Involvement, and Delegation, where each stage requires the achievement of the previous stage (Castell, 2012).

Connor (1988) discussed a new approach to public participation in preventing citizens' controversy to new policy decisions. The new ladder of citizen participation is a step-by-step instruction for dealing with citizens. The ladder starts with education (provide public with basic knowledge about the issue), and continues with feedback from them in order to get a sense of their understanding of the issue. Negotiation is seen as an essential part followed by the "bridge-building activity" (Connor, 1988, p. 255). The last step is Prevention by itself, which should be achieved by carefully completing all previous steps. According to Collins (1988) this ladder can be beneficial to the participation process in terms of saving time and money, and better decisions as a result of active communication with the public.

2.8. Deliberative Democracy

In the last few decades the issue of deliberative democracy in public participation practice has been raised. Many theories and concepts of participatory democracy are discussed now in the academic and professional realms. Representative democracy is being re-evaluated now due to the contemporary changes in society (noticeable difference in culture, religion, ethnicity) (Bloomfield, 2001). Government changes such as

localization, sensitivity to citizens' interests, affect public participation as well. Favorably, participatory democracy provides a method to increase citizen trust in local officials (Bloomfield, 2001). In the UK it is successfully practiced in land-use planning and authors argue that it should lead to better decisions (Bloomfield, 2001).

Hendriks (2002) discusses the challenges and changes that deliberative democratic process can bring to the government structures and methods of public participation such as juries and forums. Based on the author's prognosis, citizens can be more powerful in the decision-making process (Hendricks, 2002). Traditional roles of interest groups such as provision of information and legitimization of the process will disappear, and new roles (as experts) and new players (lay citizens) will arise in the process (Hendrichs, 2002). The complexity of the policy-making process requires interest groups to be more open and flexible; otherwise, they will be excluded from the deliberative democracy (Hendricks, 2002).

Miller (1992) discussed the differences between liberal democracy and deliberative democracy and argues that deliberative democracy has fewer social problems. He described the deliberative process as open discussions about the issue wherein participants not only have to choose one or another option (as in the traditional voting process) but also challenge it by giving their reasons (Miller, 1992). Miller (1992) criticizes the liberal voting process for leading to social choice dilemma where people face challenges in achieving a group agreement due different values and interests. Open discussion obliges us to respect others preferences and focus on the outcome of the process. Deliberative democracy gives people a chance to discuss opinions in debate form and also to create a network in their community.

Authentic public participation, which means that citizens are part of the deliberative process, is a new citizens' demand (Faltey, King & Susel, 1998). Citizens feel that their opinions are ignored in the decision-making process and administration is not welcome to their involvement (Faltey, King & Susel, 1998). In order to have effective (real) public participation, there has to be a partnership between citizens and administrators (Faltey, King & Susel, 1998). The shift to the partnership relationship requires some changes in roles (from managers to cooperators) and in the process (early access to the information, techniques, time) (Faltey, King & Susel, 1998). One of the barriers to authentic public participation is a modern life style where people do not communicate with each other in their neighborhood (Faltey, King & Susel, 1998). The education and empowerment of citizens, and re-education of public administrators are possible solutions to overcome the barriers and improve the public participation process (Faltey, King & Susel, 1998).

Chambers (2003) argues that deliberative democracy has moved from the theoretical stage to the stage where it has been applied in different areas. For example, he traced the use of deliberative democracy in policy studies and found a substantial change from expert-oriented policy-making to public participation in the policy-making today (Chambers, 2003).

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2, 2007) developed a spectrum of citizens engagement based on the impact they have on the decision (IAPP, 2012). It ranges from inform levels with no power on the decision to the empower level where the citizens are decision-makers (IAPP, 2007). This spectrum is a continuation of Arnstein's ladder limited to five key levels of public participation and provides the public with the promises of their influence on the decision (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Public Participation Spectrum

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPA TION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advise and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	Fact sheets Websites Open houses	Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public meetings	Workshops Deliberate polling	Citizen Advisory committees Consensus-building Participatory decision-making	Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decisions

Source: IAP2 Canada, 2012

Bason (2010) advocates the importance of co-creation in public sector, which means creating with people. He emphasized the benefits that innovative approach can bring to the public sector, such as variety of new ideas and insights, and connection of

end users and stakeholders. This approach is a continuation of idea "planning with citizens" that was popular at the end of the 1960s.

A recent article emphasized the difficulty of linking the theory and practice in the planning area and in general (Carmon & Fainstein, 2013). Carmon and Fainstein (2013) stated that if the use of research and analysis of theory increased, then planning practice could be improved. They argued that the conclusion and recommendations in the literature should be practice-based, and successful practices should be highlighted.

Collaboration and long-term thinking are new and key elements in today's planning practice and in the public sector. The public sector relies on a small group of people where changes and innovation is not welcomed (The Collaborative Citizen, 2014). The situation has changed since the public service system was created; it needs to be adapted to the new conditions (The Collaborative Citizen, 2014).

The World Bank has recognized the role of citizen engagement in the decision-making process and in creating solutions. The Bank reviewed the use of new technologies in engagement practice and what effect they have on progress. What was new a couple of years ago is common practice now, and technologies have accelerated the development of public services (Davenport, 2014). The World Bank recently sponsored a set of online conferences about closing the loop between citizens and government. Participants discussed the importance of governments to be more attentive to the citizens, and what role can play technologies in closing the loop (The World Bank, 2014). Having all these recent articles and reports, the awareness about the importance and the need of public engagement in the planning, and world practice is seen as positive trend to more open and transparent process of decision-making.

2.9. Summary of key findings

This review of the literature about public participation theory highlights the dependence of public participation theory development on the ideas and principles that were proposed more than 40-50 years ago. The main changes started after World War II when the shift from manipulation to direct participation happened. The roles of planners have changed under the pressure of citizens' demand to be actively involved in the process. The question of power sharing was raised in the late 1960s by people from lower and middle classes, which were new and unexpected changes for local authorities. During blueprint planning, planners used very technical language in communication with public that created a barrier between them. In the 1970s, transactive planning was introduced wherein mutual learning was seen as a main concept.

If the main problem for the 1960s was a choice of strategy, it was later realized that every case is unique and participants have to be targeted. The fact that unpopular decisions will not be accepted leads to more citizens' engagement in the decision-making process. Deliberative democracy covered in the literature review emphasized the chance to improve trust in local government by having open and respectful dialogue.

Another major step toward public engagement was the convention signed in Aarhus in the 1990 that provided people access to the information about environmental issues. Scholars in the beginning of 2000s emphasized the importance of targeting and attracting the "right" people to the process. Principled negotiation was seen as a direction to work in conflicted environments with mutual benefits at the end of the process. In an attempt to improve the relationship between public and government sectors, "organic planning" was introduced. People-oriented and long-term perspective thinking was the main attributes of the new form of planning. The last finding that is found in the

30

literature review is the spectrum of the citizen engagement that was published by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) and is based on the power on the decision that people have.

2.10. Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolution of public participation for the last fifty years is full of new approaches and theories aimed at improving public participation practice and quality. Most repeat the ideas from the past, while some of them are radically new. Negotiation and respectful dialogue are seen as a current direction of public participation development. Social innovation is about changing the world by todays' actions and understanding the consequences of these changes (Westley, Zimmerman & Patton, 2007). People play significant roles in these changes. Public participation in decision-making is a chance for participants to understand others reasons and arguments, respect others opinions, and listen to them carefully. These skills can help people to deal with conflicts in their daily life, and maybe start to think differently.

The progress of public participation theory is obvious while practice seems to have remained stagnant. The importance of public participation is emphasized not only in the literature but global organizations confirm the need of having open discussion with people in order to have better and more effective decisions. Collaboration and open dialogue between participants is seen as an approach that will benefit public sector.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the methods used to assess the progress of public participation in the Waterloo Region, and to determine the opinions of academics and practitioners on the gap between the theory and practice of public participation. The characteristics of the case study, the research approach, research design, data collection, and data analysis are described in this chapter.

3.2. Research approach

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods. The information for this research was not quantitative in nature, but rather, was collected from online surveys, a literature review, and personal interviews. Observations were made from different perspectives instead of from a single point of view, which improves data collection in social research (Neuman, 2000). Qualitative research is advantageous to researchers as they are able to understand society in a comprehensive manner that brings human insights and feelings into the research process (Neuman, 2000). The inductive method for research development was used in the form of theory development during data collection (see Figure 3.1). The grounded theory of public participation assisted in identifying gaps in the literature, which in turn provided the basis for creating my research questions.

My research is focused on the evolution of public participation theory and practice over the past 40-50 years. I relied on qualitative methods as it allows me to gain an understanding of people's insights and ideas through primary data collection that

would assist in answering my research questions. As Bryman (2012) argues, qualitative research helps to view the activities that happen in society through the eyes of the research participants. Further, semi-structured interviews are instruments used by social researchers for obtaining feedback from participants on current events in society and what forces lead to them in their opinions (Bryman, 2012).

Figure 3.1. Research Design

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                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │      Literature Review        │
                    └──────────────────────────────┘

        ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐
        │  Online Survey  │              │   Interviews    │
        └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘

        ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐
        │  Key Findings   │              │  Key Findings   │
        └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘

                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │      Compare and contrast     │
                    └──────────────────────────────┘

                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                    │ Conclusion and Recommendations│
                    └──────────────────────────────┘
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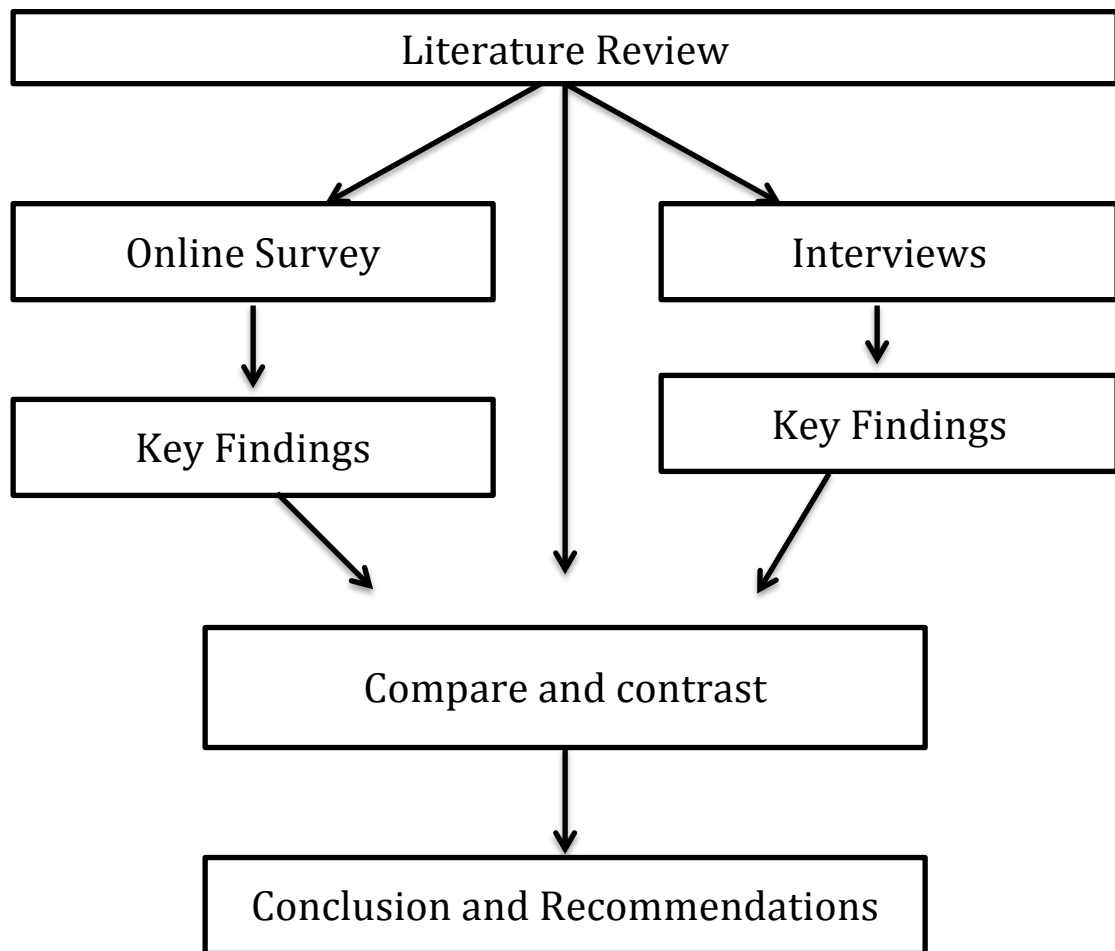
3.3. Case Study - Waterloo Region

A case study is used to explore the evolution of public participation based on the experience and insights of the practitioners in Waterloo Region. Waterloo region is situated in southern Ontario and consists of the cities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge, and the four townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich. Waterloo Region is considered one of the fastest growing regions in Ontario and is well known as an innovative place to live and work (Waterloo Region Profile, 2010; Region of Waterloo, 2010b).

Table 3.1. Regional Population Forecast

	Population	
	2006	2029
Cambridge	123,900	173, 000
Kitchener	214,500	313,000
North Dumfries	9,200	16,000
Waterloo	101,700	137,000
Wellesley	10,100	12,000
Wilmot	17,700	28,500
Woolwich	20,100	32,500
Region	497,200	712,000

Source: Regional Official Plan, 2010

Figure 3.2. Region of Waterloo Municipalities
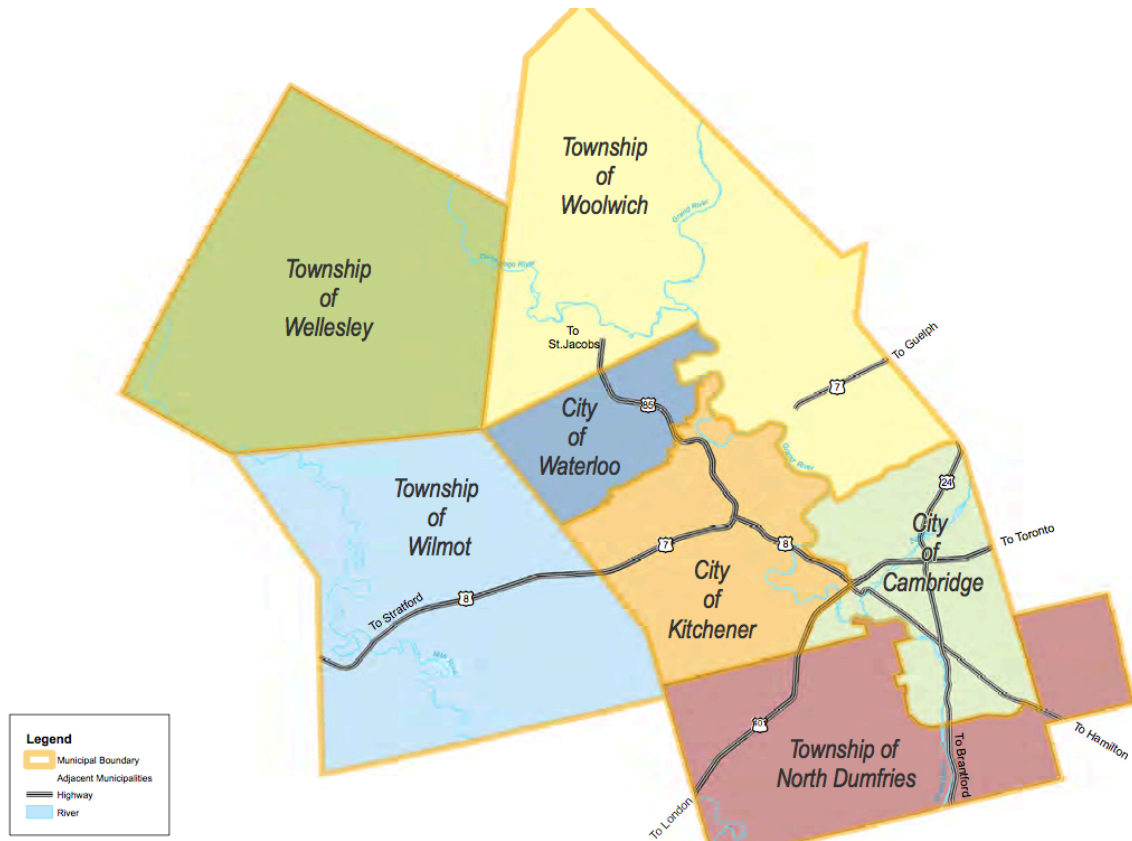
Source: Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2013

Waterloo region was chosen for several reasons. First, Waterloo region is unique in its local government as it advocates for active citizen engagement in its decision-making process (The City of Waterloo, 2001). Secondly, the region has two universities (University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University) one of which has a School of Planning, and it is quite innovative and progressive in nature. Thirdly, input from the public is always being solicited and is regularly scheduled during the strategic planning process (Strategic Focus, 2010). Waterloo region has incorporated different strategies for public engagement, including public meetings, online and telephone surveys, and focus

group sessions (Region of Waterloo, 2010). Further, local government in Waterloo region regularly reviews its communication strategies and practices in order to be more open and friendly for public engagement (Intelligent Waterloo, 2000). There is also an Institute of Community Engagement in the city that helps local communities influence decisions by developing strategies of citizen engagement (Tamarack, 2004). These unique characteristics make Waterloo region an interesting case study on public participation.

