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Framing and power in public deliberation with climate change: Critical reflections on the role of deliberative practitioners

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Abstract

Drawing on the experiences of a deliberative practitioner and critical social scientist involved in the planning, production and implementation of a deliberative initiative on climate change, this paper reflects on nuances of framing and power in practical settings. Decisions about framing, some of them more conscious than others, influence the process of opinion formation among participants as well as the outcomes of the deliberation. Framing enacts power through the selection of deliberative approaches, the viewpoints that are admitted into the procedure, the alternatives that are defined, as well as the solutions that are ultimately proposed. Grounded in reflexivity as a methodological approach, the goal of this analysis is to make the democratization of public responses to climate change more reflexive and open to transformative learning at individual and institutional levels.

Keywords

climate change, public deliberation, deliberative practitioners, framing, reflexivity

Acknowledgements

It is a well-known principle among practitioners and researchers alike that whoever controls the frame of an issue in a deliberative setting also shapes the outcomes in important ways. Decisions over framing, some of which are more conscious and deliberate than others, influence the process of opinion formation among participants as well as the outcomes of deliberation. As such, they are important sites of power.

Framing refers to the ways in which information and messages are defined and presented in order to make certain outcomes and not others visible and viable. Frames dictate the perimeters of a problem, the experts chosen to speak in its name, the prescriptions for how the problem should be addressed and the range of solutions open for discussion (Calvert & Warren, 2014; Entman, 1993). Often decisions about framing and their practical and political consequences are not given the attention they warrant.

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the practical choices and challenges faced by deliberative practitioners in negotiating framing and power in public deliberation with climate change. By deliberative practitioners, we mean people involved in the design and facilitation of formal deliberative initiatives. The role played by deliberative practitioners remain for the most part invisible in scholarship on public deliberation, although research is emerging to fill this gap (e.g. Chilvers, 2012; Lee, 2015; Mansbridge et al., 2006; Moore, 2012; Pallet & Chilvers, 2013).

We draw on two cases of participatory experiments that took place in the context of a community – university research alliance called Alberta Climate Dialogue (ABCD). Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, ABCD brought practitioners and scholars of deliberative democracy together with civil society groups, industry and government officials to explore the potential for deliberative approaches for developing effective responses to climate change. This research alliance provided an opportunity for deliberative practitioners and academics to learn from one another throughout the design and implementation of deliberation initiatives.

Exploratory and reflexive in its approach, this article is written from the perspective of two ABCD affiliates, a professional deliberative practitioner and a critical social scientist with a research interest in public engagement with science-based issues. We use our different roles, motivations, intentions and experiences as a productive starting point for combining pragmatic policy orientations with critical insights on environmental and social change. This analysis is particular to our specific circumstances and not meant as a generalization about public

deliberation. The value of such situated and reflexive analysis is that it explores nuances that otherwise might be missed or glossed over in public accounts of deliberative initiatives.

In what follows, we first clarify the methodological approach that informs this inquiry. Next, we examine the relationship between framing and power and the implications for public deliberation with climate change. Following this, we outline two cases in which lay participants were enrolled in formal deliberations about climate change, and discuss the implications of framing for both. To conclude, we reflect on the challenges faced in these initiatives, and propose areas that warrant further attention and development.

Reflexivity in Public Deliberation

Reflexivity is the methodological approach that guides this inquiry. The premise is that researchers and practitioners engage in continuous examination and questioning of the assumptions and commitments that guide inquiry and practice (Chilvers, 2012; Stilgoe et al., 2013; Wynne, 1993). This approach complements procedural evaluation of deliberative initiatives (e.g. Rowe & Frewer 2000, 2005). It is particularly useful in research initiatives that involve people from diverse backgrounds. It provides a mechanism by which differences and internal imbalances of power can be acknowledged and worked through rather than ignored or covered over by premature agreement or false consensus (Nichols, 2009). Reflexivity invites practitioners and researchers to identify and examine the power relations that shape and inform collaborative processes of learning.

