Becoming a Participant: A Qualitative Study of City Participatory Bodies in Oregon

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:

Dr. Allison Hurst

Although the last decade has seen an increase in research to understand civic engagement and public participation in terms of generating involvement, less research has been conducted to understand the structures of participation and effects on and of current participants. Many local governments in the United States use boards, committees, and commissions composed of citizen participants to guide decision making. This study undertakes qualitative methods to delve into how participants navigate structures to become effective at participating in city policies and activities. The initial theory informing the research suggested that there is a divide between public want for democratic egalitarian deliberation and administrations’ want for professionalized technocratic decision making. Findings suggest that where conflict was expected between participants and administration, respect and reverence was found, which entails that participatory bodies can be more horizontally related to their governments when relationships are developed by participants. The potential explanatory power of the roles of social and cultural capital are explored. Lastly, effective participants are those that aim for ideals of growth and democracy as evidenced by cohesiveness between personal, professional, and participatory elements of their narratives about how and why various subjects become participants.
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1 Introduction

There came a point in the progression of the research where it started to become clear that there is a lot of power behind becoming an effective participant in local government participatory bodies. That point was reached when it started to appear that there was a relationship between the use of cultural capital to navigate local government participatory structures in such a way that the activity of specific participants was aimed at sense-making across personal, professional, and participatory narratives, which present themselves as ideals pursued. Reaching this point in the research process was far from a straight path and there is still much more to be considered. The objective of this thesis is to follow the same path of reasoning that led to the point where the power of interconnected narratives seemed clear.

At its base this study was about discovering symbols that might matter in the conducting of better policy and institutional analysis. To do this, qualitative methods were utilized. From the findings what seems to matter more in trying to understand citizen participation is the connectedness of participants to their personal lives and the strength of their ability to create relationships across groups, which is evidenced by the cohesiveness of their personal, professional, and participatory narratives. These connections appear to be more important in showing which participants can effectively navigate structures to prompt local government policy and activity than simply looking at the rules and norms or formal professional and personal associations. The specific relationships and civic skills being used really matter.
1.1 Purpose of this research

This research study aimed to provide insight into the meaning of, mechanisms in, perceptions within, and functioning of citizen participatory bodies, which are advisory boards, citizen committees, and commissions in terms of how they were structured and the types of citizens that compose them. Along with examining how these bodies are structured there is also the potential to shed light on how citizen participants within them were becoming structured to increase the legitimacy and impact of these bodies in terms of their effects on policy.

It would be a gross mistreatment of the reflexive nature of this study and its importance to the researcher to say that it followed a clear line from beginning to end. In fact, looking back at the process, there was a constant return to the original statement of the problem and the outline of the purpose of the study to inquire as to what ways it might have shifted with each field observation, conversation, and interview. In the end, the project seemed to come around full-circle. The statement of purpose from the outset, as was submitted to the Institutional Review Board was as follows:

The significance of this project is to expand the corpus of knowledge about the functionality and perceived legitimacy of governance in a local setting. This research is specific to City level government and formalized citizen participation through advisory boards, committees, and commissions related to their impact on and from the operation of a municipal council. This is an understudied area. The objectives are to identify commonalities and differences among formal municipal governance participants and the structure of participation in the way they operate and are perceived to be legitimate (or not) by the councilors they aim to inform, collaborate with, and take directive from. Of further interest are the stories of these dual role citizen/public figures in their motivations to, perceptions of, and personal changes resulting from municipal board, committee, and commission participation. The overall aims of this
research project are 1) to help further inform a potential artifact guiding the structuration and communication in and among municipal participatory bodies, and 2) to reveal more about how government operates at broader levels by looking at some of its most intimate, but formalized and local aspects of the relationship between citizens and governing bodies.