3.4. Data collection

I began my research by reviewing in a general manner the topic of public participation and through this review refined the data collection techniques and the research questions. Qualitative research is more flexible with the topic and may change it during the data collection based on the findings (Neuman, 2000).

Data were derived from three main sources: a literature review, interviews with key informants, and online surveys with academics. The data for qualitative research included words, interpretations, maps, and any numerical data is used only as supplementary materials to reinforce the importance of words (Neuman, 2000).

3.4.1. Literature Review

The literature review was focused on the theory, history, principles, and methods of public participation. The overview of the main theories on public participation and their effects on its evolution are found in the literature review. The following theories along with other theories and concepts in public participation were used to build a solid theoretical base for this research: Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971; Freidmann, 1987), Transactive Planning Theory

(Friedmann, 1973), Participatory Democracy Theory (Miller, 1992), Organic Planning Theory (Plein & Williams, 1998), and Principled Negotiation Theory (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

The overview of the evolution of public participation during the last fifty years was necessary for this research. Firstly, it provided a theoretical base for the development of further research and provided strong theoretical knowledge about the main theories and concepts of public participation. Secondly, the data collected from the literature review on the theory of public participation were compared and contrasted with data collected from online surveys and interviews who practice public participation).

3.4.2. Interview Data

Interviews are the most commonly used method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012) as the researcher is able to understand the insights of others on a particular issue. There are several types of interviews: informal (open and flexible), general (focused on the topic, but have some degree of freedom), standardized (open-ended questions), and closed (questions and answers are provided) (Patton, 2002).

The informal interview is a form of open conversation without guide or prepared questions. It provides freedom for both interviewer and interviewee in terms of topics they can discuss. A disadvantage of the informal interview is a broad spectrum of answers collected from interviews that can be difficult to categorize and analyze (Patton, 2002). A general interview is focused on the specific topic but spontaneous questions may still arise during the interview. This type of interview presupposes the interview guide with the main topics and theories in the field. However, having additional information may complicate data analysis.

The structured interview occurs when a set of questions is prepared in advance. Closed interview represents a formal dialogue with provided questions and answer options. Here, respondents' insights and opinions are limited to the provided options of answers prepared by a research (Patton, 2002). Irrespective of the type of interview used, it is important to note that there is no unique interview strategy. The choice of interview will depend on the nature of the topic being explored, the level of experience of interviewer, and the research structure (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative interviews have advantages as well as disadvantages. The main advantage is that the interview provides more detailed insight by involving persons' emotions and reaction on the questions. However, a disadvantage is the time limits and schedule constrains of participants, and the possibility that the interviewee may cancel the meeting unexpectedly.

Semi-structured interviews conducted with practitioners in Waterloo region were aimed gaining an understanding of the main concepts used in public participation practice and their importance. Further, semi-structured interviews were selected as they have the highest response rate, and supplement the interview with non-verbal communication and observations of person's behavior in natural environment (Neuman, 2000). The response rate of interviews was quite low; from thirty distributed invitations, only eight were able to meet for the interview. This allowed me to understand the reasons and motives that lie behind the practitioners' behaviour in public participation practice. It also enabled me to explore solutions to bridging the perceived gap by comparing and contrasting theory and practice. The practitioners' insights on today's situation and their experience in public participation helped me to draw a picture of the progress in practice made during the past fifty years.

Qualitative methods usually use more exploratory research questions that give the researcher flexibility and an opportunity to ask unplanned questions based on the content of the interview (Bryman, 2012). I conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants in Waterloo region (See Appendix B). Through the semi-structured approach, the researcher has a guide for the interview process in form of a list of questions (from general to specific) or topics that the interviewer is going to ask the interviewee (Bryman, 2012). At the same time, I had some flexibility in my choice of questions because my interview structure permitted me to ask new questions (to obtain more specific information) during the interview. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to maintain the focus of the conversation by following the interview framework while at the same time being flexible to unplanned questions and sub-questions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Some authors (e.g., Creswell, 2009; Bryman, 2012) advise the use of an audio recorder during the interviews. This allows the researcher to note how the participants communicate, including body language and their responses. Furthermore, the record can be used to obtain a second opinion on it from somebody else in order to improve validity of the data (Creswell, 2009). Finally, the record can be used many times during the research process, allowing for the emergence of new ideas and insights that could change the interpretation of the interview content (Bryman, 2012). For these reasons, I chose to use an audio recorder during my interviews, with the participants' permission, and after they signed the consent form.

3.4.3. Online survey

Survey research is the most commonly used method for collection the data for the research (Neuman, 2000). However, the challenge to conducting survey research is that due to its popularity, people are conditioned to ignore invitations to participate in surveys.

It is important to note that while surveys may be focused on collecting statistical data, insights about the experience and behavior of the participants can also observed (Neuman, 2000).

Moreover, the data were gathered from online surveys with academics across Canada. Potential candidates were chosen based on their background and current interests. However, priority was given to academics located within Planning schools at their universities. Also, academics from social science and specifically political science departments were also selected. Email addresses of academics were obtained from official university websites with email invitations sent to potential participants asking them to complete a survey by following a link to an online questionnaire. From slightly more than 100 invitations to participate in the survey, 49 of them completed the survey including twelve partially completed.

There are two types of online surveys: web surveys and email surveys (Bryman, 2012). Email surveys are time consuming, have a low response rate, and do not offer anonymity (Bryman, 2012). As such, I elected to use web surveys as I was interested in collecting data a large group of users across Canada. Another advantage of web surveys is its response rate, which is higher than email surveys, especially if participants have an interest in the area of research (Bryman, 2012). Unlike emails, web surveys provide anonymity and confidentiality for the participants, as their personal information is not required. That is, the focus is on their experience, knowledge, and personal opinions.

Survey questions were based on the literature review findings and my research questions (See Appendix D). A total of nine questions were asked with the number of potential respondents being 120. In administering the survey, a list of the universities that had a Planning school were selected first, after which academics with common interests

were selected. In total, eleven universities were selected to participate in this study. The questionnaire contained both closed (structured) and open-ended questions. It is important to note that before distributing the survey to academics, pre-testing was done to confirm the accuracy of the survey in exploring the research questions, after which the survey was distributed to participants.

3.5. Sampling

There exists a range of sampling methods that can be used in research development. For example, probability-sampling methods include random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, and random-digit dialing (Neuman, 2000). Non-probability sampling comprise of quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, deviant case sampling, sequential sampling, and theoretical sampling (Neuman, 2000).

Qualitative researchers usually use non-probability samples (Neuman, 2000), and these were used in this research as I was more interested in looking at the qualitative responses than statistical data because my research is focused on the public participation process where people and their behavior are central.

For the web survey I relied on the criterion based sampling method. Criterion sampling is based on selecting case studies that satisfy some criteria that are considered important (Patton, 2001). The first criterion that I used for potential participants in the online survey was based on their background. I was only interested in academics with either a social, political, public administration, or planning background. For example, since the University of Toronto has a Program in Planning, I tried to recruit academics from this department to participate in my survey. The second criterion was based on the experience of the participants. Since my study period includes some fifty years, I was

interested in those respondents who had long-term experiences and a strong theoretical knowledge base. In this regard, I relied heavily on university websites to identify suitable respondents.

Furthermore, in order to identify key informants in Waterloo region, I relied on the snowball-sampling method. My key informants included planners, counselors, NGO's, and neighborhood representatives. Bryman (2012) suggests contacting a small group of people who are the most relevant to the research topic, and then use their connections to find the new contacts. For this study, eight interview participants were involved with the majority of participants from the government sector. Interviewees were identified through government reports related public participation and government websites. These participants were contacted by email, where I, among other things, requested permission to conduct an interview with them. Then, based on an explanation of my research topic, I was able to ask respondents to refer me to other potential participants. After receiving a positive response, I then scheduled a date and time that was convenient for the participant. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, including greetings and comments. Following the interview, a "Thank You" note was sent to each participant.

3.6. Data analysis

Content analysis is a method of analyzing the contents such as words, graphics, and ideas (Neuman, 2000). Content analysis can be helpful in historical research or in studying large amounts of text (Neuman, 2000). In this research I made a historical observation of public participation and for interpreting the data from interviews and online surveys. For example, when completing the literature review the unit of analysis was a theory. For analysis of the interviews I used coding.

Coding, the first step in data analysis, helps to break down the data into separate pieces and give them specific names (labels) (Bryman, 2012). Strauss and Corbin (1987, 1990) identify three types of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These three types of coding represent different levels of the coding process (Bryman, 2012). The interview transcripts should be coded as soon as possible to capture the main points (Bryman, 2012). The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed immediately after the completion of the interview. Once all the interviews were completed, I further reviewed all notes, categorizing the data by themes that assisted in data interpretation. In doing so, general themes were first selected, followed by the topics that reflected my research questions and considered a interesting research findings. The next step was to choose from the list of findings the ones that most accurately reflected my research questions and best described the general mood of participants. Also, similar themes were combined into one category as a means of reducing redundancy and repetition. All the interview and survey participants were coded in letters and numbers in order to save their anonymity.

Triangulation was used to improve the results of this study. According to Patton (2000), there are four types of triangulation: data triangulation, methods triangulation, investigator triangulation, and theoretical triangulation. Since data were collected from three different sources, data triangulation was beneficial in increasing the validity of the data (Denzin, 2006). Thurmond (2001) highlights the advantages of data triangulation's use in social research, including confidence in the received data, and provision of deeper and clear understanding of the phenomena.

Figure 3.3. Data Triangulation
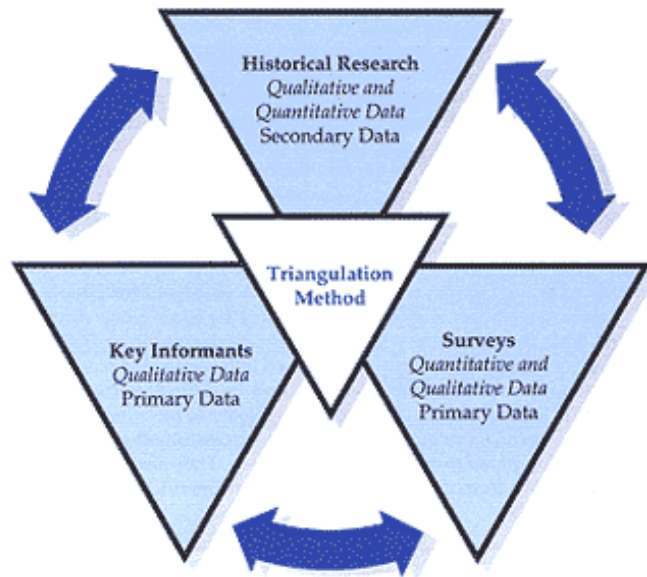
The next stage of data analysis involved comparing and contrasting the secondary data collected from the literature review with the primary data collected from interviews with key informants and web survey with academics. The goal of this step was to examine the progress made in the theory and practice of public engagement, and to identify the gaps that exist between them. The compare and contrast the analysis stage followed a similar principle as described in the coding section. That is, I identified a list of intersecting themes in literature review, online survey, and interview findings in order to find similarities and differences between them. This enabled me to identify the gaps between theory and practice, and in identifying the reasons behind these gaps. Furthermore, data triangulation provides the researcher with an opportunity to do a comprehensive analysis by examining the data from different sources (Creswell, 2009). The final step focused on developing recommendations on how to enforce the progress

and potential solutions of closing or reducing the theory-practice gap on public participation.

3.7. Research Ethics

Ethical principles play an important role in research with human participants. The ethical clearance is aimed at protecting human participants from potential risks, such as disclosure of anonymity and confidentiality (Creswell, 2009). As such, the research was approved by the University of Waterloo's Office of research ethics in October 2013.

3.8. Summary of key points

The methods used in this research were qualitative, and information was collected from three main sources. First, data collected from the literature review was intended to identify the main concepts and trends in the public participation theory. Second, data collection from online survey was aimed to collect the academics' insights and thoughts about the theory and progress of public participation. Third, data collection from interviews with key informant in the Waterloo Region was selected to collect data about the progress of practice, and to gain insights into the challenges that practitioners face in daily practice. These three sources were then compared and contrasted against each other as a means of examining the progress and gaps between the theory and the practice of public participation.

Chapter 4: Findings

The literature review findings were aimed at answering the research questions related to the progress of public participation theory, and explore the practice of public participation and potential challenges associated with it. Chapter 4 is focused on answering the following questions: (1) How has the theory and the practice of public participation changed in the last fifty years, in the context of urban planning?; (2) How big is the gap between public participation theory and practice?; (3) What are the factors that cause a gap between theory and practice? These questions are the most important and the findings from the online survey and personal interviews were aimed at shedding light onto them. It is essential for this thesis to have findings from both of these sources, as the data collected provides both a theoretical and practical overview on the question of public participation progress.

4.1. Online Survey

4.1.1. Introduction

I distributed an online survey – An Evaluation of Public Participation Theory and Practice (see Appendix A). The surveys allowed for input from a broader cross-section of practitioners across the country and were an effective strategy to gathering facts, experiences and perspectives. The survey focused on the evolution of public participation during the past fifty years and future perspectives of public participation development in Canada. Additionally, the survey collected data about the tools, techniques and best practices used in the practice of public participation. The questionnaire attempted to

provide a better understanding of the perceived value and effectiveness of public participation.

Table 4.1. Overview of Online Survey Respondents

Academic Discipline	Number of participants
Planning	29
Sustainability	1
Public Administration	2
Political Science	2
Geography	3
Partially Finished	12
Total	49

The online survey was aimed at collecting data from academics across Canada about their thoughts and ideas on public participation theory. The question about the existence of a gap between theory and practice and potential solutions of closing it, was a central question. The research questions are focused on the key trends of public participation, main challenges, forces that enhance or brake the progress of public participation, and the recommendations of how to close the gap. The academics, with their knowledge and experience in the area, served as potential sources for finding the answers to these questions. The response rate was quite high for the online survey, at around 50%.

