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Disagreement and Consensus: The Need for Dynamic Updating in Public Deliberation

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Abstract

This analysis compares a consensus-oriented procedure, Princeton Future, with a more adversarial procedure, the public meetings of the Princeton, N.J. borough council, organized as public hearings. It finds that the consensus-oriented procedure failed to pick up significant conflicting interests among the citizens and as a consequence failed to provide venues for discussing and possibly negotiating those interests. It advises that deliberative democratic procedures provide for dynamic updating on the underlying and changing interest structure before and during deliberation, with particular attention to the important lines of conflict. Thus facilitators should help participants in deliberation not only forge common interests but also clarify their conflicting interests.

Keywords

Acknowledgements

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Christopher F. Karpowitz and Jane Mansbridge

"There is community consensus."[1] The leaders of Princeton Future, a community group that advocated a deliberative approach to town planning in Princeton, New Jersey, made this claim explicitly at least twice and implied it many more times. One muggy August night in 2002, citizens who had packed into every corner of a borough council meeting room for several hours to vent their frustrations at the outcome and the process heard Princeton Future's advocates at the end sum up the new model of public participation they had offered: "All have been invited to participate. You have been invited to workshops and community meetings. You have been asked questions, and we have listened. Listening has been turned into design." Another speaker hailed both the process and the result as a "remarkable and unusual achievement" that had resulted in communitywide agreement.[2]

But if Princeton Future's participatory model was so successful, why was the public talk at the borough council meeting so contentious? At this and later meetings, the frustration with both the deliberative process and the outcomes that had emerged from it reflects the failure of that process to confront and incorporate potential conflicts. As one citizen put it, "Princeton Future did not allow for real give-and-take."[3]

In this article we look at two specific meeting procedures that are designed to produce deliberation, one the consensus-oriented procedure of Princeton Future and the other the more adversarial procedure of public meetings. We use the contrast between these two forms to raise an issue relevant to all forms of deliberation, that is, the importance of an open-minded ongoing search for the current and potentially changing values and interests of all members of the deliberation: a process we call *dynamic updating*.

We contend that participants in productive deliberation should continually and consciously update their understandings of common and conflicting interests as the process evolves. In particular, because deliberative norms tend toward consensus, participants in consensually-oriented forums must try to alert themselves to possible enduring conflicts in interest and deeply held opinion. Consensual norms correctly encourage participants to forge common interests when this is genuinely possible—when they can create new value by expanding the pie or when they can reach a higher goal by transforming their own interests and identities in ways that they will later approve. Yet participants also need to try to discover and probe one another's interests as they appear at any given time. In addition to being an important ingredient in creating more enlightened self-understandings (for example, by allowing parties to see that they really wanted A rather than B), the intensive unpacking involved in the discovery process also aims to minimize obfuscation and manipulation. Too great an emphasis on forging common interests generates unrealistic expectations and obfuscates real conflict. Too great an emphasis on discovering existing interests suggests that interests are fixed, static, waiting to be found. Deliberative groups thus need to engage in a dynamic process of updating in which facilitators probe for possible conflicts as well as possible forms of cooperation and participants feel comfortable in exploring conflicts as well as in building bonds of solidarity, creating shared value, and finding unexpected points of congruence.

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In short, we argue for an interactive process of forging and discovery, with continuing attention to the evolution of conflicting as well as common interests within the deliberative process itself. Failures in such attention, we argue, produced in the Princeton case a backlash against the deliberative process itself. Those failures were illuminated by the presence of an alternative format for deliberation—the relatively adversarial format of public hearings in a series of open borough council meetings. The larger question is the degree to which deeply opposed conflicts in interest, when discovered, can be handled within the deliberative process itself—for example, by building into that process elements of negotiation —or instead remanded to an explicitly "adversary" process, such as a majority vote or, as in the Princeton case, a mixture of public hearings and decisions by representatives subject to reelection.

Downtown Development in Princeton

Deliberative reform in Princeton was born out of frustration with adversarial politics. The local political system, somewhat unusually, includes two distinct political entities—the geographically larger and more suburban *township* and the more densely populated business district and neighborhoods of the *borough*, which is located wholly inside the township borders. Although borough and township maintain separate local governments, the two entities are similar in population and demographic characteristics,[4] both being much better educated, far wealthier, and with a larger proportion of White residents than the state of New Jersey as a whole.[5]

The residents of the borough generally oppose political merger with the township. Yet the two Princetons do cooperate through a regional school board, a regional planning board that includes both borough and township residents, and a single community library. It was the library board's decision to erect a new, larger facility that marked the beginning of community efforts to consider new development downtown, in the borough. After some consideration of alternate sites, the library board secured an agreement between the borough and the township to build a new building in the same location as the old one, near the center of the borough. As part of that agreement, the borough assured the township, which pays the larger share of the tax revenues that support the library, that it would provide "adequate, affordable, and accessible" parking for township residents who wished to drive to the new facility.[6] In addition, the local arts council was planning an expansion that would also require more downtown parking. With library plans in place, borough council members, at the urging of the mayor, began exploring parking alternatives and hired a parking consultant. Because the borough already owned the land surrounding the new library, proposed parking solutions centered on that area. Among the possible parking solutions were plans for a downtown garage.