The important substitutions to be made to make this statement make sense, in light of the continuous return to this statement, is that more than the role of ‘government’ and ‘governance,’ this study ended up zooming in to the role of individual actors because there is still a lot of ambiguity and a need for much more research to determine how to gauge the impacts of citizen participants on the decisions made by councils. Thus, a revised statement of purpose would read:

The significance of this project is to expand the corpus of knowledge about the functionality and perceived legitimacy of individual narratives to the narrator in a local setting. This research is specific to City level government and formalized citizen participation through advisory boards, committees, and commissions related to their impact on the participants and the way that they conceive of themselves and the process of effective participation. This is an understudied area. The objectives are to identify commonalities and differences among formal citizen participants as actors in local government and the structure of participation in the way they operate and are perceived to be legitimate (or not) by themselves and the activities and other actors they aim to inform and collaborate with.

In the end, the purpose of this research is related to how one finds personal meaning from becoming a participant in local government which is evidenced by constructing narratives. These narratives are composed of different elements that relate participants’ individual goals, experiences, and expertise with their community, their interests, and the impacts they see themselves having. Thus, what one of the leading research questions ended up being is: “what does the way that participants tell their story of participation have to say about democracy and the power of individual narratives to structure and drive individual participation in local government?”

It has been argued that democracy is best seen at the local level and that if local government is not working well, then democracy at higher levels of government are in
trouble (Putnam, 1993). Given events occurring the 2016-2017 academic year, it seemed more and more relevant to continue to ask questions about how this research area can grant insights into the way we pursue and enact democracy more broadly.

There was a distinct moment that stands out both in my memory and my field notes, in which the focus shifted. It was directly following the inauguration of the 45th President of the United States. On a drizzly Saturday morning more than a few women, children, and men found themselves in the streets to show solidarity with one another and express a gross dissatisfaction with representative symbols and activities. It was not my march, but I was there to listen carefully. Following this activity, there was a moment where I remember returning to the question of what my research project’s purpose was in my journal. What I noted was:

*Today was the Women’s March on Washington. I originally agreed to go at the request of my partner, but it ended up being something so much bigger and meaningful than just standing beside her in the rain. At the beginning, there was much grandiose speaking about solidarity and what it meant to be an Oregonian and how we all needed to focus on not allowing more tanned rhetoric to override tolerance and equality, which was powerful enough, but what really caught my attention from the speakers was a repeated call to participate and more a call to participate in local government. How timely? I was left wondering during the actual march that followed, what the results of that being said to so many people at once would be? Then, nearing the end of our mass circuitous walk with signage, I distinctly recall one of the call-responses.
“TELL ME WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE!”
“THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE”*

Not to undercut the power of the events today, but I am skeptical. What does democracy look like and why has it become such a soft term? For all the bodies there today, we certainly had the ‘demos,’ but what more will it take to make it ‘cricatic’? Is what I am looking at in some way democracy? What will this result in?
2 Methods

In terms of methods this research project had the simple and initial aims of discovering structures at play in the participation of citizens on local boards, committees and commissions. Considering Structures, it seemed best suited to approach this research project with qualitative methods to see how the processes of structuration are received by individuals. Using this approach, the study undertook both inductive and deductive elements through the course of analysis. Wherein the inductive approach was simply looking for patterns and themes to develop concepts post-facto and the deductive elements were then the result of an on-going review of literature and continuously asking if the data supported any of the theories, concepts, and philosophies found (Patton, 2015).

2.1 Site and Participant Selection

In all, the participatory bodies from five cities were selected for observation, with interview subjects being selected from these five. The cities that were selected for observation were chosen to represent the range of cities in terms of size in Oregon with one large, two medium, and two small.¹ The main reason for selecting this spread was to see if there was enough difference in the structure of the boards, committees and commissions to warrant in-depth research of the subjects in each case. Observations of the various cities continued for most of the research process.

¹ Large cities being greater than 50,000 in population, medium between 25,000 and 50,000, and small with less than 25,000 in population.
The intention was to select participants to represent a range of each type of participatory body, which worked out in the end. One was from a committee, two from an advisory board, two from an active commission, and one administrator that had experience being the lead administrator on all three types of participatory bodies. The reason for this was to represent the possible differences in participant types that might arise with slightly different structures and charges of each type of participation.