4.1.2. Statistical Data

The majority of respondents indicated the importance of public participation as Extremely Important or Somewhat Important. This suggests that participants have a keen interest on the issue of public participation. Analysis of the answers about the reasons of why it is so important or not important raised four primary topics:

- Democracy, politics

- Use of knowledge (Social Learning)

- Public support and understanding

- Other (not important or somewhat important)

Respondents indicated representative democracy as an important element of democratic societies. Others mentioned that public participation is politically important, but not practically. Some respondents indicated pubic participation as important due to political reasons. For example, it is important as a citizen's right to voice and expression of their opinions and concerns are critical.

The survey highlighted information on the importance of the use of citizens' knowledge for the better decision-making. Some of the responses supported the use and sharing of knowledge between citizens and practitioners. The importance of local peoples' knowledge was discussed as a key element to understanding citizens' needs and wants. Overall, one third of respondents indicated the importance of understanding and supporting local people as a primary reason of public participation as being important. People have to understand the reasons behind the decisions that practitioners make and the difficulties that decision-makers face.

Some respondents were of the opinion that it is a "claim" that public participation is important, or it is important only at the local level. Also, the respondents discussed that the level of importance of public participation varies depends on the set of factors.

The majority of the respondents agreed that public participation practice has increased since the 1960s. Respondents indicated advanced communication technologies and the role of mass media as a crucial element of public participation development. New technologies made public participation easier to achieve. Legitimization of public participation was a major step toward the increased input of the public in the planning process. Other respondents pointed out that the process became more routinized but not helpful for the citizens because of the lack of influence on the decision-making process.

The level of public participation today remained at the same level as it was forty-fifty years ago based on the answers from academics. For example, one of the respondents indicated that they did not see any future changes in public participation as they have has observed it for a long period of time with no changes in the progress direction.

Figure 4.1. The level of Public Participation in Planning Practice
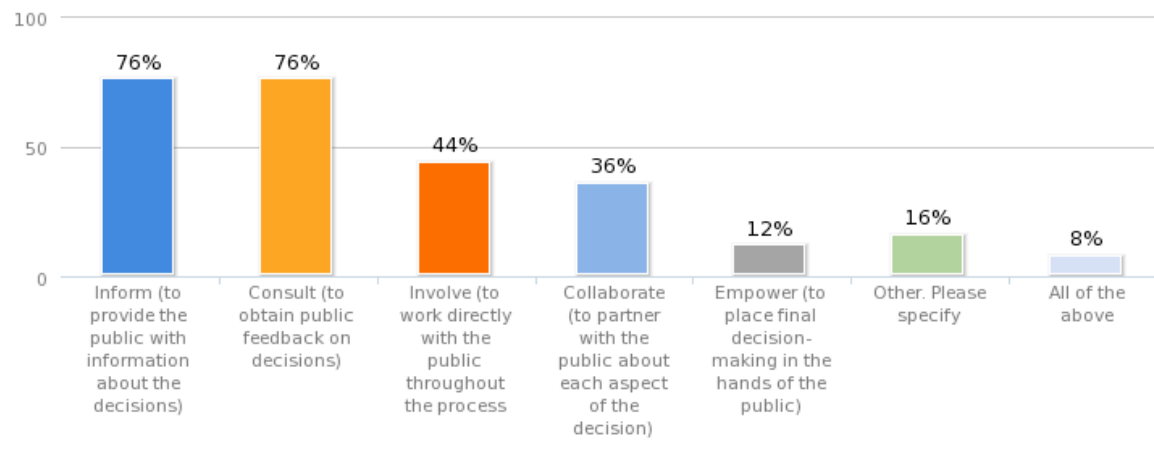
Based on the responses, according to many respondents, the level of engagement today is Inform and Consult and less than a half of respondents indicated as Involve and Collaborate. Comments from respondents included discussion about difficulties to answer this question in general because the levels vary from case to case and from city to city. Manipulation is still present today but it is more hidden and complicated. For example, it is quasi participation that is aimed at giving the public a sense that they are involved in the process. Avoid if it is possible is the common practice for the planning process.

Respondents indicated many factors that delay the progress of public participation. The majority of them chose more than two options from the list and one third of them chose "all of the above" option. The main reasons were indicated by the respondents as unwillingness to share power and the lack of fundings. Other respondents' comments included the fear of politicians to lose their power, opposing positions between public and developers (NIMBYism), lack of trust, time and interest of the general public in the proscess.

Fifty percent of the respondents answered that all of the offered options would enhance the progress with a slight preference to the openness of the process and respectful dialogue. More than 50% of respondents chose the option "other" and indicated the reasons that are more important in their opinion or were not given in the answer options. For example, some respondents suggested improving the design of the process, and involving the public in the planning process from the first step. Also, public benefits should be tangible in the outcome of the process.

The majority of the respondents indicated that there is a gap between theory and practice. Some respondents indicated the need for an improved linkage between theory and the practice. Others argued that there is no need to worry about the gap because it is

natural. The respondents indicated that not all practices are noticed and mentioned in the literature, and this makes this question difficult to answer. Additionally, respondents indicated that there is general progress and movement in the public participation that is aimed to close or at least to reduce the gap.

The respondents suggested many options to enhance the progress of public participation. Openness of the process was a main theme from the comments - open in the sense of sharing of information about the specific cases, successes, and failures, and applying new methods and techniques. Careful design of the public participation process was suggested to make the process more interactive with a two-way flow of information and respect. Training and re-educating the planners to be good listeners, more respectful to the public, and skilled facilitators was another suggestion. Overall, respondents indicated the importance of interactive dialogue between public, developers, and planners in order to make the process more social.

Future directions of public participation were discussed in the final question of the survey. The general trend in the answers is the use of new technologies and as a result more easy-accessed the process. The respondents forecast many experiments and innovations in public participation and also dialectical relationships between theory and the practice. "Planning with people" was the main direction for public participation development as indicated by academics surveyed. Along with positive prognoses, some respondents indicated not much change of the practice in the future without substantial changes to the planning process.

4.1.3. Key Findings

(1) Reasons Why Public Participation is Important

More than forty years ago, Friedmann (1973) emphasized the importance of knowledge sharing and introduced Transactive Planning as a way to transform knowledge into action. Today scholars argue that Social Learning place practitioners as co-learners with the community during the planning process with meaningful participation. The "ownership" of the decision is another aspect that makes participation important. In the 1980s, Fisher and Ury (1981) discussed that people are not willing to accept the solution that was made by someone else. People want to feel their partnership in decision-making. The degree of the "participation" sometimes does not require real participation. Elected officials make certain decisions without public involvement. Academics argued about the importance of community involvement at the local level. Without neighbourhood input in local decisions, the needs and wants of the public may be missed.

(2) The Progress of Public Participation Practice

Many new forms of public communication have appeared in the last fifty years. Internet and computer-based technologies make public participation easier to achieve. The level of public participation in 1980s was mainly focused on informing and consulting the public. Today, it is common to have a dialogue with stakeholders. In the late 1990s, Daniels and Walker (1996) argued about collaborative learning as a new approach of public participation that involved respectful dialogue and open communication. Respondents emphasized that the progress of public participation is a controversial question and could not be generalized.

> "Compared to the public participation practice in the 1960s it has increased in urban planning; compared to the 1980s it has decreased" (Online survey, PP16)

The trends vary over time so it is not a steady and continuous increase. Varying levels of participation depend on the political situation in local, regional, provincial, and federal governments. Public participation in Vancouver in 1990s reached the high point and then it returned to the level that was in 1960. The role of Council is central:

> "…participation is understood to be more of a ritualistic practice than one that actually exerts an influence on decisions. It can't be generalized. The progress is very different city to city, e.g., Vancouver very different now than 10 years ago" (Online survey, PP15).

The general mood that is seen through the survey' answers is dissatisfaction with the current level of public participation. Giving the public a false sense of being involved and "avoid when possible" seems to be the current strategies in practice.

(3) Factors that Delay the Progress

The scholars discussed in their responses many reasons that in their opinion lag the progress of public participation. The reasons can be classified in four main categories: the issue of power, the issue of trust between public and practitioners, time constraints, and the issue of negotiation.

Figure 4.2. Factors that Delay the Progress of Public Participation
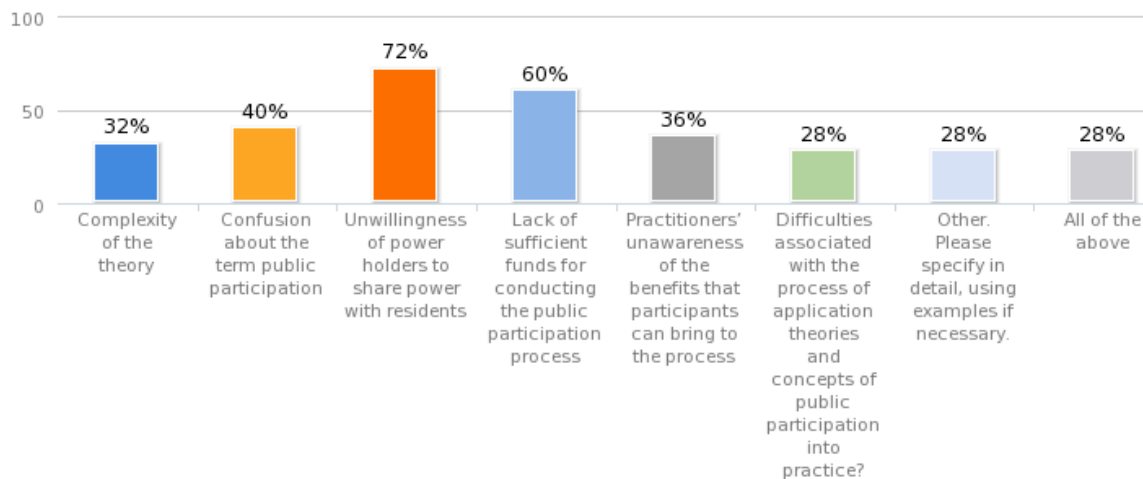
- ***The Fear of Losing Control (power) of the Process***

   The issue of power is not new. Sherry Arnstein (1969) in her well-known article raised the question about the distribution of power in 1960s. She argued about the sharing of power between low and upper class people. Academics noticed the fear and unwillingness of politicians and power holders to share the power of the decision with public. Also, respondents discussed the traditional role of the planner as a leader not a as team player. They mentioned the dominant position that planners usually take in communicating with public and their unwillingness to learn from public.

- ***Opposed Positions Between Public and Developers***

   Fisher and Ury (1981) proposed the use of negotiation to deal with people differences. Principled negotiation is seen as a key concept where parties are looking for mutual agreement. The issue of NIMBYism is seen as a main constraint in working with public. Organic planning (Plein & Williams, 1998) is aimed at improving relationships between the government and local communities. Academics emphasized the importance of listening skills that has to be inherent to the planners working with the public.

- ***Cynicism Public and Lack of Trust***

   The literature review along with academics underlined the significance of the issue of trust. Citizens are more willing to participate if they see their influence on the decision or they trust the local leaders (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). Different methods can attract different groups of people. Burby (2001) argued that targeting the right public is essential for meaningful participation. Respondents indicated that the young population is not participating and is not interested in local politics whereas older people usually comprise 80% of the participants.

- ***The Lack of Resources and Time***

A lack of resources (time, labours, and financing) and time limits (deadlines) reduces the effectiveness of public participation (Day, 1997). The number of people involved in the process directly affects the time that the process will take (Stewart & Sinclair, 2007). There is a big difference between sophisticated participation and genuine participation. The time it takes can differ, too. Respondents underlined that it is time consuming to conduct a genuine public participation process. In addition, the quantity and categories of people participating in the process may delay the decision-making process.

(4) Factors that enhance the progress

Talking about the factors that could promote the progress of public participation, I distinguished the main themes based on the responses from academics. The openness of the process along with respectful dialogue are the main factors.

Figure 4.3. Factors that Enhance the Progress of Public Participation
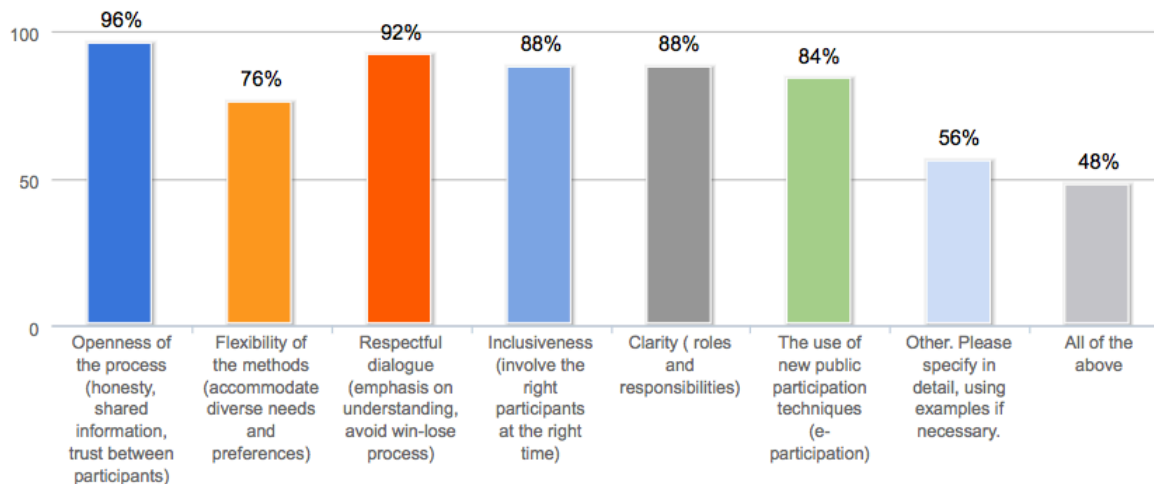
McDonough argued that fairness of the decision-making process can improve citizens' trust (2011). Academics indicated the importance of the open process in terms of

sharing information and especially being attentive to public input. People prefer face-to-face communication and immediate reaction on their comments and concerns.

Management or careful co-design of the process is another factor that is aimed at enhancing progress. Connor (1998) discussed a new step-by-step approach for dealing with citizens. He emphasized the importance of each step after completing the previous steps. Connor's ladder was focused on active communication and preparing the public to act effectively. Cupps (1977) suggests that public participation without careful cost-analysis, detailed organization, and dedicated local representatives might take the form of costly and timely process with poor decisions.

Another factor that can advance the progress of public participation practice is early involvement in the process. Planners argue that early stages of the planning process are the most effective (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). Early involvement of the public can be beneficial for both parties. Citizens feel their importance through the opportunity to express their opinions on the issue, and practitioners get more knowledgeable public for further decision-making. As a result of meaningful participation there can be mutually agreed outcomes.

The next factor suggested by academics is mutually beneficial plans, for both the public and for the developers. To manage peoples' differences, Fisher and Ury suggested applying negotiation principles that are aimed to mutual agreement (win-win negotiation) (1981). Fisher and Ury (1981) identified two types of negotiation: soft negotiation that is aimed to avoid personal conflict and as a result makes people feel better, and hard negotiation that looks more like a competition with a goal to win, usually ends up with worse relationship with oppose part.

Public benefit in the outcome of the process is another important aspect for enhancing the progress of public participation. Rowe and Frewer (2000) emphasized the significance of the public input and the effect of the input on the decision. They argued that public dissatisfaction with the decisions may lead to loss of trust.

 (5) The Gap

The discussion about the existing gap between the theory and the practice of public participation enriched the research with interesting comments and insights.