Princeton Future's Consensus-Oriented Deliberation

With a new library and parking options on the table, some prominent community members—among them a former university president, a former dean of the School of Architecture, and the head of the local Democratic Party—believed that the community ought to think more broadly about its future and its development plans. Envisioning themselves as a new and progressive solution to the shortcomings of local government, these citizens insisted that the adversarial traditions of existing political institutions would hamper effective community planning and that citizens had to be more directly involved in the planning process. Absent new opportunities for civic involvement, they predicted, the borough, the township, and the university

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would not be able to come to agreement about an effective downtown plan. Citing their desire to "help representative democracy" by adding a more "constructive" element of public participation, these leaders founded a new citizens' group called Princeton Future.[7] This extraordinarily well-funded effort was launched with a dramatic three-page newspaper spread that invited all citizens to take part in a collaborative effort to engage in dialogue about their community and its possibilities.[8]

In an open letter that was part of their initial announcement, Princeton Future made it clear that deliberative efforts would be an integral aspect of its approach: "We hope to move forward together with a view toward integrated solutions. We hope to avoid the piecemeal, project-by-project approach which can lead to community frustrations of all sorts, aesthetic dissatisfaction and inequity. *Can we listen carefully to our neighbors? Can we have a respectful dialogue across boundaries that remain fluid long enough for our disagreements to emerge into the sunlight of a covenant of single purpose?*"[9]

Princeton Future had the same deliberative aims that animate many current experiments in dialogue and deliberation. Deliberation, in this case, was meant to generate consensus that would guide practical decisions about development: "We began to see that the key would be listening to people in small groups. . . . We had to have a process for generating a social vision to inform and direct planning."[10] This process was designed to avoid conflict and to achieve a measure of social harmony: "Our intent is to be cooperative and supportive, not confrontational and preachy. . . . We believe a plan for the future of Princeton's Downtown should seek consensus."[11] The planners hoped that deliberation would yield practical policy suggestions and educate citizens, making them better decision makers.[12]

Beginning in November 2000, Princeton Future held a series of thirty-four small group discussions in local homes and churches. These opportunities for public talk were led by neighborhood coordinators who were trained to lead group sessions, and a careful procedure for recording and categorizing citizens' comments was used at each meeting.[13] The neighborhood meetings focused on developing a "social vision" for Princeton through group discussion. In practice, this meant that moderators instigated discussion with questions about "what citizens liked" about Princeton and "what they would like to improve." In an effort to reach out to minorities, who had often borne the brunt of past attempts at urban renewal, a special series of four meetings, all moderated by black facilitators, was held in a neighborhood historically populated by African Americans. At the conclusion of the series of neighborhood meetings, Princeton Future entered into an agreement with the borough to provide development plans for the block around the new library. Leaders of Princeton Future hired a consulting firm to develop a plan based on citizens' comments.

The plan that Princeton Future drew up on this basis promised a large public square, new walkways connecting the square with other parts of the downtown area, expanded parking in a garage that would include a large underground level and no more than three levels above ground, a downtown food market, and a small number of additional apartments. During the early summer of 2001, Princeton Future sponsored additional public meetings to allow citizens to review and comment on the plans that had been developed. This second round of meetings was also publicized widely, with large newspaper advertisements and thousands of postcards inviting local residents to participate. In July 2001, the borough council voted 4–2 to adopt the Princeton Future plan as a general guideline for development around the new library. Of the two council members in opposition, one said that the plan needed more work, particularly in traffic analysis,

and the other, while praising the Princeton Future process, stated that the town should pursue alternative parking solutions.[14]

Throughout the deliberative process and the planning process, Princeton Future's steering committee recognized that diverse interests were present in Princeton.[15] The group's founding insight was, after all, that the interests of the borough, the township, and the university could not be brought together without new, deliberative institutions. In addition, minutes from meetings of the group's leaders show considerable attention to the need to reconcile "social" and "public" interests (defined as social integration and aesthetic improvement) with economic interests, such as the borough's desire to maintain revenue and the developer's need to make a profit. Listening carefully to previously ignored minority groups (especially African Americans and Hispanics from neighborhoods bordering the downtown) would be an important step in articulating this public interest. Princeton Future thus envisioned its deliberative forums as a way to pursue common public goals and resist a planning process that might otherwise be dominated by narrow, private interests. And in fact, many residents did seem to agree that a large public space, affordable markets, additional walkways, and even a small number of additional apartments around the new library would be a valuable improvement over the small parking lot that fronted the old library. In that sense, Princeton Future's claim of consensus was real.