Reflexivity occurs at individual and institutional levels. Individual reflexivity refers to the kinds of self-questioning in which most conscientious professional facilitators and researchers engage on a regular basis. Institutional reflexivity takes reflexivity one step further as it involves examining established routines of thought and practice and the social forces that shape them (Wynne, 1993). In practice, such "second order" reflexivity entails "holding a mirror up to one's own activities, commitments and assumptions, being aware of the limits of knowledge and being mindful that a particular framing of an issue may not be universally held" (Stilgoe et al., 2013, p. 1571). Examining how framing influences the process and outcomes of deliberative initiatives is one example of how reflexivity can be realized in practice.

Framing and Power in Public Deliberation

Deliberation is inherently a communicative process and it is through framing that we come to understand, address and respond to political issues (Calvert & Warren, 2014). Ideally, public deliberation offers space and opportunity for people to explore and examine alternative frames of an issue, and to confront each other with rival world-views, competing ideals, and conflicting political commitments. Through principles of inclusiveness and unconstrained dialogue, public deliberation encourages people to understand the judgments of others and in so doing, to reflect on and potentially transform their own assumptions and values.

So defined, public deliberation fits squarely within efforts to open up policy discussions and decisions to a range of perspectives and values that extend beyond the technical reasoning of experts (e.g. Fischer, 2009; Stirling, 2008; Wilsdon & Willis, 2004). Expert deliberation tends to privilege technical reason and draws on judgments based on depersonalized calculation, decontextualized information as well as the generalizability of findings. By contrast, public deliberation emphasizes practical knowledge that is derived from experience, responsive to context, and attentive to the normative, emotional and moral dimensions of an issue (Fischer, 2009, p. 156–158).

A perennial challenge facing formalized public deliberative initiatives is that, in practice, they can reproduce the power relations that infuse society at large (see, for instance, Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Lee, 2015; Mouffe, 2005; Young, 2000). A central concern lies with the ways in which participatory initiatives can tacitly marginalize social perspectives that do not align with mainstream assumptions and practices. As research demonstrates, frames that resonate with and support technical and instrumental reasoning tend to be privileged over other ways of approaching policy issues. As a result, public deliberation can reinforce status quo dynamics and power hierarchies by tacitly marginalizing the perspectives of those who do not support or align with mainstream accounts of the world.

Public issues that require a high degree of technical knowledge, such as those related to environment, health and technology, are particularly susceptible to such exclusionary framing effects (Wynne, 2007). Various researchers have shown how deliberative processes across a range of science-based contexts end up more or less controlled by the organizations promoting them. For instance, in relation to climate change, research has found that top-down decision-making persists even in the context of experimentation with deliberative approaches to public engagement (Blue, 2015a; Phillips, 2012). In part, this results from unexamined

assumptions about environmental management that favor scientific and technical perspectives, position facts and values as separate and prevent deeper questioning of the institutional and individual values that experts bring to the table, including experts of public deliberation.

Deliberative Framing

For Kadlec and Friedman (2007), these aforementioned problems can be attributed as much to design and facilitation choices as to intrinsic flaws with deliberation as a form of political communication. As they emphasize, "anyone who undertakes the difficult work of organizing deliberation is always already answering these questions in one way or another but gauging the consequences of these choices is rarely given the attention it deserves" (2007, p. 9). A style of political communication intended to help people sort through competing arguments and value commitments, deliberative framing acknowledges that competing meanings and values exist in any political discussion, and that diverse frames warrant consideration before public judgments are rendered (Friedman, 2007). Deliberative framing essentially aims to level the playing field, although inequities of power inevitably remain.

One approach to deliberative framing is to assume that power is something that can be shared and distributed. Echoing Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, citizens are deemed to be empowered when they have the capacity to frame issues according to their own interests and values, and to shape debates accordingly. From this view, the solution for problems of framing and power are largely procedural. That is, through appropriate methods and design as well as through myriad choices made during event facilitation, deliberative practitioners can assist participants in voicing and negotiating their perspectives and values and well as learning from the perspectives and values of others.

While Arnstein's ladder of citizen engagement provides an implicit guiding metaphor for many practitioners of public deliberation, Collins and Ison (2009) argue that it is limited when applied to public deliberation with climate change. Rather than assuming, *pace* Arnstein, that citizen empowerment is the end goal of participatory initiatives, Collins and Ison suggest that participation should also encourage collective learning about the issue and the context of power relations at hand. For instance, through the process of participation, participants might discover that institutional frames of climate change draw on narrow interests and values, and that diverse ways of knowing are at stake in addressing environmental challenges.