Figure 4.4. The Gap between Theory and Practice
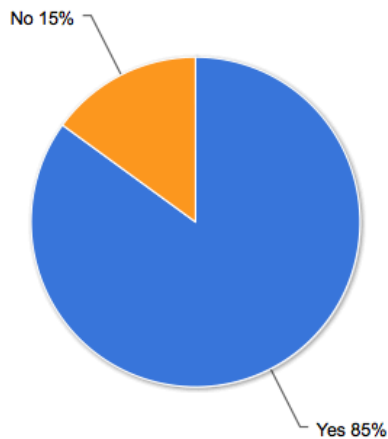
 The majority of academics confirms its existence and feels that it is a part of the natural process:

> "The gap between theory and practice is natural. Let practitioners be innovative and let theorists try to diffuse knowledge of best practices." (Online survey, PP10)

In spite of the fact that the general feeling about the gap is just the recognition of its natural existence, respondents gave some recommendations of how to close it:

> "Theory needs ongoing development. We need to improve our linkages between theory and practice " (Online survey, PP9).

The literature about public participation is mostly written by the academics and discusses about theory development. The point made by the academics is about the luck of practitioners' input in the literature and only superficial review of the general practice:

"A lot of excellent practice goes unnoticed by the academic community." (Online survey, PP21)

Best practices usually describe the progress in the practice of public participation. The term "best practices" is biased and not clear. The criteria may differ from person to person and reflect different insights:

"Practice must be more accountable so that adoption of outdated methods can be widely seen." (Online survey, SP19)

The argument made by the academic has a reflection in the literature by Innes and Booher (2004) who criticized the traditional forms of public participation for being not effective. They distinguished the main reasons of being ineffective, such as quasi participation, poor targeting of the public and unfriendly atmosphere. Additionally, old-fashioned methods represent one-way communication with limited roles for citizens in the process:

"More training for planners, more resources for the process. More dialogue across stakeholders"

Practice will never keep track with theory because many are not convinced that public participation results in better outcomes for all (e.g., NIMBY). Closing the gap requires better collaboration between researchers and practitioners. In the 1980s, the collaborative approach was introduced as a way to manage relationships in the public-private sector (Gray, 1989).

(6) Suggestions to enhance practice

The survey covered the main topics of my research and gave me answers to many of my research question. This was the most meaningful output of the survey I received from the comments and suggestions from academics.

Training and education of practitioners is an important element for progress in practice. Listening skills are seen as an inevitable part of the training for practitioners working with public. Academics emphasized the role of the planner in the process as a skilled facilitator with listening more and speaking less. Daniels and Walkers (1996) argued that the learning process should be constant for planners and high-professional practitioners. They introduced collaborative learning as way of open dialogue with sharing of ideas.

Ensuring trust remained one of the key recommendations to enhance the practice of public participation. It is essential to recognize citizens' willingness to participate in local decision-making due to the fact that it can increase the public' trust in the decision. Another valuable recommendation relates to the role of the public in the process. The openness of the process along with innovative approaches can reduce the "politics" in the decision-making process. Clear and detailed instructions of the methods and strategies that will be used to attract, involve, and communicate with citizens, and the level of their influence on the decision should be designed and for the each particular case. At the same time the process needs to fit the task and resources.

Collaboration in public participation practice is focused on the sharing of information between stakeholders. The survey respondents suggested moving toward sharing experiences about failures and successes in form of storytelling and narration.

The academics suggested avoiding traditional forms (surveys, workshops) of public engagement and moving planning into more comprehensive approaches with integrated media in public participation practice. Internal or external engagement experts could be helpful for the conducting effective public participation process. Social learning would benefit the practice by bringing new insights to the practitioners and educating the public.

(7) Future direction of public participation

The development of public participation can take different directions. There is an increased emphasis on the use of social media and technologies in public participation practice. Online forums, government official websites, and other social networks are used for informing the public about the issues, and for discussing and giving feedback on it. Visualization is an important tool for planners to work with public, and computer technologies help to improve the quality of it. Planning innovations and computer-based software are used in daily practice to engage citizens and to meet community needs.

Another direction of public participation development is theory development. Social learning is an important element of theory development and addressing the issues of complexity and power in public participation theory. The theory of public participation is mixed with other theories, and academics advocate the integration of the theory with planning process and other theoretical frameworks. Another recommendation for future theory development is to better link the theory with practice and work collaboratively with the practitioners. Theorists' assistance in evaluating of the outcomes of different approaches is essential for theory improvements.

Social justice in the decision-making process is an important criterion that helps to evaluate the plans on how they do overall and not only in terms of participation

criteria. Additionally, fair targeting of the public participating in the local projects. There is a need to focus on citizens interested in the project and who may be influenced by it, not only territory-based participation. The increase in public participation is seen as a future direction that can lead towards more sustainable communities. Citizens wish to be involved in the local development projects. For example, high-rise buildings, parks, and large stores that require big parking spot.

No change is another direction of public participation development. Based on their own experience respondents do not believe in any changes or the progress because they did not it during the last one or two decades. Some of them argue that even though the theory has improved, the practice remained on the same level. The cause of no progress in public participation practice is explained be the "hierarchical nature of the planning as profession".

4.1.4. Summary of key findings

Survey participants indicated progress as an unsteady process that changes depending on the period of time. The overall impression based on the responses is that the process hasn't changed much since 1960s. The factors that participants underlined as delaying the process are unwillingness to share the power, competing interests and distrust to government. Academics argued that factors such as openness of the process, early involvement in the process, and careful design of the process could enhance the process of public participation.

Another important theme from the online interview responses is about the gap between theory and practice. Academics confirmed the existence of the gap and explained it in different ways. Some of the respondents indicated that lots of successful

practices are not reflected in the academic literature. Others recommended improvement of the theory in order to enhance the practice.

Online survey respondents shared their views and ideas about how to close the gap, and what might be the future directions of the development of public participation. One of the recommendations is to tighten the linkage between the theory and the practice. Another suggestion is aimed at re-educating the planner, and to train them in listening and facilitator skills. Collaboration is another way to improve the process, sharing of information, respecting the other stakeholders' opinions, and having the immediate feedback during the dialogue.

Survey participants shared their views on the future directions of public participation where the use of social media and computer-based technologies take on a greater role. Theory development is seen as an important direction for the creation of the solid theory foundation. Some participants do not see any changes occurring in the future, and they relied on their past experience in the public participation arena.

4.1.5. Conclusion

It became evident that there is a significant need to provide definitions and explanations for the key terms about public participation in my research. As a researcher, the respondents' comments provided the opportunity to modify and correct my questionnaire for the interviews. There were both positive and negative comments, suggestions, and recommendations that I found very useful and helpful for future research. Some questions gave meaningful and useful answers, others were less meaningful but still helpful, and a few questions were not useful.

With more than 70% of the survey respondents indicating that public participation practice increased since the 1960s, the results of the survey showed the general progress and positive attitude of academics. Based on answers from respondents, the complexity of the theory or difficulties associated with the transition the theory into practice has nothing to do with the progress of the practice. The main factor that delays the progress of public participation practice remained the same as it was fifty years ago - unwillingness to share power.

4.2. Interview Findings

4.2.1. Introduction

This section of Chapter 4 explains the participants' views and comments on public participation practice today, and their discussion about the future direction of public participation in response to interview questions (see Appendix B). Also, I compared and contrasted the main themes from the interview findings with the literature review findings. This chapter is aimed at confirming the key trends discussed in the literature review and to explain the reasons behind the disparities in the theory and practice of public participation.

The interview findings were gained from the insights and experience of eight interviews with practitioners in the Waterloo region. The practitioners consisted of city and region planners, NGO and interest groups representatives. (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Overview of Interview Key Informants in the Waterloo Region

Category	Number of participants	Position
Planners from government sector	5	Director of Planning, Director of Policy Planning Manager of Planning
Planners from private sector	1	Senior Planner
NGOs	1	Project manager
Councilors	1	Social Council
Total	8	

The findings are organized into five main themes:

- Challenges in the practice of public participation

- Key trends of public participation practice

- Important skills for today's practitioners

- Criteria for successful public participation process

- The progress of public participation practice

The participants defined the term "public participation" very broadly, from informing and consulting the public to participation as an ongoing process.

4.2.2. The term "public participation"

Participants defined the term "public participation" very broadly, from informing and consulting the public to participation as an ongoing process. One interviewee suggest the definition:

> "Public participation can take many different forms. It can consist of people coming out to the public meetings; providing their feedback through social media; calling or emailing staff; interested groups to share their point of view; giving people an opportunity to ask questions about matters and issues affecting their community and

their neighborhood. I will define it quite broadly. Basically, having people an opportunity to become engaged in their community." (CP1).

Some participants defined the term by discussing the levels and forms that it can take, while others focused on the challenges of public participation associated with the discrepancy of people who participate and the interests of the whole community. One interview participant defined the term as:

"Get their views and opinions on a specific theme or a general, it may depends on the nature of it. The challenge that I see is to have participation from just those who are there now." (WP2).

One of the interview participants emphasized that the level of engagement depends on the issue and it is important to inform people about the issue before they have to express their opinion about it. Knowledgeable participants can participate more effectively, and that is beneficial for both parties. One interviewee stated:

"I would define it very broadly. I think that public participation can be any communication or interface that makes the public more aware and allowed them to get more involved in the municipal government. The forms of participation can vary depending on the intent of what you are informing and asking people to participate in." (KP3).

The majority of study participants defined public participation as an action that can take different forms, while only one participant defined it as a continuous process that is aimed to work with people who care about their communities and not only one time. Here is an example of definition given from participants' point of view:

"I would define it from participants' point of view. It is having previous contact and knowledge with people and issue in what they are involved, making it possible to feel like they….It is an ongoing process." (KC4).

The forms of public participation vary from traditional, such as public meetings and consultations to workshops, one-on-one discussions, and the use of online forums and

websites. Planning departments regularly conduct public participation and do the minimum that is required by the Planning Act, and for some complex and long-term projects they go beyond the minimum. For example, the consultation session with the public is held before an official meeting and one after. This strategy helps people to prepare for the official public meeting, collect the information, ask clarifying questions, and come to the meeting with fact-based information. Some planning procedures do not require public participation, for instance, site planning.

4.2.3. Challenges in the practice of public participation

Public participation practice faces many challenges depending on the issue, the type of project, and resources availability. Participants discussed the reasons behind these challenges and how their departments deal with them.

(1) No actual participation

One of the challenges associated with public participation is the lack of actual participation. The participants discussed the progress of public participation in terms of the increased number of people who wish to participate and the use of new approaches in maintaining the process, but the participation itself is more of a formality rather than citizen engagement. Brody, Godschalk, and Burby (2003) argued that people are expecting to have an influence on the decision when they participate in the process, and if there is not, they will not be satisfied with the outcome. The literature review and surveys with academics argue that is it important to involve people early in the process thereby making participation genuine. One interviewee stated:

> "Often you go into a planning process weather you want or not with an idea of what the outcome will be and you using the public participation as a check-in balance point instead of actually going in and taking the outcome of it… More demand for participation, but less actual participation itself." (WPM6)

The issue of trust and fairness of the process play important roles in attracting people to participate in the process. People are more willing to participate if they feel their power on the decision, or if they feel that they are decision-makers. Academics suggested collaborative approaches in working with public, knowledge and experience sharing, as a way to meaningful participation. According to one interview participant's opinion:

> "Most of the decisions are made ahead and the number of options is limited." (KC4)

In contrast, academics are of the opinion that the process of public participation has become more open, and some practitioners agree with them, for example:

> "All decisions are front-ended, they are not in behind, that is how it has changed." (KSP5)

(2) The lack of reports after the process

People who participate in the process are willing not only to have some degree of influence on the decision, but also they are expecting to see the result of their input. Rowe and Frewer (2000) underlined the importance of the report after the process in order to build trust between citizens and local authorities. People are more willing to accept an unexpected decision if they receive logical explanations of the reasons why it was made. One practitioner expressed:

> "Power holders promise to have a report and share it with us, but when we ask for, nobody gives us a clear response, even if we talk with ministers… It more like a marketing campaign go and buy it. We do not know, because we do not see the outcome or report. They have to give a summary after each public participation session. It would be nice to see for people who participated what they did and what are the results… It is kind of privilege circles that know what is going on." (KC4).

(3) Resources

It is no secret that there are difficulties associated with the lack of resources (time, money, location) for the public participation process. Most of the participants confirmed that time constraints are a major challenge. Public participation sessions are usually scheduled to the evenings when people are free from work and can attend meetings. Participation is voluntary and people are not willing to spend their evening or weekend at City Hall instead of enjoying time with their family. It is especially unlikely to happen if they have to drive, or more realistically take a bus because there is no parking. The respondents from the survey confirmed that the lack of resources, in particular time, can delay the decision-making process, and meaningful participation requires time. In support of the comments made above, here is an example of what today's practitioners say:

> "We always trying to set our meetings in the convenient location to people. We hold our meetings in the evenings. We have a number of meetings in different times and days. We receive comments by telephone, by email, and websites. We also have Facebook and Twitter account to give people an opportunity… In some cases English is not a first language for people in our community, and it is hard to participate. We do not have facilities and recourses to provide public participation in different languages right now. It is difficult to try to keep things interesting." (CP1).

(4) Competing interests

The planning process involves participants from different areas. Citizens represent one side of the interests, stakeholders have their own interests in the project, and usually their interests are opposite, or not the same. Fisher and Ury (1981) recommended use of principled negotiation to deal with people' differences. They described these differences as an integral part of human nature, and instead of ignoring the existence of them it is better to find a way of how to negotiate them. Citizens who participate in the public participation process are usually disagreeing with some conditions or outcomes of the

proposed project, and that is the main reason why they show up. According to one practitioner's experience:

"Community sometimes feels frustrated when they agree with the zoning but still do not want the new development be there. We have to balance the neighborhood and the community who are the owners and developers interests." (WP2).

Academics also indicated that it is a challenge to find a balance between public interests and developers' interests. Open dialogue, principled negotiation, social learning, and collaboration are all the ways to improve the relationships between competing parties, and lead to the mutual agreed decision. In some cases, the interests of one group do not represent the opinion of the large community, and that can mislead the whole process, for example:

"When we go to the community a lot of times you would have diametrical opposed competing interests, and it is very rare that we actually satisfy the competing interests. The outcome usually satisfy no one because it compromise, or maybe one group because of what they are asking for is about legislation. It is not usually only two competing groups, there may be 3-4 competing groups, so people are more involved, and that we think is great. The reality is that there are a lot of people out there. The position of these people is not in the large community perspective interests, so one little neighborhood can be against the project that would benefit the whole community because the road has to be on their street, close to their own houses. People usually advocates for the things that directly benefit them, and rare people care about the large community interests. Pluralistic society." (KP3).

In some cases, the interests of one group do not represent the opinion of the large community, and that can mislead the whole process. In confirming this fact, here is the comment from one of the practitioners with more than 25 years experience:

"I think is one of the concerns is the participation reflective over bigger scope. In other words, it tends to get only those groups who are opposed and not necessarily the groups who support." (KSP5).

Today, practitioners are often faced with competing interests, and they a have variety of approaches to deal with them. Practitioners emphasized the importance of

taking into consideration the opinion of the whole community and not only the group of people who show up at the public meetings. One interviewee points out:

> "The people, who show up, are the people who don't like it. It is really important when you are trying to gain the community interest that you are not relying on the people who only attended it. You have to find out what are the community interests. That happens times and times again." (KP3).

(5) Legislation limitations

In the Ontario context, the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) is a body that hears appeals about land use planning and other issues. Under the Planning Act there is a requirement for planning departments to notify citizens about new development project and have a public meeting (Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, 2009). In cases where citizens are not satisfied with the outcome, they can appeal (Planning Act, 1990). Developers are more experienced and knowledgeable in dealing with the OMB, so they usually win the process (Environmental and Land Tribunals Ontario, 2009). The time frame to make a decision is limited and not always optimal for complex projects. According to experience of one practitioner:

> "Some legislative changes. Some part might encourage more public engagement, and other part discourages them. Time limits in the Planning Act. Tribunal process if the public participation process didn't get to any decision, there is no public engagement on the next provincial level." (WP2).