But in its attempts to forge a consensual public interest, Princeton Future failed to engage important conflicts among the various segments of the community. When we analyze the structure of interests, much seems to hang on parking and taxes. The township residents, all of whom had to drive to the new library and all of the other facilities downtown, wanted more parking. Some borough residents, especially those who lived close to the proposed development, resisted the increased traffic that might accompany more downtown parking.[16] Others were deeply suspicious of the university's involvement, believing that its interests were primarily in avoiding payments in lieu of taxes and getting the town to pay for parking for people who came to visit the university. The borough, in turn, wanted to create the parking it had promised in exchange for the new library with as little cost as possible, so as not to increase borough taxes. But the borough council had also promised that in any eventual parking garage, fees would be no higher than those of the parking meters on the street. The downtown merchants were conflicted, wanting more on-street parking (which was not a possibility), not being fully convinced that people would drive to a garage to shop downtown when they could drive to any of the malls surrounding Princeton, and worrying that the little street parking that they had would be made unavailable during the construction of any new development. The developer, finally, simply needed to make a profit.

The facilitators of Princeton Future did not, however, treat the trade-offs among these conflicting goals as hard choices in which some citizens wanted outcomes that others deeply opposed.[17] Nor did they structure the deliberations as negotiating sessions between those who favored more parking and those who opposed raising taxes.[18] This meant that just underneath the surface of Princeton Future's "consensus" lay a host of unresolved, still churning tensions. Instead of being confronted by citizens directly, the hard trade-offs were made later, often privately, by consultants and the Princeton Future steering committee.

After approving Princeton Future's General Development Plan, the borough council entered into negotiations to hire a developer to work out the specifics of the downtown construction projects. In June 2002, the developer unveiled his proposal, which bore some resemblance to the Princeton Future plan but included a much smaller public plaza, a much larger parking garage, and many more apartments than Princeton Future had recommended.[19]

In response, Princeton Future held a public meeting at which its leaders emphasized the need for "common agreement" about downtown development and highlighted the differences between their proposal and the developer's. Princeton Future's leaders took on the role of advocates for the public interest that they believed they had identified in their deliberative endeavors.

In light of concerns expressed at this meeting and additional negotiations with leaders of Princeton Future, the developer modified his plans, slightly decreasing the size of the garage and increasing the size of the plaza, in addition to making other small changes.[20] From this point on, leaders of Princeton Future publicly supported the developer's proposal, claiming that the community needed to support its elected representatives and that the plan included much of what the citizens who had participated in Princeton Future had hoped to achieve.

The opposition that Princeton Future had not fully recognized emerged when citizens organized petition drives against the plan, wrote letters to the editors of local newspapers, founded community groups, and even picketed outside the borough hall. Content analysis of a local newspaper's letters to the editor reveals consistent opposition to the downtown development plan.[21] A survey conducted by Princeton's Survey Research Center and Christopher Karpowitz found that just over half of the registered voters who had heard of Princeton Future's recommendations either "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with these recommendations.[22]

Borough Council Meetings as Public Hearings

Beginning in August 2002, formal public discussion about development in downtown Princeton shifted to a series of borough council meetings, the last of which was held in January 2003.[23] These meetings served as an important supplement to the deliberative process because they gave formal public voice to opposition that had not fully emerged in the earlier consensus-oriented process.

The borough meetings were organized as public hearings, offering citizens an opportunity to comment publicly about the developer's proposal and the process that led to it. These sessions were generally very well attended, with more than one hundred residents filling the council chambers to overflowing on several occasions. Typically, the mayor allowed several hours for community comment at a time, followed by a few responses from council members. Given that format, talk at the borough council consisted largely of testimony—with citizens standing at the microphone and addressing their elected officials—rather than extended dialogue, although some exchanges between council members and citizens did occur.[24] Speakers frequently expressed great emotion in their speeches. The citizens in opposition became particularly emotional as they tried to break through what they correctly perceived was an existing decision against them. More than once, council members responded with astonishment at the level of interest and passion that the downtown development had evoked.

Speakers at the council meetings addressed both the outcome and the process. Opponents demanded a referendum, one claiming that "Voices of opposition were shouted down at Princeton Future. Opponents have been minimized at every step!" Another, waving her child's fourth-grade civics text, insisted, "We have a right to vote! Princeton Future did not allow for a real give-and-take! Why won't you let the people vote?" Some speakers responded that the Princeton Future deliberative process had been a new, more inclusive, and productive form of referendum and an example to which other towns should look. But the clear majority of citizens present expressed some form of opposition to either the process or the development plan. The

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Princeton Future process seemed to have produced not consensus but a backlash of anger and frustration.[25]