Rather than assuming that power is something that is shared among experts and citizens, an alternative approach is to situate power in meaning (Dryzek, 2013; Hendricks, 2009). This perspective focuses on social rather than individual dimensions of power. From this view, power operates through knowledge, or more specifically, through the ways in which issues are framed. This approach illustrates how information, facts and arguments are never neutral, but are inherently inflected with social values and power relations. Since power is bound up with knowledge, there is no neutral input into deliberative forums. As a result, people's individual perspectives—experts and citizens alike—are not taken at face value, but are situated within a broader contexts of social power that privilege and support certain frames over others.

Taken together, these approaches to deliberative framing and power highlight that the challenge facing deliberative practitioners is not only to ensure that diverse people are supported by proper design procedures, but also to ensure that a diverse range of issue frames are available for consideration from the outset. This enables marginalized frames to have a hearing so that they are not pushed out of view and silenced by dominant ways of approaching a political issue. When a diverse range of issue frames are taken into consideration, citizens and experts alike are better positioned to be more reflexive and critical of taken for granted ways of understanding the world. This opens up the capacity for mutual learning across social difference (cf. Tully, 2012).

Framing Climate Change for Public Deliberation

As the sense of urgency to address climate change mounts, so do the number of alternative ways of understanding and framing this important issue. Dominant media and policy accounts tend to focus on a limited range of frames of climate change, however, leaving many citizens largely unaware of the diverse range of frames that exist in the public sphere.

Conventionally, climate change is framed as a technical issue that can be measured, understood and ultimately 'solved' by scientific and technological means (Demerrit, 2006). This is the frame most commonly encountered in media accounts, government initiatives, activist campaigns and even public engagement experiments. This story line goes as follows: The climate is primarily a biophysical entity that has been examined by scientists who, by virtue of their professional training, provide objective accounts that in turn offer politically neutral information for policy makers and publics. As represented through the authoritative voice of organizations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the science of climate change is certain and clear:

humans are causing climate change by releasing greenhouse gases—mostly carbon dioxide—into the atmosphere and this is leading to the gradual heating of the planet. By reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases, through technology or market-based mechanisms, we can avoid 'dangerous' climate change from taking place. The reason that these scientific insights and their attendant policy recommendations have not had uptake in policy is largely due to resistance from politicians, lobby groups as well as uninformed or apathetic citizens.

This frame provides a readily recognizable story in which the problem (human-caused climate change) can be attributed to a specific agent (GHG emissions, specifically C02) and warrants particular remedies such as technological or market based approaches as well as the mobilization and education of public constituencies. A popular counter-narrative to this frame is that given by well-funded, highly orchestrated and very vocal climate denier groups. These groups argue that climate variability is natural and is not caused by human actions. The problem, from this perspective, lies with politicized or inaccurate science and is caused by a particular agent (the IPCC, unscrupulous scientists) and warrants particular remedies such as exposing the 'myth' of global warming and retaining status quo practices (Oreskes & Conway, 2009 provide an extended discussion of this framing strategy).

While both frames take considerable airtime in the media, and together result in polarized ways of approaching the issue (between so-called believers and deniers of climate change), they do not represent the entire breadth of frames available. Lesser-known frames – many emerging from justice oriented civil society groups and academics - provide alternative accounts and avenues for social change. These alternative frames broaden the scope of climate change and mobilize alternative ways of seeing and resolving the problem (for a comprehensive overview of alternative frames, see Hulme, 2009; Malone, 2009; Stevenson & Dryzek, 2014). For instance, although the mainstream tendency is to frame climate change in terms of energy and mitigation, the frame can broadened to see it as a problem facing water, food, and energy for which adaptation is also a significant response (O'Riordan & Sandford, 2015). An increasing number of activists, scholars and religious leaders are calling for broad sweeping changes to existing political and economic systems rather than just palliative technological or market based measures taken within existing systems (see, for instance, Klein, 2014). Each of these alternative frames result from particular social groups that bring certain values and interests to the table. The public sphere is marked by an ongoing struggle over whose meanings, interests and values come to define climate change and the attendant policy options for addressing it (cf. Castree et al, 2014).