Tribunal process is undesirable for both citizens and planning departments. The planning department seeks to make a decision before the dead line; otherwise, the decision will be made at the Provincial level of government. The public has an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process at the municipal level with almost no participation at the provincial level. So, making decisions in time is beneficial for both parties. One interviewee argued:

"If you need to have something from local decision-making you go to the tribunal and the tribunal process set up that I think favors people in certain situations, people with more experienced recourses as oppose to people who do not know about that…Tribunal is very inconsistent in tribunal decision-making, they are unpredictable for the municipality… So the fact is that under the Planning Act you have so many days to make a decision and if you don't make a decision they can automatically give it to Municipal Board, I haven't seen very many successful submissions from the general members of public because the board set up the expert evidence…We have to make a decision now and we know that this decision will make someone unhappy, but that happen all the time. Most of the time we make a recommendations on the application, and there are almost always someone who is unhappy, it may be even the applicant. The time is only the part of the problem." (KP3).

(6) People do not like change

The reasons why people do not like change varies. First of all, change is associated with uncertainty and some kind of loss of the old and stable life. The planning process is based on change - changes that have to happen too soon or changes that are only in the long-term plan. One way of accepting a change is to control it, or be part of it (Canter, 2012). It is important to inform people about the changes and give them a chance to be part of the future changes. Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton (2007) argued that people's action today would form our future, and people should act together in order to have a desired future. One practitioner expressed:

"A lot of people do not like change, even if it is a good change. It takes time to deal with a paradigm shift. When you need to participate with community about change you have to be prepared for that. It takes time to get used to a change." (KP3).

People do not like change if they have not participated in discussions about these coming changes or if they haven't been a person who offered them. Changes made today will be reflected in the future, and people are willing to be part of the future creation (Westley, Zimmerman & Patton, 2007). One interviewee confirmed that:

"Planning is about managing change. Most people don't like change. People do not really care about the things in the long term…" (WP2).

Another challenge is that the general public cannot or does not want to think in terms of the long-term perspective. They pay more attention to current issues and theire individual circumstances. One interview participant emphasized:

> "Another reality is that people who participate will be happy with it only if they have some benefits from the project for example a new convenience or a pharmacy close to them, but not a big supermarket." (RWP7).

(7) High Expectations

People who come to public meetings usually have high expectations about their level of influence on the decision (Rottmann, 2013). As mentioned previously, people who participate are usually opposed to the project and the main reason they come is that they want to change the decision. If they do not see the change they want, they feel unsatisfied and frustrated. The distribution of power was discussed since the 1960s and not much has changed. Citizens want to have some degree of power on the decision, and power holders generally give them only a chance to participate and express their opinions. One practitioner stated:

> "People think that if they come out and speak against something that will influence or change the decision-making process. But as I indicated in my first question it is one part of the multiparty prospective. So if the Official Plan says you should have residential and you propose residential and someone from the public says that it should stay agriculture, who is correct? The public policy or the person's prospective? It is about finding that balance. So, expectations are they represent the broad scope, and let's be clear, people often object because they don't want to see a change. How does that (public participation) fit to all of the other public participation processes, the Provincial Policy Statement, or The Growth Plan, or the Official Plan, or the Zoning By-Law. It is a multidiscipline process that is only structured to do a best account." (KSP5).

The literature review along with surveys from academics, and practitioners agree that it is important to balance the interests of different parties. Fisher and Ury (1981) argued that it is essential to separate people from the problem; they should focus on

mutual agreement and not on the personal interests. Practitioners pointed out that the planning process is a complex process where public participation is only one part of it. In other words, public opinion is not the only factor that influences the decision, and people have to understand that. One practitioner argued that:

> "Planning process is a multicomponent process where public participation is only one component." (KSP5).

(8) Long-term thinking

People care about changes that happen now or in their neighborhood, they do not care about changes that could happen in the long-term perspective. Cupps (1977) emphasized the problem of long-range planning. He argued that long-term planning is more important and that planning department should not try to satisfy all citizens' needs in prejudice of long-range planning. One experienced practitioner observed:

"People do not really care about the things in the long term…" (RWP7).

Almost all of the interview participants indicated the challenges for people associated with changes. "Planning is about managing change" is how one of the practitioners defined the planning process. The difficulty is that people do not like changes, and the planning process is usually accepted with negative feelings because it brings changes. One practitioner shared the experience of working with public:

> "The challenge for us because we deal with the full region and the work we do is long term and required public participation for the long term. Most people don't know or don't care about the entire region problems, if the problems are not obvious, it is difficult for people to understand them…" (RWP7).

Another challenge identified by participants is that people do not care about the changes that will happen in the future. People care about their neighborhood and about their life today, and not about the circumstances of their decisions in the future. Long-

term thinking is an important element for collaboration, and is aimed to lead for better outcome of the process (The Collaborative Citizen, 2014). One interviewee underlined:

"Most people do not think in the long term, they don't care about structures. The people who think long term think that the region is doing the right thing." (RWP7).

(9) Information

Access to information has become more available due to the technological advancement. People have access to official websites, to reports, and can even comment and criticize them. The problem is that not all information resources are genuine and fair. People can get frustrated because they do not know which source is official and represents facts accurately. One practitioner reported:

"The other part is misinformation. With the advent in the social media you can spread information really quickly and it is not necessarily correct information. So making sure that it is fact-based as opposed to just a prospective or just see this and whatever." (KSP5).

The majority of participants indicated the issue of information. Due to technological progress, the information is more accessible. There are lots of sources of information: official websites, forums, open discussions, online reports, but not all of them are trustworthy. One practitioner emphasized:

"The concern is the information that being exchanged is accurate and valid." (KSP5).

Some participants reported that information on the Internet is not safe because it is not fact based, and the authors are anonymous, so nobody takes responsibility for it. Participation through online forums is "faceless", and sometimes people do not actually mean what they write. One interviewee expressed:

"We are in a hyper informed world, where are so many opportunity to participate. People do not know or do not understand how to participate, or feel that their participation is not actually taken into account." (WPM6).

Communication in person can be difficult not only in planning practice but also in daily life. Today people prefer to communicate by using various devices. Planning departments are trying to be innovative and use new technologies to attract more people, especially young people, for example:

> "We also have Facebook and Twitter account to give people an opportunity. Sometime the input from the web is not as helpful because people sometime use it as forum. Because they are doing it in isolated protected way." (CP1).

The majority of the practitioners felt that all the comments and opinions received are valuable even if they are received anonymously. The challenge that practitioners see in the online communication is the validity and relevancy of the information to the particular issue. One experienced practitioner argued:

> "Every opinion is important, through social media you have the opportunity to get access to more people. The other part is that there are people not in the constituency, the can be in Britain or in the US. So you get more information, but how do you synthesize the information." (KSP5).

4.2.4. Key trends

Even though participants indicated many challenges associated with public participation practice, the key trends are mostly positive in their nature. Participants discussed the level of engagement, the new tactics that participants use, the range of methods that are used today, and the role of social media.

(1) People are more engaged and are more organized

The level of engagement is generally seen as increasing. People have become more aware of the issues and they want to be part of the discussions, but not all issues require deep public input. One practitioner stated:

> **"**The level of engagement depends on the issue, the whole spectrum of public engagement is used." (KP3).

Participants described different tactics they use to work with increased number of citizens who wish to participate. Some emphasized managing the time and location to accommodate all participants; others underlined the importance of targeting. Knowing the community is an important element of public engagement strategy (TCRP, 2011). Special interest groups are another option that could work, and help to avoid meetings with large groups of people. According to one interview participant's experience:

> "The key trend that we tried to pick up on is the difference between getting huge quantity of input and focusing on the following participation. Instead of getting huge numbers of opinions, hundreds of people tell us one thing each, we focused on the gathering together groups of people that would worked with you over a period of time. So I think the idea of meeting regularly over the year versus only gathering people together for one special public meeting." (WPM6).

City planners are of the opinion that collecting citizens' opinions and giving them a chance to share their ideas is in the right approach to effective public participation process. The majority of authors from the literature review share this position and emphasize the benefits for both parties. Brody, Godschalk, and Burby (2003) argued that the level of engagement depends on the strategy that practitioners choose. The academics suggest involving engagement specialist in the planning process to improve the quality and provide fairness of the public participation process. Planning departments confirm that they have facilitators, and engagement specialist in their team:

> "So we do use the whole spectrum depending on what issue is, and I think most people know that. I think that in order to have an effective public participation it is to know what are your tenses; you do not want just to inform. If there is a possibility to allowed the input when you make the decision than it is smart to go ahead and allowed for consultation." (KP3).

Along with increased general public interest, there is progress in engaging special interest groups. Participants indicated that they have become more organized, and they try to use different tactics in order to get desired decision, for example:

"… more and more organizations, especially pubic agencies that have recognized that there is the whole continuum of types of public participation and there is one that better than the other depending on purpose." (KP3).

(2) Not only traditional methods of public participation are used

Innes and Booher (2004) argued that traditional methods of public participation do not work anymore due to lack of actual participation, and the limited number of people involved in the process. Academics and practitioners are on the same page with them. They argue that public participation process has to be integrated with the media and new technologies. One interviewee suggested that:

"More public participation today than it was before. It is not only in the traditional format where you have only public meetings and the council chambers… So there are far more consultations, there is more than traditional approach, you often meet one on one, or even exchange through social media or internet. "
 (KSP5).

(3) People are more informed

Through the development of new technologies the access to information has become more accessible. The internet is a first source of knowledge because it is fast, easy, and convenient. The sharing of information is an essential element for the open process, and collaboration between public and government. Academics underlined the importance of sharing the information by using a variety of sources, for example:

"People using the Internet tend to be more informed on an issue." (TWP8).

The participants indicated that people come to meetings more informed about the issue than it was before. After they heard about the issue, they started to collect information about it from different sources. As a result, people are more knowledgeable and can meaningfully participate, and planning department cut time spending on the information session. One interviewee noted:

"People are becoming more informed about the issues. People do research and than come to us and ask very good questions." (CP1).

(4) People come to support

In spite if the fact, that people who come to the meetings are usually in disagreement, and that is the main reason they come; the positive trend is that people today come to support projects. Practitioners proudly indicated that citizens come to them and express their support in variety of forms. Some of them can do it in public, other in person, after the meeting in one-on-one discussion. One practitioner reported:

"More people come up and say that that is a great thing that you are doing." (RWP7).

Visualization is a new trend in the planning process, and public participation has been affected by it. GIS applications, schemes, presentations, and maps are inevitable part of the planning reports that help people to understand the issues better, for example:

"Hi-tech and interactive things are used, interactive online maps that people can add pictures to or submit things to. Those things are very trendy." (WPM6).

Practitioners and academics noticed that people have become organized, especially special interest groups, advocacy groups, and communities. People understand that the more they are informed and organized, the more impact they can have on the decision. Based on one interviewee comment:

"People are much more organized on the matters that are important in their community. People become really active participants if the issue is important to them. Interest groups try to organize themselves, to make sure that they have a voice." (CP1).

4.2.5. The Most Important Skills

Good listening is seen as the one of the most important skills that today practitioner should have. Friedmann (1973) emphasized listening skills as an important element of social learning. Academics recommended an improvement of listening skills for planners as a way to enhance the progress of public participation. Along with listening skills the participants indicated the importance of other skills, such as communication skills, organizational skills, facilitator skills, patience, and diplomacy.

Patience is an important skill for practitioners working with the public. People who came to meetings are usually opposed to the project and they usually behave aggressively toward planners or government representatives. The reasons for this kind of behaviour can be many but in any situation practitioners have to stay calm and patient. As one practitioner stated:

> "The most important skill I think is being patient, which might sound as an odd skill, but I think that it is critical skill." (KSP5).

When participants indicated patience as one of the main skills they emphasized the importance of controlling yourself and take the comments easy. Sometimes the comments can be offensive and the practitioners have to deal with them and stay patient. One practitioner stated:

> "Patience, a lot of patience. And I mean it." (RWP7).

The literature review emphasizes good listening skills as a key element for successful public participation. Academics and practitioners are of the same opinion and underline the inherence of this skill to the planning process practice:

> "I think we have to be willing to listen and not rely on just traditional public forms." (TWP8).

Participants discussed their experience of working with the public, and the feelings of anger and frustration that are common for people when they do not like the project, or the outcome of the process. Practitioners are used to those feelings and understand that their task is to listen to the people's comments and opinions, for example:

> "People get angry, frustrated, you have to be prepared to talk with them and listen them, take notes." (RWP7).

One of the participants said that when you listen to someone's opinion you do not necessarily have to agree with it but need to at least listen. In other words, it is not easy to listen when the points of view differ, but people feel better when they feel that they are heard. It is good for practitioners at least to know what people think about the project and why they do not like it. One interviewee argued:

> "They have to be able to listen because you want to hear someone's opinion, you have to understand what actions they like to see." (KSP5).

Another important skill is the use of combined methods of public participation, the traditional and the computer-based new technologies. As one of the interview participants indicated, some practitioners from the older generation have to depend on the young specialists who are more comfortable with new technologies. One interview participant emphasized the importance of:

> "Being able to participate in all of the traditional methods and what are becoming the traditional (social media, internet)." (KSP5).

Almost all of the participants mentioned the importance of having communication and facilitator skills. Facilitator in the sense of making people comfortable by participating because some people are intimidated by the government and do not like to speak in public. Based on one practitioner comment:

> "Communication skills, you have to speak in a way that people are not intimidated. You need to work collaboratively with other folks." (RWP7).

Presentation and organizational skills are also important. The practitioners who work with public have to be open and communicative so that people feel comfortable to ask the question and have a dialogue. The data that they represent have to be clear and understandable and at the same time complete and precise. One interviewee suggested:

"You have to have a strong presence, reputation, so when you have to represent an information it has to be done in open, honest, and professional way. It is a balance between common sense and technical research and data collection. You need to have someone who is very practical, who knows how to send a message out." (WP2).

In the 1950-1960s, planners used very technical language in communicating with the public, and that was a barrier for citizens to participate (Lane, 2005). Nowadays most of the reports are adjusted for the general public, they are written in a plain language with limited technical explanations. Even though the shift has happened, practitioners feel the need to use more simplifications in presenting materials to the public, for example:

"…we have to speak in the language that is not necessarily very technical. I am not saying that we have to dumb down things but we have to speak so it is clear and understandable, and our reports have to be in that sort of clarity." (TWP8).

4.2.6. The Criteria of the Successful Public Participation Process

Interview participants were asked to share some examples of successful public participation, and based on those examples a set of criteria was identified. The range of examples varies from region level projects such as LRT to the new developments in a neighbourhood.

One of the criteria for successful public participation is additional consultation. Interview participant indicated that they go beyond the minimum requirements in Planning Act and provide extra consultations for public. These sessions are informative

and are aimed to help people understand the issue better. In addition, they help to target "right" people (special interest groups) to the official meetings. One practitioner noticed:

> "It generated huge amount of community foundations, they did astronomical number of sessions and meetings, large number of demographics, interested groups and stakeholders. A lot of organic public participation methods." (WPM6).

Some interview participants discussed the importance of having peer review on the project by an independent party. Having the School of Planning and the School of Architecture in the region provides an opportunity for practitioners to consult with them and ask for their second opinion, for example:

> "So here is the prime case where they had a traditional consultation, and they have a significant consultation beyond with a neighbourhood, and peer review by independent party, and they consulted with the School that has no invested interest." (KSP5).

The role of early involvement of the public in the project is discussed and supported in the literature review. Early stages of the planning process are the most important and public involvement is effective at that stages (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). Academics argued that involvement at the very first stage could improve the process and bring the desired outcome for both parties. Study participants identified early involvement as one of the criteria of best practices of public participation process:

> "Early involvement in the planning process. Started from broad topics, and then focused on the two main issues. Once we identified those two key issues we had a very focused discussion with people. Very targeted discussion." (CP1)

The exchange of information is another important element of successful involvement of the citizens (TCRP, 2011). Multi stage involvement provides a chance to identify the goals and objectives of the project at the first meeting, and to have a specific discussion at the next meeting. That strategy can help to avoid mass meetings and have a discussion with an interested group of people.