In contrast to the Princeton Future neighborhood meetings, questions of interests and the difficult trade-offs between them were front and center at the borough council meetings. Hard choices had to be made. Yet at the conclusion of the hearings, despite the many voices in opposition, the borough council voted 5–1 to approve the developer's proposal and move ahead with funding the construction. Indeed, the single council member who had changed his vote from opposition to approval provocatively said that he was voting for the plan because he thought it was the right thing to do, despite his belief that the plan would fail overwhelmingly in a referendum. He argued that a referendum would not give the true opinion of an informed public and that the council members were the best informed on these issues because most citizens did not take the time to understand the various aspects of the plan.[26]

Comparing the Two Venues for Public Discussion

Citizens in Princeton thus had an opportunity to discuss downtown development in two distinct contexts—one more unitary in its approach, the other falling closer to the adversary end of the spectrum (see Figure 17.1).[27] Both settings were deliberative in the minimal sense that they represented an opportunity for citizens to give public reasons for their opinions and to hear the opinions of others. Neither setting allowed ordinary citizens final authority, although the public hearings came closer in that the participants were directly trying to influence the ultimate decision makers, whom they could reject at the next election.

Figure 1 about here

Many differences between the two discursive settings reflect their positioning on the unitary-adversary spectrum shown in Figure 1. The design of the Princeton Future meetings reflected the planners' beliefs that communitywide agreement could be attained through group discussion focused on common interests.[28] The Princeton Future meetings were often held in the homes of participants, thereby invoking norms of friendship and neighborliness.[29] The fact that the meetings did not have to come to a binding decision also allowed the groups to avoid facing important conflicts.[30]

Borough council meetings, by contrast, were more adversarial affairs. In these meetings, citizens did not typically engage in dialogue with one another or with their elected representatives. Instead, they stood up and gave testimony, explaining their reasons for supporting or opposing the development, often with reference to their specific interests in the project as business owners, library patrons, property owners, or neighbors directly affected by the development. Council members rarely tried to forge some sort of agreement out of these various perspectives; they simply responded with their own reasons for supporting or opposing the project.

Avoiding Premature Consensus Through Dynamic Updating

Deliberative programs such Princeton Future often seek to challenge "politics as usual," which is taken to be an adversarial process in which self-interested individuals compete over who will get what when, and how. There may be less agreement, however, about what the

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alternative mode of politics should look like. For some, including Princeton Future, the goal is to discover or forge a shared common interest—a full public consensus. For others, common interest is only discovered or created through political struggle, and even then, it remains contested as well as shared.[31]

The more unitary democratic vision can sometimes be achieved through deliberation. In some contexts, win-win agreements are discovered when the parties to a negotiation find innovative ways through which both can get what they want at less cost to the others than they had originally expected.[32] In other contexts, misunderstandings can be cleared up and genuinely common interests uncovered.[33] Deliberation can also yield respect and solidarity that enables parties to surmount previously existing differences and create partially new identities for themselves that encompass more compatible interests.

In still other contexts, such as this Princeton case, the costs of attempting to forge a substantive common interest are higher. In contexts that verge on unalterably zero-sum situations, the costs of trying to create consensus include not only time and the likelihood of emotional wear and tear but also the great danger of forced consensus or pseudoconsensus.[34] Participants in deliberative settings aimed at consensus often complain that their objections are overlooked in the group's eagerness to settle the situation. This was certainly the case in Princeton, where opposition groups complained loudly that they had not been heard during the Princeton Future neighborhood meetings. One solution to this problem is dynamic updating: training the group to engage in an ongoing, or at least regularized, process of discovery, in which members of the group try to analyze the state of current and potential interests as they see them at each stage of the deliberation.

The failure to gauge accurately the degree of potential common and conflicting interests at the beginning of the deliberative process in Princeton produced an expectation of forging consensus that eventually proved false, and that flawed expectation in turn created a process that eventually fueled considerable anger and opposition to the final plan. The eventual anger and opposition of many participants may not in fact have been greater than would have occurred in the absence of the deliberative process, but many who opposed the eventual outcome certainly blamed the deliberative process and advocated other less deliberative decision-making processes, such as referenda. Thus, even if Princeton Future's flawed deliberation did not make the city's problems any worse, it did damage the good name and reputation of deliberation itself, making it harder for future administrations and civic organizations to deploy the deliberative model when the setting *is* right for this mode of public talk.[35]

The failure to facilitate the emergence of conflict in the course of the deliberation compounded the problem. Usually participants will not be able to gauge accurately the degree of potential common and conflicting interests at the beginning of a deliberative process, precisely because identities change, alliances are created and dissolved, and new information emerges in that process. Conflicts may lie submerged through the greater power of some participants to set the agenda,[36] the fear among some participants of the interpersonal costs of raising a conflictual issue,[37] or both. In this case as in many, an elite group set the agenda for the deliberation, expecting a process of "education" that would, over time, naturally tend toward consensus.