2.2 Structure of Observations

The location of the observed meetings happened in a variety of professional settings. Often participatory bodies are convened in somewhat intimate departmental conference rooms. Some of the larger bodies observed, those with larger responsibilities, those whose jurisdictions covered entire cities, or those where there is joint membership with councilors would occur in council chambers. On three occasions there were also committee meetings that occurred in attached or nearby community centers. In prior conversations with staff it seems that the locations selected are often a question of where the city owns the right amount of chairs for the expected turnout based on agenda items or consistent experience.

For the field site observations all but three of the meetings were recorded by the researcher. Field notes were maintained for each of the meetings observed, which were paralleled by an observation guide to detail the setting, see Appendix 1. When possible and when granted access without need for a public records request, additional meeting recordings were obtained to expand access to the number and type of meetings. The reason
for not pursuing recordings that would have required a public records request was that it would generate a public document that would link the researcher to the potential participants of the study. In all nineteen meetings were attended and twenty-six meeting recordings were obtained.

2.2.1 Participant Solicitation

Participants were solicited for interviews before and after observed meetings. The process of the solicitation included the researcher introducing himself and explaining the nature of the research process. After explaining the research, potential subjects would be asked if they were willing to participate, then if agreeing, a meeting time and place would be agreed upon or contact info would be exchanged. In all 41 participants were solicited, nearly half agreed to be interviewed and 6 interviews were conducted.

2.2.2 Structure of Interviews

Locations for the interviews with participants were local coffee shops of the participants choosing, the one exception was the administrator who chose to meet at his city office. These public locations were often noisy, but also seemed to lend themselves to a relaxed, but somewhat professional, interview location. Interviews were semi-structured utilizing an interview guide with 16 questions, see Appendix 2. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim with redactions for personal or locational identifying information. Pseudonyms were used for all relevant sites and participants in transcription and all subsequent analyses. The shortest interview lasted for 42 minutes, the longest was in total over three hours, and the most common length was about an hour and fifteen
minutes. In total 403 minutes of recorded interview resulted in total of 53,577 words of transcribed responses, or about 107 pages of narrative from the subjects.

In places where further information or context was needed; state level statutes and administrative rules, city ordinances and revised codes, and conversations with staff and administrators were consulted and reviewed to clarify certain structural elements witnessed in the meetings and validate quotes from interviews. In addition to consulting law and staff, reflective journaling exercises were conducted to further clarify potential theoretical and experiential elements of the research (Luker, 2008; Maxwell, 2013).

2.3 Data Analysis

For data analysis, all of the data used for findings and results was loaded into Nvivo 11 Pro to aid in maintaining the essential links in the data to the theories and ideas being pulled from and read into it. All of the data used was coded with thematic codes, which are essentially markers that identify common themes across multiple data (Maxwell, 2013). Coded elements were then considered in conjunction with one another between and within participant narratives and related to demographic and experiential information.
3 Personal Statement and Limits of the Study