One of the interview participants shared their experience about successful public participation process. The collaborative approach was introduced in the late 1980s as a strategy to balance the interests between private and public sectors (Grey, 1989). Collaboration in the planning process is about sharing the insights and ideas about the issue between stakeholders.

Academics indicated the sharing of information between stakeholders as a way to enhance the progress of public participation practice. Based on the experience of practitioners this method works and it is effective. If the stakeholders are willing to be engaging deeper in the process, the practitioners are ready to accommodate their involvement and think that it would only benefit the process. One interviewee shared this experience:

> " The most successful was bringing together stakeholders who actually work in different areas in one room with their peers and take their ideas and having them to validate those ideas in project. To do it consistently all along the way. It was instrumental for our success at the end" (WPM6).

Another criterion of a successful public participation process combines theory and practice and present a hybrid approach. Academics with their solid knowledge in the theory can be helpful and provide a different prospective on the issue. Some academics working at universities have rich practical experience that they can share with today's practitioners. One practitioner argued:

> "We had a number of open houses directed to public engagement of surrounding neighbors and community. We did another unusual thing, we reached outside, we reached out to Mark Seasons because I knew him and he is from a school of Planning. We had a city and him a discussion, and also school of Architecture, and with two of them and the developers we kind of mixed the academic with practical to try to get some conversation on that. This work went very well. It took a lot of time and efforts to do that and it worked, the project on paper and the project that was built were very similar." (WP2).

The combination of methods and approaches was discussed in the literature as a best way to attract people from different areas because it gives them an opportunity to choose, for example:

> "A hybrid approach. We do presentations; most of our staff are trained facilitators (for people to understand what the application is, how it works, we explain the details), and we do a lot of handouts as well, and then we ask for question and comments. We do after the process Q&A component where people come and ask questions in person." (KP3).

Today practitioners are willing to be open to the public and to provide people with options where and hope to participate. Some people are still intimidated by governments and do not like to come to government buildings. People feel more comfortable in a relaxed atmosphere, in the places associated with good memories such as community centers, shopping centers, and malls. Having this in mind, practitioners are trying to be mobile and flexible in the choice of place and time, for example:

> "Multiple stages with the use of different methods, to inform and consult the public. The use of the social media, web sites, where people involved, trying to get their interests in their places, trying to come to the community centers for people who do not want to come to the City Hall, malls. For the big projects we are trying to do all of that." (KP3).

4.2.7. How Public Participation Process has Changed

The discussion about progress usually starts with the review of new technologies and computer-based tools. The progress of public participation is no exception. Almost all of the interview participants indicated the use of social media, Internet, and visualization tools as major impulse of the progress.

Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and official forums provide the opportunity for people to discuss the issues with the government officials from the distance. Another advantage of the use of new technologies is an increased number of

young populations participating in the urgent issues. Visualization tools help practitioners to create informative and detailed presentation for public, for example:

> "Some of the technologies have changed the process. The input is more, larger. People are able to express themselves more than it was before. More detailed, diagrams, GIS tools. False documents, very professional." (RWP7).

Access to information has become open to the public and available all the time due to the Internet, and official websites that place original data on them. In spite of the fact that genuine information is available on the official websites, one of the participants emphasized the increased number of false reports that looks very real and confuses people. Another practitioner emphasized the importance of filtering the information available in the Internet:

> "Taking advantages of the different methods, making use of technologies, there is far more engagement from local groups." (KSP5).

There is a mutual agreement between academics, practitioners, and authors in the literature review about the increased number of people engaged in the planning process. One of the reasons is the access to the information; people are more aware about issues and willing to be part of the decision-making process in their communities. One interviewee noticed:

> "One thing is that the people are much more engaged than it was 20 years ago, I have been working for the region of Woolwich for 27 years." (TWP8).

The number of people intimidated by governments decreases, and mostly consists of people who are new in the country, or have some negative experience in the past, or it is inherent in their cultural or educational characteristics. Based on one practitioner's experience:

> "People are more engaged, and willing to share their views. There are still some people who feel intimidated by the government. Sometimes they are newcomers who

are still learning their way, trying to find their place in our community. Are not likely to talk die to their cultural background, or personal experience." (CP1).

Another shift that happened in the practice of public participation relates to organizational skills. People have become more organized. Interview participants noticed that people can behave very professionally and organized if the issue is important to them. As one interview participant underlined:

"Not just inform and meet the minimum requirements, we go beyond the requirements. People have become more involved. At least council knows what the people think and we know what people think about what we are doing." (KP3).

People organize in special interest groups and behave strategically. They collect information about the issue from different sources and unite with people with similar interest and specific knowledge in order to participate effectively and get a desired outcome from the process. One practitioner stated:

"A lot more engagement, maybe not from the mass level, but you have these community groups, and they are more organized in their particular area." (TWP8).

Although the majority of the participants indicated the increased number of people who participate, one of the practitioners stated that the participation is not actual participation, and the increase is measured only in quantity not in quality. One interview participant emphasized:

"More demand for participation, but less actual participation itself. Before it was a privilege to participate, and now it is accessible. Box process is down a little bit. Need for consensus. More innovative approaches, more risky, more open." (WPM6).

The majority of participants described contemporary public participation process as open and fair. In contrast, one practitioner underlined the legislative process of the public participation process where council is not allowed to present on the first meting:

"Councils are not allowed to express their opinion on the application until the application is being herd; they had a public meeting, and closed the public meeting. Only then legally the council have to start taking opposition on it." (WP2).

Having access to information offer people an opportunity to participate with solid knowledge about the issue, and have an effective discussion base on facts. One practitioner expressed:

"And I think groups are understanding that there are needs to be and there are responsibility to ensure that the correct information is out there so the engagement is based on facts and not on misconception. That is a big change… It is good to have a debate, if they are fact based." (KSP5).

The decision-making process has become more transparent and the decisions are open to the public. In spite of this fact, academics suggested that planners make the decision-making process more open and the reasons of decisions accessible to the public. In addition, one of the interview participants raised the question of the lack of reports after the decisions are made. Based on the opinion of one practitioner:

"All decisions are front-ended, they are not in behind, that is how it has changed." (KSP5).

4.2.8. Summary of key findings

Study participants identified the main challenges that they face in their daily practice of public participation. Organizational challenges are presented broadly in the literature review, and participants proved that they have difficulties associated with location and time scheduling of meetings. Another challenge that was discussed with participants and that can also be found in the literature is competing interests. The majority of the challenges that participants identified correspond to the literature review findings and with academics' opinions. However, there are two exceptions: long-term thinking and dislike of change. Those two factors are very important for the public participation in the planning process.

The majority of the interview participants indicated the progress of public participation that happened during the last 40-50 years. The role of new technologies and social media is central to progress. While the majority of the participants discussed many challenges associated with the public participation process, they feel that it has changed in a positive way.

Waterloo region practitioners indicated that people are more engaged in the process and care about the issues that happen in their community. Another trend is that people are more informed thanks to the social networks, official websites, and online forums. With reference to Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation, the literature confirms that Informed levels are achieved in most of the areas of public participation, and in some of them achieve the Consult level. The desirable level is Engage and Empower, and authors argue that Inform is not enough for effective decisions.

Study participants identified good listening skills as the most important skill for today's practitioner. Academics and theory emphasize the importance of listening skills for effective public participation process. Study participants indicated the criteria of the successful public participation process, where early involvement, collaboration, and hybrid approach are the main components. These criteria match those of the recommendations made by academics in the online survey and support the ideas found in the literature review.

4.2.9. Conclusions

The findings from the interviews of eight practitioners from the Waterloo Region mostly reflect the theoretical concepts and trends from the literature review and key findings from the survey with academics; however, some insights and opinions differ and contradict each other.

The key trends of public participation indicated by the practitioners reflect the theoretical concepts found in the literature review. Increased levels of engagement and the lack of actual participation are the main themes of the literature, and in practice the same tendency is seen. Some practitioners expressed their opinion about the progress of public participation and they are of the opinion that there is no gap between theory and practice. In contrast, the academics indicated the existence of the gap and discussed challenges associated with closing it.

Study participants identified the role of social media as a key factor of public participation progress and change. People rely on social networks and official websites as the main sources of information. Academics and practitioners see positive results such as increased involvement and open access to the information; however, there is a lack of credibility for the open data sources, and doubtful quality of the data obtained from the Internet.

Chapter 5. Analysis of Findings and Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter compares and contrasts the findings from the three main sources of data collection: literature review, online survey, and interviews with key informants. The findings are organized by themes that I created. The analysis comprises finding in these themes by matching ideas and comparing them with each other.

The key findings from the secondary data are aimed at tracing the evolution of public participation and identifying the main theories and approaches that were developed in different periods of time. The key findings from the primary data sources such as interviews and surveys provide the opinions and insights of academics on theory development, collection of data about the present practice of public participation, and the challenges that practitioners face when applying different approaches.

5.2. Compare and Contrast Findings

Based on the literature review findings and my research questions I created questions for the online survey and interviews. These questions are focused on finding the answers to my research questions and testing the theoretical findings.

Finding #1 No actual participation

The theory states that in order to have actual participation there has to be a partnership between parties (Faltey, King & Susel, 1998). When authors discuss actual, authentic, or genuine participation they mean the process where people are actively engaged in the decision-making process. Academics partially agree with this statement; they argue that public participation is important at the local level. Practitioners in Waterloo region emphasized the importance of informing people about the issues and

providing consultations, but they agree that public participation is not required for all planning procedures. One of the participants shared the experience:

> "Site plan approval does not require public participation process. If there is more technical issue that the more educated people have to work on it and it not to be in the public process. I agree with it." (WP2)

This evaluation of the progress of public participation based on these findings suggests that not much has changed. The number of people who participate has increased but the level of engagement seems to have remained the same.

Finding #2 The lack of resources

One of the main challenges associated with public participation found in the literature review is the lack of resources (Day, 1997; Rittel & Weber, 1973). The articles in the literature argue that if there is enough time and financial, support the process is going to be successful. In contrast, practitioners argue that if people care about the issue they will find the time and will probably come to any location. Based on city planners' experience, the problem relates to region-scale issues and long-term planning. Academics indicated the resource issue as one of the reasons for delaying progress:

> "Lack of time and interest on behalf of the general public to participate (always the same old people)" (Comment received from Online survey, January 2014)

Finding # 3 No trust

The issue of trust is central in any decision-making process. The literature review emphasizes the importance of having trust between citizens and government. Smith & McDonough (2011) argued that if the decision-making process is open and fair it could help to improve the relationship among the parties involved in the process. The lack of trust could be a barrier for the citizens to participate. Academic responses underlined that

the majority of the participants comprise an older generation of people and there is an acute storage of young people to participate. Interview participants had not raised the question of trust during the interview but they mentioned that some people are still intimidated by the government.

The theory stated that the process has to be open but there is no discussion of how to make it open, for example, appropriate measures of openness (Hendricks, 2002). In practice, practitioners argue that it is difficult to come to an agreement with the large number of people. One of the reasons for this difficulty is that people come to the meetings angry and not impartial.

Finding #4 People do not like change

The practitioners made an interesting observation about the issue of change. Based on practitioners' experiences, the news about any change is usually perceived as negative whether it is a good or bad change. The change was associated with uncertainty and instability in the future. During any discussion of possible solutions, people prepare themselves to the potential changes in the future. People are more willing to accept the idea of coming changes when they were participants in the decision-making process. In that case, people can prepare themselves for future changes and discuss possible circumstances. In order to change the behaviour of people, they have to understand why they need public participation and what benefits participants might bring.

Finding #5 Fear of losing power

The authors argue that power holders do not want to share power with people and they think that people want to be the decision-maker. Bailey & Grossardt (2007) made an interesting observation and discovered that the actual level of engagement that people desire is not as high as expected. People do not want to be the only decision-makers; they

want to be part of the process and have their comments taken in consideration. Based on the interview responses from practitioners in Waterloo region, my impression is that they give people an opportunity to express their opinions but not actually engage them. Only if the issue is controversial and there are too much protests will planners try to listen and understand why people do not like it.

Finding #6 Challenge to attract people

In order to attract people to participate in the public participation process, practitioners use lots of method and technics. The authors in the literature argue that the more methods you use, the larger the number of people you attract (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). Practitioners disagree with this theory and argue that when the public participation process comprises a mass of people it is very difficult to manage the process and the outcome may not be effective. Practitioners argue there is no need to attract large number of people with different interests. The better strategy is to organize in special interest groups or have community representatives.

Targeting is an important element for the public participation planning process (Burbi, 2001). For example, people from different regions are not well informed about the situation in another region and their suggestions might be not be consistent with or relevant to local conditions.

> "We are trying to deal with the growth plan issues at the policy stage, at the official plan stage which is to provide directions and I think that people do not see the relevance sometimes at the back and do not understand the implications of those high level decisions because it doesn't change of affect them right now. Long term planning is not a high priority, so it is hard to get people to participate in that issues." (TWP8).

Finding #7 Long-term thinking is difficult

Another interesting observation made by practitioners is about unwillingness or inability of people to think in the long-term. In the literature there is a response to this issue where authors argue about the importance of the long-term perspective thinking for the better decisions and prevention of the negative effects in the future (Fisher & Ury, 1981; Cupps, 1977; The Collaborative Citizen, 2014). Practitioners stress the challenges associated with the unwillingness of people to think in the long range. For instance, for the regional level that implies development of the long-term plans, people do not care about the changes that might happened in the future and will not directly affect them. Academics explained this difficulty as an example of NIMBYism that is inherent in people's nature. One of the interview participants indicated that there are people who think in large scale and that practitioners are trying to work with that category of people:

> "Most people do not think in long term, they don't care about structures. The people who think long term think that the region is doing right think. We trying to deal with people who think about sustainability, transportation, who have agriculture sites, who care about environment." (RWP7).

Finding #8 Competing interests

People want their needs and wishes to be understood and taken into consideration. They want to be treated with respect and have open discussion with a chance to explain their choice (the Collaborative Citizen, 2014). The theory suggests using negotiation approach to deal with people differences (Fisher & Ury, 1981). In contrast, the practitioners recommend reducing the number of people by organizing them in interest groups. If the theory suggests separating people from problems, the practitioners suggest separating people from people. However, the practitioners emphasized the role of planner

as a facilitator in order to manage the public participation process and reduce the chance of potential conflict situations.

Thinking about the difference in citizens and developers' interests, the strategy of separating people from people does not work here and a collaborative approach is needed. Developers represent private sector and public which is composed of people that represent their own interests, and both of them want benefits from the outcome. Developers are very critical about any changes that come from the outside and were not conceived in the project. The assumption is that human beings are selfish by nature and thinking about someone else's benefits is contrary to their nature:

> "The reality is that there are a lot of people out there. The position of these people is not in the large community perspective interests, so one little neighborhood can be against the project that would benefit the whole community because the road has to be on their street, close to their own houses. People usually advocate for the things that directly benefit them, and rare people care about the large community interests. Pluralistic society." (KP3).

Finding #9 High Expectations

Some of the interview participants indicated that people have very high expectations about their level of influence on the decision. Sharing their experience, practitioners described that people become very angry and aggressive if they do not get the desirable decision. Correspondingly, in the literature authors argue that the main reason people come to the public participation process is to express the opposite opinion and to try to change or to stop the project (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). Despite the fact that there is a positive tendency in public participation to support the project, the majority of participants are often against it.