Framing in Practice: Alberta Climate Dialogue

How are divergent frames of climate change negotiated in practical settings? What role do deliberative practitioners play in negotiating these various frames? Through a series of experimental formal deliberations, Alberta Climate Dialogue (ABCD) provided a unique opportunity to examine various facilitation methods, process designs and issue frames in practical settings. In addition to several workshops throughout the lifespan of the project which brought community members, practitioners and academics together to discuss possible courses of action, ABCD organized and delivered three discrete public deliberation initiatives: Edmonton Citizens' Panel on Energy and Climate Challenges; Water in a Changing Climate; and Energy Efficiency.

These experimental 'mini-publics' (Fung, 2003) were stand-alone initiatives and were divergent in their design approaches. For instance, the first two convened participants in face-to-face conversations, whereas the latter used technology to foster dialogue across a range of participants. Two operated within the frame of energy and mitigation and had clear connections to existing policy decisions whereas one focused on water and adaptation and did not link with an existing policy directive. These panels were unified by similar set of assumptions about public deliberation in that initiatives were convened with randomly selected citizens who discussed policy relevant issues under the aegis of a sponsor organization who was positioned as recipient of the panel recommendations. For the purposes of this discussion, we will focus on the two face to face panels (Edmonton Citizens' Panel on Energy and Climate Challenges and Water in a Changing Climate) to draw out key lessons and insights.

Edmonton Citizens' Panel on Energy and Climate Challenges

In 2012, ABCD partnered with the City of Edmonton as well as the Centre for Public Involvement (CPI) to create its first deliberative citizen panel. Since its inception in 2009, the CPI has worked with the City of Edmonton to develop formal, invited participatory initiatives on issues such as internet voting, municipal budgeting, urban planning, and food and agriculture. The purpose of the Energy and Climate Challenges citizen panel was to provide policy advice and guidance to the City around energy transition and carbon reduction actions to assist with developing the City's environmental strategy. The panel brought together fifty-six randomly recruited Edmonton residents who met for six one-day sessions between October 13 and December 1, 2012. Participants were asked to recommend broad directions for city councilors concerning the future of energy

sources. Participants were also asked for their advice on a series of implementation choices associated with different policies. The team also included over 30 small group facilitators, note takers, project support staff, resource people, and academic researchers. Dale was one of the lead designers and facilitators of this panel.

At the end of the six week deliberation, the citizen panel had two key recommendations: that the City of Edmonton take measures to become a low carbon city by 2050 (92% support); and, that the City of Edmonton implement the goals and associated actions proposed in Edmonton's Energy Transition Discussion Paper (94% support). As well, the report stressed the following conditions be followed by the City in implementing its recommendations: weigh the costs and benefits of each energy transition action; use public and transparent decision making processes so citizens are confident that energy transition decisions serve the public good; link City leadership to citizen education; and, recognize and promote multiple reasons for energy transition. These recommendations were included in the strategic courses of action contained in the resulting Energy Transition Strategy, unanimously adopted by Edmonton City Council on April 21, 2015.

The rationale for framing the citizen panel around energy and climate was that it provided a direct connection to an existing policy process (MacKinnon et al, 2014, p. 18). At the time of the panel, the City of Edmonton was developing an Energy Transition Strategy that includes using sustainable sources of energy, becoming a carbon neutral municipality as well as developing resilience to disturbances to its energy distribution systems. Edmonton is currently dependent on nonrenewable forms of energy such as coal for electricity, natural gas for heating, and gasoline and diesel for transportation.

In July 2011, City Council approved an environmental strategic plan called 'The Way We Green'. This plan identifies climate change and energy as Edmonton's top environmental challenges. Although this document set goals for Edmonton to become a carbon - neutral, sustainable and energy resilient city, it did not explain how these goals might be achieved. In order to implement these goals, the City implemented a multi-stage strategy. The first stage involved modeling possible GHG reduction scenarios. An external consultant (HB Lanarc) was hired to model possible scenarios. The first scenario ('business-as- usual' or the Reference Case) estimates that Edmonton's GHG emissions would decline slightly from 2009 to 2035. In search of a strategy that might bring about significant reduction, a Low Energy/Carbon Case was also modeled. This scenario demonstrated that it is

hypothetically possible for the City to dramatically reduce its GHG emissions through measures such as energy efficiency.