In such situations, facilitators and members of any group must try particularly hard to find ways to ensure steady and realistic updating of participants' understandings of one another's values and interests. Too much emphasis on the creation of shared values and solidarity can make it difficult to tease out underlying conflicts in the course of a deliberation. Of course, one cannot know in advance whether a group will move toward consensus or reveal deeper

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difference, but facilitators can deploy procedures and language that keep the group open to either possibility.

One example might be the discussion process taught by the National Issues Forums (NIF) Institute. In the NIF model, it is helpful to seek common ground, but "common ground is neither consensus nor agreement that everyone wants the same thing. . . . As a practical matter, it is necessary to identify enough common ground to move ahead. . . . Through deliberation, . . . participants begin to identify which actions and consequences most people are prepared to live with over the long haul." This sober conception of common ground recognizes the need for joint action but does not overemphasize either the potential for conflict or the potential for commonality. NIF moderators place such emphasis on hard choices that this phrase is the title of one of their most widely circulated pamphlets.[38]

Reflections: The Dream of Unity

The dream of unity dies hard. In 1990, James Morone concluded that "at the heart of American democracy" lies a yearning for a direct, communal politics. The "democratic wish" that Morone found in American history involves a celebration of direct citizen participation that will transform "private into public," "conflict into cooperation," and "bondage into citizenship," culminating in communitywide agreement that will overcome "adversary self-interest." It is a vision of "a single, united people, bound together by a consensus over the public good which is discerned through direct citizen participation in community settings."[39] In *Beyond Adversary Democracy,* Mansbridge agreed: "As a people, we in America are starved for unitary democracy,"[40] meaning a direct, consensus-oriented democracy, aimed at the common good. "Unitary institutions," she argued, "[fill] human needs that adversary institutions cannot."[41]

Moreover, Americans—although perhaps no more than any other group—dislike conflict. In the small town meeting in Vermont that Mansbridge describes, one young farmer told her, "I kinda dread going, because I know when I come home I'm going to have the worst headache I ever had, a splitting headache." Another said he stopped going because he was afraid for his heart. Many townspeople did not go to the meeting, and when you ask them why, said one woman, "they'll say, `Too damn many arguments!'" The townspeople often described the meeting as "this bickering back and forth," "petty quarrels," a "nasty argument," or a "big fight." As one woman put it, "I just don't like disagreeable situations."[42] John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse have shown more broadly that some citizens, fearing conflict, do not react well when forced to confront the messy disagreements that are an integral part of democratic processes.[43]
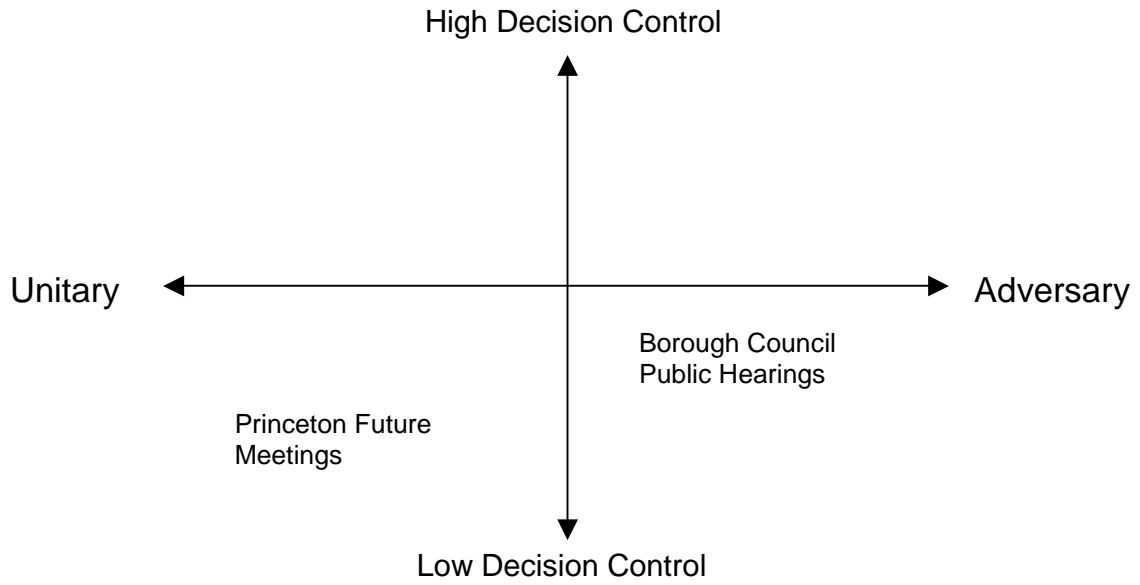
Unless conflict is structured into the deliberation, therefore, a deliberative group may well try to avoid difficult trade-offs altogether, preferring to find a consensus on easily available common ground. The Princeton Future deliberation fell into this trap. In deliberation, it is certainly possible to clarify conflict at the same time that one forges common understandings and even common interests. The unsettled question is the degree to which actual negotiations on conflicting interests can be structured into deliberations without undermining pursuit of the common good.[44]

If negotiation cannot be integrated into deliberation, another strategy is to combine relatively unitary with relatively adversary forms of public talk. In the Princeton case, despite the fact that opponents were still not satisfied with the borough council's decision, the more

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adversarial public hearing at least allowed conflicts to emerge that had been submerged in the deliberative process. It also allowed more instances of testimony.