As a result of the sense of satisfaction that people have after the process, the aspiration to participate in future exercises could decrease. People have to feel their need

and significance in the process in order to be an active and ongoing participant (Fisher & Ury, 1981). One of the interview participants argued that public participation is only a part of the complex planning process, and other decisions have to be made before the final decision will be considered.

Finding #10 Early involvement in the process

Not only do authors in the literature argue about the importance of early involvement in the process but also academics and practitioners. The theory states that if citizens are involved in the very first step of the planning process, the outcome will be more informed and knowledgeable participants in the process (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003). As an illustration of this theory in practice, one of the practitioners shared an experience with early involvement in the planning process where they identified the key issues and then had a very targeted discussion. This is one of the criteria for successful public participation process. Academics similarly emphasized the importance of early involvement:

> "Most important factor is involvement of public from step 1- preparing a draft plan and particularly engaging the public in plan choices." (Online survey, PP35).

It is important for participants to understand the changes and effects that the project can or cannot bring in their lives. Developers can benefit from involving the residents at the early stage of the planning process by understanding their needs and finding consensus. As a result of this approach the developers achieve satisfied residents and positive impressions about them and their work.

> "Hopefully, PP theory will focus more on involving the public in the early conceptual stages of projects (e.g., should we do this kind of thing) rather than the later technical, bureaucratic, legalistic stages."(Comment received from online survey, PP43).

The difficulties associated with attracting people to the process at the early stages reflect a lack of interest in the project at the planning stage. When people do not see the changes or actions around the issue they usually do not care about it. One of the interview participants used an example of an LRT project to illustrate that people start to show interest after the project was approved, or the changes affect them directly:

> "I saw a million huge efforts by the Region. LRT-tons of sessions but still people say that they never heard about it…" (WP3).

Finding #11 Careful design of the process

Theoretically, to have a successful public participation process, it has to be designed with peoples' needs, values, and preferences in mind (Cupps, 1977; Wilson, 1963). Before residents decide to participate they have to understand the purpose of the project, the importance of their input, and the consequences that the decision can cause. Academics feel the same way about the importance of a detailed process design:

> "People participating must know the purpose of the public input, what their role is in the process, the stage of the process and what happens next toward the policy decision, they should receive feedback on their input, and before the begin have the opportunity to fully understand the complexity and implications of the issue/ decision (via written info and perhaps a briefing" (Online survey, PP38).

Burke (1963) argued that the large number of people participating in the process leads to changes in community behavior, and the community starts to act more like a unit. In practice, practitioners shared their experience of working with large numbers of people and described it as a complex, disorderly, and a meaningless process. Academics emphasized the necessity of the design of the process with accurate development of each step harmonized in the time frame and funding. In addition, academics underlined that the design of the process has to be created with people in order to take into consideration their ideas and solutions.

Finding #12 The use of social media

Social media is one of the fastest growing tools for interaction between people. The forms of social media vary from social networks and online blogs to informative websites and virtual games. Although the main users of social networks are young people, the number of older people who use it has increased almost twice during the last decade (Bullas, 2013). Social media is a valuable tool in planning practice, including public participation.

The use of online forums and blogs has increased because practitioners realized the benefits of their use in the public participation practice. The academics along with practitioners indicated the importance of social media use for the progress of public participation practice. Some practitioners are of the opinion that social media is a future development of public participation and the solution of the challenges, such as lack of information about the issues, inconvenient time and location of the event, and attracting young people to the participation in the planning issues.

While social media benefits the process in most of the cases there are some challenges associated with it. Some interview participants identified that the use of the Internet and computer-based technologies represent isolated and faceless participation that allowed people to comment in more free ways and express what were sometimes irrelevant comments and ideas. That approach can complicate and delay the data processing. Another challenge for today's practitioners from the old school of planning is that they have to depend on the young workers in order to use new technologies. Some authors argue that not all communities and issues need internet-based approaches to be used (Bernoff, 2007).

Collaboration is seen as an inevitable part of the planning process, and social networks can be valuable tools to promote it. Some practitioners shared their experience of successful public participation process where one of the criteria was collaboration with stakeholders. Online forums and websites can help to meet with stakeholders at the early stages of the planning process and discuss with them the main issues. Key findings from this research are summarized in Table 5.1

Table 5.1. Summary of key findings

	Literature Review	Online Survey	Interviews
Key Trends	No actual participation		
	The level of engagement is not adequate	Inform and consult are the main levels of engagement	The whole spectrum of engagement is used in practice
Challenges	The lack of resources • The time it takes to do genuine participation • Insufficient funds		
	No trust between citizens and government	The lack of trust	The number of people intimidated by the government has decreased
	Power holders are not willing to share the power	Power holders have to be willing to share power and knowledge with people	Knowledge sharing is important but in complex and technical cases people can not understand
	Difficulties associated with attracting people to participate	"Cynicism of the public as to the motives of government agencies in participation initiatives" NIMBY	Difficult to attract people for the long-term planning, The majority of people do not care about the regional planning, they care about their neighborhood only

	Satisfy all participants interests	Fundamentally opposed positions between public and developers	Diametrically opposed interests of more than two groups complicate the process
	People want their needs and wants to be taken in consideration during the decision-making process	Communities have to feel that their feedback is heard	People have high expectations about the level of power they have on the decision
Criteria of successful public participation process	Early involvement • People are informed and have knowledge to meaningfully participate • Identifying key issues • Planning with people approach		
	The literature underlined the importance conclusion and recommendations that can be applied in practice.	The interest and attitudes of both practitioners and researchers are fundamental	Hybrid approach that include peer review and involvement of academics and practitioners in the project
	Careful design of the process • Design with people • Very detailed and specific development with identified role of public in the process • Extra informative session		
	The potential benefit for the public at the outcome of the process is seen as an important element	One of the factors that enhance the progress s assuring the benefit in the outcome.	People are willing to participate only if they have a direct benefit to their neighborhood or to them personally at in the outcome
	The report after the process where people can find a feedback on their contribution	People should have a feedback on their input in order to be willing to participate next time	The lack of feedback jeopardize the trust in the government sector
Skills	Good listening skills		
	Communication and presentation skills		
		Skilled facilitators "Listen more and lecture less"	Patience Diplomacy

			Plain language
Future Directions	The use of social media and computer-based technologies		
	Citizens have to be the decision-makers Collaboration and long-term thinking	No change based on the experience of 15 years More planning innovation and public involvement to meet the needs of our communities with scarce funding	Increased demand to participate More organized and knowledgeable participants
The Gap	Theory is ahead of practice		There is no gap between theory and practice, the practice do beyond the theory
	The level of engagement promote in the literature is not achieved in practice	Lots of practice is unnoticed in the literature	

5.3. Summary of Analysis

The analysis of the key findings from three main sources enriched the context of the thesis and helped to find the ideas and themes that are similar and that differ from each other. The main trends found in the literature, and discussed by academics and practitioners are the level of engagement, challenges of public participation process, the criteria of successful public participation process, and the main important skills for today practitioners. Future directions of public participation were actively discussed as well, and social media plays one of the main roles.

An interesting observation was made about the gap between theory and practice. While the authors in the literature and academics acknowledge the fact of existence of gap and offer possible solutions how to close it, the practitioners state that they don't see

any gap. The practitioners emphasized the progress that has been made in public participation practice during the last few decades. The interview and online survey respondents confirm the set of criteria for successful process and the main important skills discussed in the literature. Competing interests issue is actively discussed in the literature, and practitioners from the Waterloo region indicated the challenge associated with the opposed interests of participants as a reason of having conflict environment during the meetings.

Lack of trust is one of the main challenges of successful public participation and is not as obvious in the Waterloo region, and some participants argued that the number of intimidated by government citizens has depressed. Collaboration and long-term thinking are topics that have became high profile in the recent literature, and these are presented as a ways of future directions of public participation. The practitioners of Waterloo region underlined the importance of these approaches and confirm that seek to apply them in practice.

Social media and visualization comprise a large portion of the future directions and play a key role in the progress of public participation in terms of increased number of participants and the access to the information. Practitioners of Waterloo region warn about possible challenges such as authenticity and suitability of information received from social media sources.

Chapter 6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1. Introduction

   The chapter summarizes the key findings from primary and secondary data research, answers the research questions that guided this research, and provides recommendations based on the findings. Based on the recommendations and the study findings, concluding remarks and suggestions for further research are included in the chapter. Overall, this thesis covered the theoretical foundations and practical application of public participation in the past fifty years, the progress that was made, and the challenges of today's practice.

6.2. Summary of key findings

   The research presents three sets of findings from primary and secondary sources. The data were collected from the literature review about public participation theory, from the online survey with academics, and from the set of interview with key informants in the Waterloo region. The questions for the survey and interview were designed based on the purpose statement of this research and were aimed to answer research questions.

   The literature review findings are focused on the historical overview of the main approaches and concepts in public participation theory. During the past fifty years, a large leap was traced in the level of engagement in the planning and decision-making process. With reference to Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation, the Information and Consultation levels are generally approved and confirmed as a requirement for a successful public participation process. Partnership is seen as an essential step toward trust gain between parties. Collaboration and long-term thinking are the direction for the future development of public participation practice. The theory is focused on engaging

more people in the process and making the process fair and open. The literature review about public participation theory has illustrated the evolution of theory during the last fifty years: from Arnstein's (1969) ladder and advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965) in 1960s to co-creation, collaboration and long-range planning. The approaches proposed in the modern literature are focused on the benefits in terms of the long-term perspective and the public interest. The shift from narrow thinking to strategic and long-range planning can be easily traced in the literature review.

Online surveys were focused on testing the existing theoretical approaches and the discussion about the progress and possibilities of closing the gap between theory and practice. The key findings from the survey helped to understand the linkage between theory and practice and the challenges associated with reducing the gap. The importance of having tight linkages between theory and practice was discussed as an inevitable part of the comprehensive public participation process. One of the benefits that was indicated my academics is having practice-oriented recommendations in the literature. The academics confirmed the difficulties of applying theory in practice.

The main challenges that the survey participants indicated were the issues of power, the top-down structure of the planning process, competing interests between citizens and developers, and the lack of resources. Overall, academic responses varied in their nature and ideas about the progress of public participation. Based on the data received from the online survey, general progress is confirmed as discussed in the comments with providing details and examples in support of their opinions. However, some of the online participants stated that progress has not been steady, with many "ups and downs" that have happened in public participation practice during the last fifty years.

The research also includes key interview findings, which illustrate the practitioners' perspective about the practice of public participation in Waterloo region. The interview participants argued that the progress of public participation practice is obvious and expressed in the increased number of participants, people are more informed and organized, in the support that people show to the projects, in the increased interest about local issues, and in expressed interest to participate in the decision-making process. Also, practitioners indicated the challenges associated with the process, such as the lack of actual participation, the lack of resources, competing interests, unwillingness of participants to think in long range, and the NIMBY issue.

The data collected from the interviews with planning practitioners differs in many aspects from the data collected from online survey. First, the practitioners of Waterloo region do not confirm the gap; instead, they feel very positive about the progress and future directions of public participation practice. Secondly, the challenges that they indicated are focused on citizens' unwillingness to participate, or participate only in the issues the consequences of which can directly affect their lives, and unpreparedness to accept any changes. Finally, the criteria of successful public participation process were discussed very clearly, and almost all of the planning practitioners indicated the same set of criteria.

In the previous chapter these findings were compared with each other and some similarities were found as well as differences. Based on the analysis of these chapters, the following recommendations were created. The recommendations are based on the comments and opinions received from academics and practitioners, and from my personal observations and conclusions.

6.3. Research questions

The purpose of this research was to explore the evolution of the theory of public participation, and to examine the progress of practice. The questions were focused on exploring the forces that affect the development of both theory and practice of public participation, the reasons behind the gap, and possible solutions of closing this gap..

6.3.1. How has the theory and the practice of public participation changed in the last fifty years, in the context of urban planning?

The question about the progress of public participation is an important element for my research because it helps us relate practice to theory. The period of fifty years was chosen on purpose. The 1960s was important and full of events where public participation started to become an active issue. The findings from the literature review are the primary source for answering this question. The authors from that era suggested increasing number of participants as a way to successful public participation process.

The academics indicated that progress is an "up and down" process and it could not be generalized. The overall trend is positive in the development of public participation theory, and academics emphasized the importance of theoretical knowledge for today practitioners. An understanding of what benefits public participation brings to the planning process is an essential part of information tanning for the practitioners. Another interesting observation was made during the interviews with practitioners that they are confused about the meaning of "theory" of public participation and understands it as "procedural theory."

The current literature about public participation is focused on long-term thinking, collaborative approaches, an open decision-making process, and the use of new technologies. The main themes remained the same, in their nature, as they were 50 years ago, with the focus on informing, listening, and respecting people in the dialogue with government. Responses from the online survey indicated that the theory needs more nuanced and fundamental research. In addition, integration with other research areas could improve theory development.

To examine the evolution of public participation practice, the main information source was interview findings. The information received from the interview key informants was compared with the information generated by the online survey in order to reach an objective evaluation. The practitioners felt very positive about the practice of public participation and argued that people became more informed about the issues and are willing to participate in the local decision-makings process. The shift from "no participation" to "information" and "consultation" is confirmed by all three data sources.

In spite of the fact that progress in practice is generally accepted, researchers argue that the adequate level of engagement has not been achieved. Interview participants indicated that even though the number of participants increased, the quality of the process tends to suffer. Another positive trend is that fewer people are intimidated by government. The practitioners are well informed about the important skills that they should have when working with the public. The practitioner are flexible and mobile in time and location scheduling, they prefer evenings, and able to come to the community centers and malls for the citizens' convenience.

However, the distance between citizens and practitioners exist and the practitioners are the one who acknowledge this. Interview participants emphasized that the public participation process is only a part of the complicated planning process, and accordingly participants do not have much power on the decision. It is apparent that the planning process remains somewhat complicated and difficult to understand for many citizens.

6.3.2. *How big is the gap between public participation theory and practice?*

To answer this question, the key findings from the three main data sources have to be taken into consideration. The authors from the literature review along with responses from the online survey with academics agree about the gap between the theory and practice. The theory of public participation is rooted in many other theories such as the theory of choice, the theory of justice, the theory of behavior that explained the importance and benefits of public participation. The theory stays that the practice has to be based on theoretical groundings.

The academics underlined the importance of practice-based recommendations and conclusions when developing theory on public participation. They emphasized the challenges associated with making the transition from theory to practice. The scholars find the gap as part of the natural process where theory should always be ahead of practice and prepare the practitioners for the future changes. However, some academics argue that the gap is an illusion, noting that many examples of progressive and successful public participation practices exist but are not acknowledged by academics. Better

connections between theory and practice can be acquired through the close and integrated work of scholars and practitioners.

The discussion about the gap is based on the opinions, insights, and experience of academics and practitioners, so it is difficult to say how valid this perception really is. The research was focused on finding the evidences of existence of the gap, not on measuring it. Furthermore, the discussion about the gap is limited by only two sources, the online survey and literature review. The planning practitioners are of the opinion that practice of public participation is quite progressive, and some of them believe that practice is more progressive and innovative than the theory.

6.3.3. What are the factors that cause a gap between theory and practice?

Public participation became part of the planning process about 40 years ago, in the middle of 20th century when the demand to participate in the decision-making process arose. There were several reasons behind the increased demand. The structure of the decision-making process (top-down) has changed, and the importance of environmental and social problems were recognized as acute and required broader circle of decision-makers (Leach & Pelkey, 2001). The 1992 conference in Rio de Janeiro and the Aarhus Convention played a significant role in development of public participation practice.

The great breakthrough in the theory development occurred in the 20th century. The literature discussed the importance of public participation and the benefits it can bring to the process, discussed the criteria of a successful public participation process, and indicated the different approaches that have to be used. In the early literature the

issue of power remains important, with many scholars arguing that the one of the main challenge for meaningful public participation is unwillingness to share power.