The second stage involved convening a citizen panel to examine the extent to which Edmontonians support the Low Energy scenario. The existing policy moment for this deliberation provided a strong frame that focused the ensuing discussions on issues related to climate and energy. As a consequence, the resulting process did not allow much room for differing issue frames to emerge. This is not a criticism of the design of the panel; rather, it recognizes the constraints under which this particular citizen panel operated in that the scope of what could feasibly be discussed was narrowed from the outset.

The lead facilitators were acutely aware of these restrictions. To supplement the discussion paper provided by the City of Edmonton, a background document was created and given to participants. In reflecting on the dominant framing of this panel, the lead facilitators discuss the tensions that emerged between the prevailing position of climate change offered by the City and desire for the research team to broaden the existing frames:

> There was a healthy tension between the framing provided by the Energy Transitions paper and agreement that the citizens would not be restricted by the paper's recommended actions. ABCD and CPI both felt strongly that the citizens should be free to bring in other dimensions of the issue that were different from and/or went beyond the framing. (MacKinnon et al., 2014, p. 17)

Yet, in substantive ways, the background document tracked closely to the discussion paper prepared by the City of Edmonton in that it remained within a dominant framing of climate change as a problem framed around mitigation and energy.

In follow up evaluations, individual table facilitators expressed concern about the potential effects that the dominant frame presented for the deliberation.[1] As one table facilitator described,

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[1] A follow up survey was conducted a few weeks following the deliberation. These quotes are in response to the following question "The Citizens' Panel was framed quite deliberately in terms of a particular set of policy choices and recommendations (from the Discussion Paper). What were the strengths and challenges of this framing of the Panel's work? Are there ways in which this framing could have been better handled?"

I think a lot of panelists had some questions about the framing of the panel process. Many panelists expressed their feelings that they needed more different views and not only one side of the story on the subject. Some even said that they felt like a certain agenda was being supported.

Another commented on the perceived bias of the discussion guide created by the City,

The bias of the report was played down as though it wasn't biased. It was a report that presented a particular point of view—that was the starting point for this panel. Period. If that was presented from the start in that way, rather than focusing on the lack of bias, then panelists may have been more receptive, or may have spent less time and energy critiquing the report.

Another facilitator provided a more nuanced account of the tradeoffs inherent in providing alternative sources of information.

Had the City commissioned Discussion Papers from more than one organization, many of the panelists would have been better assured of the impartiality of the information they received. Multiplying the sources, however, would have added to the already considerable burden of information that some of the participants were finding intimidating. If more than one Discussion Paper were used for similar proceedings in the future, length would have to be very carefully managed.

This panel provided important insights into the capacity of citizens to be enrolled directly in high-level policy discussions about potential energy futures. At the end of the deliberation, the participants largely supported low energy / carbon case, with some support for a 'go faster and further' scenario that emerged from the participants themselves. The panel recommendations were implemented in the City's policy framework moving forward. The framing of climate change during the initiative tracked closely with the framing put in place by the sponsor and reinforced the mainstream framing of climate change. As such, participants were given a partial understanding of the scope and complexity of climate change, where dominant expert-based frames dictated the scope and range of conversation that ensued.

Water in a Changing Climate

To illustrate how a diverse range of issue frames can be brought into deliberative initiatives to encourage collective learning, we turn to the second citizen panel

convened by ABCD. *Water in a Changing Climate* was held on February 22, 2014, at the University of Lethbridge in southern Alberta. The community sponsor for this event was the Oldman Watershed Council (OWC), a grassroots community group of citizens, municipalities, businesses, provincial government and non-governmental organizations. The OWC serves an advisory role to the provincial government in developing its water management strategy. Unlike the City of Edmonton, the OWC played a minimal role in organizing the panel. Throughout the planning process, ABCD researchers were provided with very little guidance as to what the sponsor hoped to achieve. At the time the panel took place, the OWC did not have a policy agenda on climate change. The lack of a clear link with an existing policy decision meant that the initiative had little influence over decision-making processes. This provided freedom in experimenting with alternative framing processes.

From the perspective of ABCD, the rationale for this panel was twofold. First, it addressed aspects of climate change that had thus far been neglected by research collaboration. While water, food, energy and climate form an inseparable nexus, ABCD had until this point concentrated most of its efforts and collective discussions on the intersection between climate and energy. As an alternate lens, water opens discussion to the need for adaptation as well as mitigation. Communities in Alberta already struggle with water-related challenges such as recurrent droughts, seasonal shortages, increasing competition for limited supplies and water pollution (Henderson & Sauchyn, 2008). These issues are compounded by global climate change.