Those who designed Princeton Future simply did not think through the potential conflicts. If the Princeton Future deliberations had been willing to engage these issues explicitly—both in the planning process and within the deliberation through a dynamic process of updating the participants' understandings of their interests—the deliberative process itself might have been able to encompass and facilitate a mutually attentive exploration of those interests. As it was, however, a relatively static approach, not geared to helping all citizens understand and negotiate their various conflicts, produced what must be considered in hindsight a failed deliberative process. In the end, it was the adversarial public hearings that gave many citizens their real voice.

Figure 1
The Deliberative Grid

High Decision Control

Unitary ⟵———————————⟶ Adversary

Borough Council
Public Hearings

Princeton Future
Meetings

Low Decision Control

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Endnotes

[1] Sheldon Sturges, Princeton Borough Council meeting, Aug. 13, 2002.

[2] Michael Mosteller and Sheldon Sturges, Princeton Borough Council Meeting, Aug. 13, 2002. At that same meeting, another speaker said he was "pleased with the process and the results. I don't know how the process could have gone otherwise." Supporters of Princeton Future regularly expressed such sentiments. As one woman put it during another council meeting, "Princeton Future allowed us to address the problems we share in a new way. . . . Public ideas were incorporated into the process" (Dec. 3, 2003).

[3] Dorothy Koehn, Princeton Borough Council meeting, Dec. 10, 2002.

[4] According to the 2000 census, the borough includes about 16,000 residents and the township approximately 14,000. Nearly 80 percent of the residents of both the borough and the township are white, with smaller communities of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians, each of which make up an additional 5 to 10 percent of the population.

[5] More than three-quarters of township residents over twenty-five years of age have at least a college education, and almost 50 percent have earned a graduate or professional degree. The median household income in the township is nearly $100,000. Borough residents could also be described as extraordinarily well–educated; nearly 60 percent of borough residents have completed college, and just under 40 percent hold graduate degrees. The median household income in the borough is just over $67,000 per year—only two-thirds that of the township but still more than the $55,000 median figure for the entire state. While the community studied here is clearly unique, those differences allow us to conduct a kind of ideal test of deliberation in action. If there are troubles here, among articulate individuals who understand the issues and have the resources to devote time to talking about them, then we can expect even more difficulties in communities that do not share the advantages of Princeton. If, on the other hand, the Princeton case reveals successes, then perhaps it can serve as a positive example of successful reform under relatively ideal conditions.

[6] The question of what, exactly, "adequate" or "affordable" parking meant became a subject of political debate, although the borough council and library board eventually settled on the idea that it would mean at least eighty-five spaces for library patrons at rates no higher than those paid at parking meters on the street.

[7] Robert Geddes, speech at Communiversity event, Princeton, New Jersey, Apr. 27, 2002.

[8] In the first few months of its existence, Princeton Future attracted nearly a quarter million dollars in funding. The university contributed significantly, as did area corporations, including Robert Wood Johnson.

[9] Robert Geddes, Robert F. Goheen, Sheldon Sturges, "Open Letter to the Community," *Town Topics,* Sept. 13, 2000:.36 (emphasis in original).

[10] *Princeton Future Annual Report 2002* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Future, February 2002) 3.

[11] Geddes, Goheen, and Sturges (2000).

[12] Capuzzo, "Hot Under the Buttoned-Down Collar." *New York Times,* 22 December 2002, NJ1. The issue of "education" raises normative questions. If the idea was to bring those who knew less about architecture and urban design around to the same opinions as the experts, then it is unclear to what extent those experts were open to citizen opinions that opposed the experts' fundamental assumptions. Even the Princeton Future's claims for participatory democracy ("All have been invited to participate. You have been invited to workshops and community meetings. You have been asked questions, and we have listened. Listening has been turned [by us] into design.") underscore the top-down character of the process.

[13] Leaders of Princeton Future asserted that making accurate records of citizens' comments was a critical part of their efforts. If citizens knew that their comments were being recorded in detailed minutes, they would be more likely to feel that Princeton Future thought the comments were important. Larger group meetings that occurred later in the process were videotaped, and detailed transcripts of the conversations were made available for citizens to review.