Some legislative changes such as the right to have access to information about environmental issues, and making the public participation mandatory in the planning process have influenced on the public participation development. New technologies have changed the process in the way of making it more accessible, less formal, and less resource intensive. Due to the Internet, considerable amounts of reliable information are available on official websites, and ongoing dialogue is available through social networks.

The major factor that leads to misunderstanding between scholars and practitioners seems to be conflicting impressions about what comprises an appropriate theory of public participation. Scholars search for a deep understanding of peoples' behaviour, for reasons behind satisfaction with the decision, and the role of public participation for achieving justice and fairness in the process. In contrast, practitioners seek guidelines, instructions, and practical recommendations for these theories in practice.

6.3.4. How might we close the gap between public participation theory and practice, in urban planning?

Based on the interviews with the key informants in Waterloo region, the question about the theory-practice gap generated interesting ideas. While the literature review and academics accept the notion about a lag in adopting theory in practice, the practitioners argue that in practice they do not see it. However, the practitioners indicated lots of challenges associated with the public participation process.

The practitioners suggested organizing groups by their specific interests in order to have meaningful participation. Another suggestion came from the literature and is focused on uniting people by thinking about common futures and changes that will affect participants' children and grand children.

Another challenge is the lack of sufficient recourses, meaning financial, time, and labour. All threes sources confirm the existence of this challenge, and how this makes the process difficult for both parties. However, the use of computer-based technologies partially solves it by providing the opportunity for people to save time and money, and for practitioners to serve people at a distance.

Scholars argue about the unwillingness of decision-makers to share their power with citizens as a major force that delays progress in public participation practice. An additional challenge indicated by practitioners is the nature of the planning process that too often does not include an authentic public participation process. Academics emphasized the role of politics in the public participation process and the need to manage this aspect. Finally, people have unrealistically high expectations about their level of influence on planning decisions. The reason in my opinion is the lack of information about their roles in the process, the lack of experience in participating, and the absence of a detailed design of the participation process. Some practitioners suggested having public participation as an ongoing process, which helps to educate people about the process, reduce the chance of unjustified expectations, and make people feel that they are active participants.

The interview and survey findings along with literature review include discussion about the enhancement of the practice of public participation, the development of theory, and improvement of the linkage between them. General recommendations that come from

the three main data sources emphasize the integration between scholars and practitioners. Experience and knowledge sharing is seen as integral element for the social development.

Academics indicated the importance of showing the benefits of participation for all participants and having clear instructions about the roles and opportunities for people who participate. People have to understand the plan and the changes that it will bring to their daily lives in order to have an incentive to participate. Another important aspect that survey respondents empashized is uniqueness of each case and the need to design the process with unique characteristics of each case in mind. A collaborative approach to decision-making with stakeholders is another approach that academics consider as a way to integrate theory into practice.

From the academic perspective, practitioners need special skills training and re-education with deeper study of public participation theory. In order to reduce the gap between theory and practice, practitioners have to be more innovative and open minded, and stop trying to apply general strategy to each case. In other words, practitioners have to be closer to people in order to listen and respect their needs and wants; this should help planners create community-specific solutions..

6.4. Recommendations

The recommendations are based on the findings from the three main data sources, their comparison and contrast analysis, and addressing them to the research questions. The recommendations are organized in two parts, the first set of recommendations is directed to improve the theory, and the second set of recommendations is directed to enhance the practice of public participation.

6.4.1. Theory recommendations

The online survey respondents emphasized the need for further theory development in order to improve the linkage between theory and practice, which the academics see as a key element for closing the gap. Also, academics recommended integrating the theory of public participation with other theories. One of the directions this might take is the continuation of the discussion about social justice (Fainstein, 2010). Another aspect that online survey participants highlighted is the lack of awareness by of scholars about the many progressive practices because they do not interact with practitioners. Based on the findings from online survey, this set of recommendations can be offered:

(1) Theory development and integration

Theory needs to be innovative and well developed in order to guide practice, and the recommendations made in the literature have to be practically based. Second, collaboration between academics and practitioners is essential for objective evaluation for the every single case, and integration of the theoretical concepts in decision-making process. Without collaboration and tight linkage between academics and practitioners, theory and practice will remain two solitudes. Finally, academics feel that fundamental factors of power and complexity have to be addressed in the theory in order to question the suitability of the top-down model of participation.

Another recommendation would be to test some of the theory assumptions how they work or why they do not work in practice. For example, one of the theoretical assumptions is already is criticized by practitioners. While the theory calls for larger numbers of participants for a successful process, planning practitioners argue that mass participation is not as effective as working with citizens in small groups..

(2) Collaboration

Evaluation of the outcome of the process and the theory approaches is essential for public participation improvement. The academics argue that practitioners need academics' help in evaluating public participation outcomes, and that they have to work together. For practitioners, it is helpful to understand the theory behind the practical approaches, and to have a direct dialogue with the scholars. For academics it can be helpful for them to see the outcome of the theoretical approaches in practice, and to receive direct feedback from practitioners.

(3) Education

Based on the findings from the interviews with practitioners, it can be concluded they do not care or do not know much about the theory of public participation theory. When answering the question about the key trends in practice and theory of public participation, they chose to speak about the practice. That can be understood and explained by the nature of their work as practitioners. Having this in mind, I would suggest theory-based education for future practitioners, and ongoing training with explanation of the theory behind the practical instructions for practitioners.

(4) Terminology

The literature review suggests focusing on clarification of the concept of public participation, explaining what public participation means, how and where it can be applied, and what benefits it might bring. Also, the literature suggests clarifying the difference between participation, engagement, involvement, and input in order to avoid incorrect interpretations. Academics mentioned the importance of being careful with the term "best practice" as it might be biased. The research about best practices of public participation with the collection of the large set of examples and then comparing them

could be a meaningful case studies-based research initiative. That could be valuable for the researchers seeking to test their theories in practice.

6.4.2. Practice recommendations

Based on the findings from interviews with practitioners in Waterloo region, it can be concluded that the practice of public participation is well developed. However, some recommendations can be made based on interview responses, online survey responses, the literature review, and my personal conclusions. Recommendations include different aspects of public participation process: the process itself, the players in the process, the outcome of the process, and external factors.

(1) Design and management

Based on the comments from survey respondents, the design of the process plays an important role for a successful public participation process. The design means the process of participation created in advance, including the timelines, funding limitations, and the understanding of the roles of participants in the particular case. Also, early involvement of stakeholders in the process is confirmed by the three data sources and acknowledged. The role of practitioners is seen as facilitators who seek to be active participants in the process in terms of engaging people and explaining the procedure.

(2) Ongoing engagement and immediate actions

People participating in the process have to be targeted and well informed about the issue because mass participation is recognized as not effective. Ongoing involvement is another suggestion that is aimed to engage people in the process on the regular basis. Regular participation can enhance trust between citizens and government and also decrease the number of people who are intimidated by government. In addition to these recommendations, the literature and academics emphasized the importance for people to

feel that they are heard and their input is taken into consideration. In order to achieve this, the academics suggest take actions right after the decision is made, or at least to have a report where participants input is included and valued. Openness of the process and innovative approaches are the forces that can enhance the practice of public participation.

(3) Skills and behaviour

Another set of recommendations is addressed to practitioners, their behaviour, their role in the public participation process, and their knowledge and education. Based on the interview, survey, and literature review key findings, listening skills are the most important skills that today's practitioner should have. Academics indicated that planners should feel more comfortable working closer to, and being more with, participants instead of being removed from the process. In other words, the barriers between officials and general public have to be reduced or eliminated in order to make people feel relaxed, friendly, and willing to share their thoughts and ideas.

(4) Social media

The role of social media is confirmed as a leading in public participation practice development. The practitioners suggest being careful with the validity of information that is easily accessible but not always trusted, meaning a need to rely more on official websites and forums that contain genuine data. I would personally suggest to put more information on government website about the purpose of participation, the benefits it can bring, and clear and detailed instruction on how and where one can participate. First and the most important in my opinion is understanding the roles of citizens in the local planning process and opportunities to be part of it. Attracting young people is also important, and social networks with the use of new technologies can be helpful in

transforming young population into a caring, responsible and long-term thinking population.

6.5. Research Limitations

One of the limitations that I faced during the research data collection was the limited number of participants, and the limited geographical area. While the online survey covered the territory of Canada, the interviews were conducted in Waterloo region only. The number of responses was limited due to the fact that not all of the potential respondents completed the survey. The reason could be the limited number of people who are interested or have special knowledge in the theory and practice of public participation.

Another limitation is associated with data analysis. With three main data sources that were compared and contrasted with each other, the research could benefit from having citizens' insights and comments collected via a survey with Waterloo residents. The time that the second survey would take for collecting and analyzing the data was a major constraint for not doing it. Also, the private sector (businesses, developers) is not well presented in my research due to the limited number of responses I received from them.

During the interviews with practitioners in Waterloo Region, some very good questions were asked about my research and suggestions were made about the direction it could take. The relationship between social media and public participation is a very interesting direction to pursue. The social media theme was mentioned by each interviewee, and I feel that my research needed to explore this important topic.

6.6. Suggestions for further research

The challenges and barriers mentioned as research limitations can be seen as potential for the future research. The research is primarily focused on the progress of theory and practice that was made, less about the future development of public participation. The role of social media in public participation progress is certainly significant, and its future development of it will make much greater use of social media. It would be logical to suggest investigation of the benefits of social media, the drawbacks, the different approaches of using it, and possible steps of integrating social media into the public participation process.

Another direction that the research could take is to examine the legislation associated with the public participation process. As one of the interview participants noted, it is important to know if the legislation process promotes or challenges public participation. The role of the Ontario Municipal Board, and top-down structure of the planning process are seen as negative and intimidating aspects of the process. It might be interesting to test how time and resource constraints influence the process and what forces manage these limitations. One practitioner highly recommended that I identify the criteria of a successful pubic participation process in order to have a comprehensive analysis of best practices.

6.7. Concluding remarks

The research was intende to find answers to the research questions. I sought to evaluate the progress of the public participation by comparing the findings from the primary resource data with the literature review findings. Progress is obvious and is traced in the increased number of participant, in the increased level of awareness, increased level of engagement (from Manipulation to Consultation), and many other

signs that were found. However, the challenges that were discussed in the 20th century such as the issue of power, the lack of resources, the difficulties associated with attracting young people, remained unsolved or partially solved.

The role of engaging citizens in the decision-making process is considered a major contributor to efforts to change the government structure into open and responsible governance (The World Bank, 2014). Based on the literature review findings and academics' experience and ideas, a gap between theory and practice exists, and the reasons behind it vary. However, the practitioners in the Waterloo region have not identified the gap, and some of them even argued that the practice is ahead of theory. That can be explained by the fact that the Waterloo region is quite innovative and progressive region compared with other regions in Ontario.

Collaboration is seen as the direction of future public participation development where not only public and government sectors are included, but also private, academic, and special interests groups are engaged in the decision-making. The use of technology can accelerate the transition of relationship between the government and the citizens into more innovative and meaningful process. Some researchers argue that there have to be people who are positioned between the general public and the state in order to translate their roles in the project and help them meaningfully participate (The World Bank, 2014).

Furthermore, the use of new technologies and social media can be beneficial as a way of informing and attracting young and computer-friendly audience, but there is a risk of overlooking or missing input from a large part of audience who are not active. The use of new technologies advances the practice of public participation; however, the collection of insights and ideas is not enough. As one of the academics indicated, feedback from

government is very important, and immediate actions is the evidence that the government has listened to its citizens.

In addition, the important point made in all three sources is that mass participation is not effective, and people participating have to have interest to the issue. Also, participants have to clearly understand the purpose of the issue, the role they play in the process, and after the process the participants need to have a feedback from the government. When citizens see the results of their engagement in form of actions or the report, they trust the government and are willing to participate on the regular basis.

The combination of academics and practitioners and their collaboration in the decision-making process is a perspective way of closing the gap. The academics should work closely with practitioners in order to enhance understanding, share knowledge, and to exchange ideas. This calls for direct and regular conversations between academics and practitioners.

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1. How important is public participation in local decision-making?
   - Extremely important
   - Very important
   - Moderately important
   - Slightly important
   - Not at all important
2. Why it is important? Please explain
3. Has public participation practice progressed since 1960s?
   - Not at all progressed
   - Slightly progressed
   - Moderately progressed
   - Very progressed
   - Completely progressed
4. Based on your knowledge and experience how would you describe the level of public participation today (IAP2, 2007)?
   - Inform (to provide public with information about the decisions)
   - Consult (to obtain public feedback on decisions)
   - Involve (to work directly with the public throughout the process)
   - Collaborate (to partner with the public about each aspect of the decision)
   - Empower (to place final decision-making in hands of the public)
5. In your opinion what forces affect the delay in the progress of public participation?
   - The complication of the theory, and the lack of the agreement about the term public participation
   - The unwillingness of the power holders to share the power with residents
   - The lack of sufficient funds for conducting the public participation process
   - The practitioners unawareness of benefits that participants can bring to the process
   - The difficulties with putting theories of public participation into practice?
   - Other. Please specify.
6. Please rank the approaches and theories that in your opinion should be used in the practice of public participation?
   - Alternative Dispute Resolution (processes and techniques that act as a means for disagreeing parties to come to an agreement short of litigation)
   - Mutual Gain Negotiation (the process where each party is tried to gain some advantage at the end of the process)

- Social Innovation (the process, initiative, or strategy that aimed to bring changes in the regular decision-making)
- Deliberative public engagement (the form of engagement in that it is about giving participants time to consider and discuss an issue in depth before they come to a considered view)

7. Has current planning practice kept pace with recent theoretical advances in planning/participation theory?
   Yes.
   No. Please explain why.
8. Is it possible to close the gap between theory and the practice?
   - It is impossible to overtake the theory
   - Theory always has to be further in progress
   - Collaborative approach needed in order to solve this problem
   - Very little chance to do it
   - There is no need to close it
9. What actions would you suggest to take to foster the progress of public participation practice?

Appendix B Interview Questions

1. How would you define the term public participation?

2. Does your department regularly conduct public participation?

3. In your opinion, what are the main public participation problems in the planning area?

4. What are the key trends in public participation practice and theory?

5. Are public participation efforts successful in Waterloo region?

6. What are the most important skills that today's practitioner should have working with the public?

7. Could you name some examples of the successful public participation processes? What were the criteria of the process? What were the outcomes?

8. How has pubic participation process changed during the last 30-40 years? What forces affect these changes?

Appendix C Information Consent Letter for Interview

Date

Dear *(insert participant's name):*

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree thesis research in the School of Planning, Faculty of Environment at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Mark Seasons. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Over the years, public participation has played a significant role in our society, and public participation theory has advanced rapidly over the years. However, in practice, public engagement in local decision-making seems to lag somewhat behind the theory. Political, economical, social, and environmental forces seem to challenge the transition from theory to practice. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the gap between the theory and practice of public participation, and examine how to close this gap. Waterloo Region is my case study. The key informants for this research are city planners, members of NGOs, and local authorities who are active practitioners in the Waterloo Region, and experienced in public participation.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 20-25 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising me. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for 1 year in a locked office in my supervisor's lab. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by email at gmiroshn@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Mark Seasons at (519) 888-4567 ext. 35922 or email mark.seasons@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, the

Director, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or
maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me by email at
gmiroshn@uwaterloo.ca.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your
assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

 Galina Miroshnikova

CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the
investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

_____

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being
conducted by Galina Miroshnikova of the School of Planning at the University of
Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive
satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted. I am aware that
I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate
recording of my responses.   I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be
included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the
understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.   I was informed that I may
withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.   This
project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of
Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. I was informed that if I have any comments or
concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office
of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this
study.

YES   NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

 YES   NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

 YES   NO

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

 Date: _____