Second, this deliberation was an experiment in developing a deliberative process that is economical to implement particularly for civil society organizations that operate within budgetary constraints. This was an important consideration, as one of the stated deliverables of the research was to build deliberative capacity in the region. From the outset, the design of this citizen panel was guided by the assumption that in order for deliberation to become a more central component of everyday practices, cost-effective processes must be made available so that organizations can implement them in resource-constrained environments. This deliberation provided an opportunity to test how deep a group could go with deliberation on a complex issue in just one day. The event was also designed to encourage social learning such that the framing of the issue evolved as part of the process and was negotiated, in part, by the participants. This required a flexible process that was adaptable to whatever emerged from the participants' contributions. It also relied heavily on the skill of the small group facilitators, a point we will return to in more detail in the subsequent section.

In total, 33 people across a range of social backgrounds participated in the panel. Given budgetary constraints, recruitment was limited to established networks of the Oldman Watershed Council. While we attempted to ensure representativeness across gender, age, occupation, location of residence (in terms of rural, urban and First Nations communities) and views on climate change, the panel did not and could not claim to be representative of the population in the region.

A background document, prepared by ABCD affiliates, was sent to participants a week before the panel. This document described the purpose of the panel, the agenda, and gave a preliminary definition of climate change and the challenges it presents for water resources in the region. This material also included a range of different frames for climate change as a starting point for discussion.[2] These frames were described in plain language so as to avoid overwhelming the participants with too much background information from the outset. They were presented in the background document as follows:

- Climate change is a problem that can be solved. Climate change is a problem that humans can and should solve through reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Dangerous climate change can be prevented through technology, markets or behavioral changes.

- Climate change as an issue of justice. Approaching climate change as an issue of justice means thinking about the ways in which people and other living creatures are vulnerable to weather and climate. This perspective addresses the human, cultural as well as physical components of climate change. Reducing greenhouse gases is important, but not sufficient to address climate change. Building resilience to weather and climactic changes, confronting social inequality and addressing stewardship for the natural world are also significant.

- Climate change as a force of nature. This perspective emphasizes forces that influence the climate that are outside of human control. People who hold this perspective tend to believe that there is little we can do to prevent climate change. These people also tend to be skeptical of information that suggests otherwise.

Although not described as such, the first represents the mainstream frame of climate change. The second represents a social justice frame that opens policy

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[2] Descriptions are taken verbatim from the background document. This document is available on request. Inquiries should be directed to the lead author of this article.

discussions to considerations of adaptation. The third represents what is typically called the denier position on climate change.

At the start of the deliberation, participants were advised that these frames represent different ways of understanding the issue but are no means the final word. We also emphasized that people can hold several of these beliefs at the same time. These three perspectives were used as a warm up exercise where participants were asked to align themselves in the room based on where they 'fit' within these different approaches. Our intent was to provide a wide enough range of options such that people would feel represented in their views. Almost two thirds of the participants aligned with the first frame whereas only two people aligned with the last one. The remainder aligned with the social justice frame.

The morning session then proceeded with a short presentation from a climate scientist with extensive research experience in the region. In small groups, participants discussed collective concerns about water and climate change in the region. The lead facilitator (Dale), with assistance from the table facilitators categorized the resulting concerns into the following themes: land use pressures; environment and public health; extreme weather events; governance; social justice and responsibility. These themes were in turn validated with the participants. In the afternoon session, following a short presentation from the director of the OWC, participants self-organized into groups based on these themes. They were invited to provide more detailed descriptions of what these themes entailed in terms of opportunities and barriers for action, with the view to provide recommendations for the sponsor organization in moving forward. The overall recommendations reflected a range of divergent approaches, including encouraging more regulation; providing more education and information about how to deal with extreme weather events; standardizing emergency response plans; exploring incentives to promote conservation and effective use of water; living within means; fostering individual stewardship; and supporting sustainable farming and agriculture, particularly in urban contexts.