[14] These mild comments in opposition indicate, as did other features of the process, that although the procedures in the borough council are compatible with adversary democracy, the preferred style of interaction on the council itself is relatively unitary, assuming and searching for a common good, often avoiding overt conflict, and making decisions by consensus whenever possible. As in many towns, there is no sustained party competition in Princeton. All the members of the borough council are Democrats, and no Republican has been elected for quite some time. For these reasons, the borough council could not be counted on to seek out opposition and illuminate conflict. The council's stance as well as the process of Princeton Future led the increasingly frustrated opponents of the plan to claim repeatedly that no one was listening.

[15] The *Princeton Future Annual Report 2002* stressed the group's goal of achieving "economic, physical, and social" diversity and emphasized the need to create "an affordable balance of shops, services, building types, and green spaces appealing to people across the income spectrum" in Princeton.

[16] These residents expressed two related concerns: a garage would bring increased traffic, and it would make it possible for Princeton to grow, becoming less a small town and more like other, larger central business districts in New Jersey, many of which included large parking garages. The concerns were thus practical (the annoyance of more traffic) and powerfully symbolic (the end of a vision of Princeton as a small academic village).

[17] Princeton Future did sponsor sessions in which citizens were asked to respond to various aesthetic trade-offs in the design of buildings and open spaces, but larger trade-offs between various interests were not considered.

[18] This was especially problematic, given the deep suspicion that some had toward the university and its interests. Had the question of interests been considered openly, citizens could have voiced their concerns with one another and with representatives of the university in a setting that was less confrontational than the borough council. Instead, these suspicions and resentments remained submerged in the quest to find consensus.

[19] During this time, Princeton Future frequently expressed concern that the negotiations between the borough and the developer were occurring in private, behind closed doors. Princeton Future consistently advocated for an open, public process and attributed any public discontent to the borough's unwillingness negotiate openly with the developer.

[20] The high water table under the planned public square made it extremely expensive to put more parking underground, as Princeton Future plans called for. This was a critical development, given the controversy that the size of the garage eventually created.

[21] Despite the fact that the editors of the newspaper strongly supported the downtown development, approximately 62 percent of letters published between June and December 2002 expressed some form of opposition.

[22] Princeton Community Survey, August-November, 2003 (full data available from Christopher F. Karpowitz). The survey was sent by mail to a random sample of borough and township registered voters as well as an oversample of those who were more intensely involved in Princeton Future events or who attended borough council meetings. A total of 723 respondents returned the survey, which represents a response rate of 45 percent. Among the respondents who attended Princeton Future meetings and responded to the question about the Princeton Future plans, 48 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the Princeton Future recommendations, while 49 percent agreed or strongly agreed and 3 percent said they did not know. Among the respondents who did *not* attend Princeton Future meetings, 57 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the PF plans, 27 percent agreed or strongly agreed, and 16 percent said they did not know.

[23] The borough council continues to hold meetings at which the downtown development is discussed, but the last meeting before the council's approval of the developer's plans occurred in early 2003. In addition, some discussions occurred in front of the regional planning board, but those were less publicized and less well attended than the borough council meetings.

[24] Lynn Sanders (1997) urges testimony as an alternative to deliberation, pointing out that the formal reasoning processes that some deliberative theorists advocate may disadvantage individuals who would be more comfortable with simply stating the situation and how they see it affecting them.

[25] Christopher F. Karpowitz, notes from Princeton Borough Council meeting, Dec. 10, 2002. At earlier meetings, speakers had said that the "mechanism" for public input had been "faulty" (Princeton Borough Council meeting, Nov. 12, 2002), and, commenting on both the Princeton Future and the borough council processes, "We've been trying to participate in this process without being heard. . . . What kind of town center will this be if it brings such divisiveness in its

infancy? A true consensus needs to emerge" (Princeton Borough Council meeting, Dec. 3, 2002). Karpowitz attended every borough council meeting on the downtown development between September 2002 and January 2003, taking extensive notes on the speakers and other aspects of the process. The quotations in this paragraph are from his notes.

[26] Indeed, in one of Princeton Future meetings, one citizen participant specifically commented, "I would caution against a referendum. You will have a vote. You will have politicking. Issues get squeezed, passionate and slanted. Someone wins and someone loses. This [Princeton Future] is a wonderful way to decide what the future of this community will be. If people want to come, they know their voices will be heard. This is the best possible way to find out what we want and how we get there" (Princeton Future minutes, Zone One Open Community Meeting, June 19, 2002, in Princeton Future 2003).

[27] See Mansbridge ([1980] 1983) for a full discussion of the distinctions between unitary and adversary democracy. Unitary democracy, which looks back to a distinguished intellectual tradition that includes Rousseau and the political "friendship" of classic Athens, depends on the presence of a common interest that unifies the group and on equal respect among citizens. Identification with the group as a whole allows citizens to make decisions by consensus, as friends. Deliberation is a key element of its politics: "The unitary process of making decisions consists not in the weighing of votes but in the give and take of discussion in a face-to-face setting" (p. 5). The identifying characteristics of unitary democracy thus include equal respect, face-to-face contact, common interests, and consensus.