Although during her presentation, the OWC representative had explicitly asked for practical solutions that could be implemented by the Water Council, the ensuing recommendations included a range of different institutional responses. Even though background material and the guest speaker emphasized the looming possibility of protracted drought in the region, this was not regarded as a primary concern among participants. This might in part be attributed to top of mind weather—related challenges as a series of flooding events that had taken place in the province the previous summer.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, social justice emerged as an overarching frame from the collective discussion. This approach was enabled, in part, due to the prior framing in the background document as well as in the warm up exercises. This illustrates the influence that frames have on the values and perspectives that participants express in deliberative settings.

Discussion

The two initiatives outlined in this paper differ in their approaches to public deliberation and climate change. Whereas the first took place over six weekends and engaged mainstream frames of climate change, the second took place over one day and engaged mainstream and alternative frames of climate change. The first enrolled a largely urban population and the second enrolled people from urban, rural and First Nations communities. For the purposes of this paper, we are not interested in comparing these initiatives with each other nor do we measure them against pre-conceived criteria of what constitutes effective deliberation and design. Rather, we use these practical experiments to draw out areas that warrant deeper reflection and consideration.

Many assumptions about public deliberation were implicit in our research group from the outset. These assumptions are important to acknowledge because ABCD did not examine existing deliberation initiatives but actively sought partnerships to create new deliberative experiments. Overall, the group privileged an understanding of public deliberation as a decision-making procedure that is best realized through the establishment of discrete, time and group bound face-to- face formal deliberative initiatives. Public deliberation was largely conceived as one-off discrete exercises that link to particular policy moments and extract public opinion to feed into these decision moments. Support for particular projects within the research initiative was contingent on working within this frame of reference. While mini-publics are undoubtedly important practical instantiations of public deliberation, they have notable limitations; they are resource-intensive, tend to be disconnected from the broader political landscape, and typically enroll limited numbers of people. The discrete nature of each citizen panel meant that collectively we did not build systemic understanding of the efficacy of the individual design processes. Given the difficulties of finding sponsor organizations and the stand-alone nature of each panel, we were collectively unable to replicate individual panels to build a more systematic understanding of strengths and limitations of different design approaches. Very little time overall was devoted to teasing out and negotiating existing normative assumptions, political commitments and working definitions of both public deliberation and

climate change within our research collective.

This approach to public deliberation had powerful implications for the ways in which climate change was conceived, approached and discussed in practice. For instance, the emphasis on connecting with existing policy discussions and with particular institutional decision makers meant that discussions remained largely within status quo frames and responses to climate change. In the first initiative discussed in this article, the sponsor organization dictated the frame. While this focused participant feedback on existing policy directives and enabled uptake in policy, it closed possibilities for alternative understandings of climate change to emerge.

By contrast, the second panel discussion involved a more open approach to framing. In this case, the community sponsor did not provide guidance as to the overarching frame. While this provided an opportunity to experiment with alternative framings of climate change, it also meant that the final recommendations were open ended and not aligned with the needs of the sponsor organization.

In the open framing process and due to the short time frame, facilitation was more demanding and the quality and training of facilitators accentuated. A somewhat unexpected challenge arose with the volunteer table facilitators. Although many reported to have previous facilitation experience, they found themselves ill-equipped to deal with the challenge of facilitating for deliberative purposes. In part, this can be attributed to insufficient training, particularly for the short deliberation. Whereas the training for the Edmonton panel lasted for two days, training for the water panel lasted only three hours. In post-event evaluations, some participants of the water panel expressed concern about differing abilities among facilitators of the sessions, and as a result felt they were not properly represented in the discussions. In follow up interviews, table facilitators also expressed concern over their own lack of capacity with respect to deliberative participatory initiatives. As one facilitator recounted, "That it was the hardest facilitation I've ever done and totally different from anything else I have facilitated." Some table facilitators expressed concern about how to deal with participants who had strong views coming into the deliberation. They were particularly worried that some of the recommendations reflected entrenched positions of some of the participants, rather than the outcomes based on the careful consideration of the views of others. In retrospect, more opportunities for volunteer facilitators to develop skills were warranted before putting them into 'high stakes' contexts with minimal training and experience. One of our key lessons was the shorter the deliberation, the longer the training and practice

requirements for volunteer facilitators.[3]

Conclusion

As mediators of public dialogue, deliberative practitioners play an important role in negotiating power through the ways in which issues are framed. In practice, the complexity and consequences of choices about framing are often left unexamined. While deliberative practitioners may lack the ability to reframe issues directly in practical settings due to existing constraints, critical reflection on the role of framing and power can and arguably should be discussed in other public venues (such as the pages of this journal).

Methodologically, our analysis is grounded in reflexivity as a complement to procedural evaluation. Rather than take public deliberation and climate change at face value, reflexivity actively acknowledges and openly expresses the diverse meanings, assumptions and values at individual and institutional levels. While Alberta Climate Dialogue provided a space and opportunity to bring critically informed scholarship into conversation with the practical expertise of organizing public deliberation, the implementation of reflexivity took shape late in the process and frequently took back stage to practical efforts to organize deliberations, communicate results and measure outcomes. This is understandable, given the difficulties involved in convening deliberative initiatives in the context of tight time frames, limited budgets, and bureaucratic decision-making processes where instrumental outcomes are valued over normative or substantive ones. The danger is that pragmatic considerations can all too easily overshadow and crowd out critical reflexivity and social learning.

In the context of issues such as climate change that are characterized by high degrees of complexity where there is little agreement about the nature of the issue and the appropriate response, assumptions, values and frames need to be critically examined. This applies not only to the various meanings associated with climate change but also to the meanings and practices of public deliberation. Through consistent inquiry into how issues are framed and given meaning in particular institutional settings, deliberative practitioners are better positioned to ask neglected questions about how knowledge and power are wielded in practical settings and how existing power relations might be negotiated so that marginalized perspectives and values are given a fair hearing.

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[3] A detailed discussion of facilitator and note taker training is available in the forthcoming ABCD Working Paper by Fiona Cavanagh, Jacquie Dale, Susanna Haas Lyons and Mary Pat MacKinnon. Building Capacity: Small Group Facilitation and Note-Taking for Dialogue and Deliberation. http://www.albertaclimatedialogue.ca/

One of the challenges of convening public deliberation on climate change is that this issue has been constructed from the outset in terms that privilege certain social meanings and values over others. A challenge for deliberative practitioners lies with negotiating the diverse range of frames that include and extend beyond mainstream representations. Approaching climate change as a diverse set of frames instead of indisputable 'facts' is the first step in recognizing and negotiating its diverse social meanings.

We conclude with two recommendations. First, advocates of public deliberation with climate change need to be willing "to put their own normative commitments through the test of deliberation" (Lövbrand et al., 2011, p. 489) and space and time need to be made available to do so. As a methodological approach, reflexivity is often overlooked in participatory settings. It does not fit neatly within institutional systems that value simplicity over complexity; that separate data collection from theoretical development; and that are structured around short time frames for completion and evaluation. In some circumstances, reflexivity can be actively resisted as it challenges deeply held assumptions about the value neutrality of experts and authoritative institutions. The lack of reflexivity, at individual and institutional levels, can perpetuate what sociologist Brian Wynne calls the "institutional neglect of issues of public meaning" (2003, p. 402) whereby expert driven frames are tacitly privileged over other ways of understanding and approaching the issue at hand.

Second, we recommend more opportunities for deliberative practitioners to learn from critically oriented social science scholarship and vice versa. In spite of the breadth of available literature, interpretive social science scholarship has exerted little influence over the ways in which climate change is framed in mainstream media accounts, public policies and public deliberative initiatives (Blue, 2015b; Castree et al., 2014).

Public deliberation and deliberative democracy more generally offer promising avenues for addressing climate change. We propose reflexivity as a methodological approach to assist with keeping deliberative spaces open to multiple meanings and values. We believe this is a necessary move for the enrichment of political institutions. In the absence of reflexivity, formalized deliberative practices can tacitly and prematurely close down policy options by limiting the framing of issues to mainstream assumptions and values. In so doing, formalized public deliberation can unwittingly reproduce hierarchies of social power.

While reflexivity is important for public deliberation in general, it is particularly important in relation to climate change. Climate change invites us to question whether the political modes of thought and practice that caused the problem are, in part, responsible for the problem itself. Through pluralistic frames of climate change, public deliberation can help people debate and decide among different visions of the future and how to get there. From this pluralist vantage point, public deliberation might feasibly foster the types of social re-ordering that many argue are necessary for addressing climate change in a socially responsive and responsible fashion.

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