Adversary democracy, by contrast, takes the conflict of interests as its starting point. Its intellectual heritage includes Hobbes, Locke, Adam Smith, and Madison, all of whom recognized conflict as a central element of political life. For the adversary democrat, egalitarianism is less about equal respect or friendship than about protecting the differing, often clashing interests competing within the political society through the mechanism of the equal vote.

Work on agonistic democracy has stressed the compatibility of enduring and fundamental conflict with deliberation. Yet some theorists consider the democratic exercise of power illegitimate even at the end of a deliberation: see Arendt ([1963] l965), Cohen(1989), Habermas, J.([1976] 1985), Wolin (1960), and for comment, Mansbridge (1995).

[28] The Princeton Community Survey confirms that citizens perceived important (and statistically significant) distinctions between the two discursive settings. Respondents were asked, for example, to share their impressions of how important various meeting goals were at the gatherings they attended, ranking each goal on a scale from 0 ("not important at all") to 10 ("very important"). Goals included "teaching people about community development in a neutral, factual way," "allowing people to air differences of opinion and discuss different points of view," "helping people come to agreement about community development," and "persuading people to support a specific approach to community development." Both supporters and opponents of downtown development were far more likely to see education and helping people come to agreement as comparatively more important goals for Princeton Future than for the borough council. Conversely, borough council meetings were more likely to been seen as places where persuading people to support a specific approach to development was an important goal. That difference makes some intuitive sense, because the purpose of borough council meetings

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was to debate the merits of a specific community plan that was already on the table, whereas most (though not all) of the Princeton Future meetings were dedicated to finding agreement about principles that would guide the creation of a plan.

[29] Some of the larger Princeton Future meetings were held in the borough council chambers, in local churches, or at the university, however.

[30] A *contemplative* group, which simply advises, gives an opinion, or discusses, not making a binding decision, will usually, all things equal, produce far less bitter conflicts and, accordingly, far less fear of conflict than an *active* group, which makes a binding decision. Many deliberative forums, such as deliberative polls, AmericaSpeaks, the National Issues Forum, and the group we analyze here, Princeton Future, are such contemplative groups. In an active group, the stakes are higher and thus the sense of urgency is greater. When a friend takes an opposing position, the conviction that one has been betrayed is far greater when one will have to live with the results of the decision for most of one's life.

[31] Pitkin and Shumer (1982) and Barber (1984) both maintained what we consider an agonistic side to their understandings of deliberation.

[32] Follett ([1925] l942), Fisher and Ury ([1981] 1983).

[33] Even in the Princeton Future case, it is clear that the citizens who attended Princeton Future meetings learned something about downtown design and possible plans, even if they vehemently disagreed. Those who attended the meetings were, for example, far more likely to have an opinion about downtown development than those who did not.

[34] In the case of the Princeton backlash, failures to check for conflicting interests both initially and throughout the democratic procedure undermined participants' attempts to create a process that, in the words of one of the process entrepreneurs, would "make democracy work better by making it more participatory." Robert Geddes, public speech at Communiversity event, Princeton, New Jersey, Apr. 27, 2002. Mansbridge (2002) enumerates the major costs and benefits of consensus.

[35] In fact, Princeton Future's subsequent efforts to promote public participation seem to reflect this recognition. In the case of conflict involving the local arts council, which wanted to expand its building into an historically black neighborhood wary of losing any more ground to development, Princeton Future organized a series of small-group negotiating sessions between members of the arts council, neighbors, and other community residents. This group, moderated by former attorney general Nicholas Katzenbach, attempted precisely the kinds of negotiating between interests that we recommend here. In addition, other recent Princeton Future events have included sessions in which special care was taken to ensure that all interests were represented and guaranteed time to articulate their perspectives.

[36] Bachrach and Baratz (1963), Crenson (1971), Lukes (1974), Gaventa (1980).

[37] On the fear of conflict, see Rosenberg (1954-1955), Mansbridge (1983), Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002).

[38] McAfee, McKenzie and Mathews (1990).

[39] Morone (1990), 5-7.

[40] Mansbridge (1983), 301.

[41] Mansbridge (1983), 4.

[42] Mansbridge (1983), 60-65.

[43] Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, 2002).

[44] Introducing discussion of conflict into contemplative groups might produce precisely the sort of negative reactions and avoidance catalogued by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002). The larger political process should also include opportunities for "forging conflict," that is, for individuals on similar sides of a conflict to create alliances, forge common interests among themselves, and develop common understandings of their adversaries – all processes that inevitably involve some form of deliberation. Investigating the empirical dynamics of forging conflict and analyzing the appropriate relation of this process to the full panoply of deliberative norms is a matter for later study.

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