3.1 Personal story of interest in the topic

The researcher's interest in this particular area of local governance began nearly a decade ago. At the age of 21, I was approached by a neighbor whom was on the city council for a small city in northern Minnesota to participate in the forming of an advisory committee focused on sustainability issues for the city. At the time, I was far from professionalized enough to know how to navigate the rules, structure, and charge to make my participation really effective, especially in light of the professionalism and expertise present in other members with more of tendency to take charge. Through that experience and the activities we conducted as a committee, it began to seem that these participatory bodies were very poorly understood in the academic sense, given my return to higher education in the time since. Much of the theory and most of the frameworks, just didn't quite seem to capture all of the nuance that would need to be accounted for to fully explain or predict the behavior of these governmental bodies and their members. At their core, these small citizen member driven participatory bodies can have big impacts, but the level and area where those impacts can occur all seemed to come down to the individual members and how they navigated conflicts with city administration and elected officials. Further, the assumption is held in this research project, that although concerned with individual actors, there is enough similarity and patterning among individuals to avoid full relativity between subjects in this case and between this case and other similar research areas.
One of the things attempted throughout this research project was to remain objective by analytically accounting for who I am and what my experiences of these boards were while treating the boards being observed in an objective fashion. It is often a mistake in qualitative research to make a distinct separation between the research and the personal life of the researcher (Maxwell, 2013, p. 24; Patton, 2015, p. 700). As such, observations and interviews were treated as objectively as possible and then when it came to reflection and analysis I would use my own experience to think about differences and similarities seen in these cases. This turned the whole of the research experience into a learning exercise, which I hope to share in part. This was a difficult thing to manage, particularly in interviews, because I found myself at times using my own experience to both establish rapport and build ethos through solidarity with some of the members. In standing on ethos, I was trying to down play the perceived interest in pathos, which would likely look different with a researcher entering the field with a less obviously informed approach.

3.2 Effects of the Researcher

I am not sure that it mattered at all in the course of this research project that I was a big young white male. The construction of how I dress and comport myself may have had more of an effect. One of the questions I kept asking myself was why so few participants seemed willing to sit down with me for interviews. On the one hand it might have been some simple structural or personal elements for the participants, i.e. lack of time or energy. Insofar as they are very busy and somewhat guarded people my small interview rate may have simply been a matter of time and importance of my research project to the population I was concerned with. However, one thing that kept coming back to me was the
way that I presented myself and what effects this had on the difficulty of getting interview subjects. Citizen participants seemed cordial and open enough in conversations before, after, and outside of the meetings, but when it came time to solicit or actually schedule an interview, a lot of subjects did not make it all the way from discussions before and after meetings to the point where we actually sat down for an interview. Did this have something to do with the collared shirt and pressed slacks approach I had while trying to present myself as the same level of professional as seen in majority amongst the participants that led to an impression that I was not someone with whom to share personal narratives? I asked myself this a lot near the end of the research project. I can’t say for certain that it mattered, but I can say that it seemed to have some effect on the rate and type of interviews that made it to the coffee shop stage.

One thing that I caught myself doing during the interviews and ‘in-passing’ conversations was standing as a type of expert on the subject of how the boards are legally constrained and how they are discussed at the administrative level. This may also have had an effect not only on the interviews themselves, but also on the population that I was trying to solicit. It did, however, seem somewhat fitting that some trust may have been established by this “expert” approach in that it seemed to inspire some level of understanding that I knew enough about the structure to avoid being too concerned about matters that seemed too intimate to be relevant. What I mean by “too intimate to be relevant” is that although conflicts were present in nearly every meeting that I observed, I seemed to be able to better attract individuals for interviews if there was reassurance that the perceptions of conflicts, their origins and their nature would not be attributed to specific individuals. These conflicts
would manifest as those related to specific interests, conflicts of representation, or simple lacks of agreement over definitions and approaches, but for the most part they would be resolved or by-passed, but not directly addressed, in meetings and they were things that participants seemed mostly reluctant to put actual names to in interviews and in conversations before and after observed meetings. The only exception was Kurt who did on one occasion in his interview name an individual and associated them with having generated a conflict by lack of agreed definition and misconception of a proposed approach. Otherwise conflicts would be mentioned, but they would not be attached to individuals.

3.3 Intimate Settings

With the exception of the large full-extent committees, e.g. budget and planning, all of the meetings that I observed were in settings that were in fairly intimate settings. What I mean by intimate here is that with full member attendance, staff, presenters, and only on one occasion another member of general public, there were often very few empty seats in the small conference settings. It makes for a very hard setting to hide as a passive observer. In fact, there was only one instance where I was not personally called out by staff or membership to explain who I was, who I was affiliated with, why I was there and asked to sign in.

Something consistently noted was that, although the atmosphere was cordial enough and those that reached out to interact with me did seem welcoming, it always came off as though, despite the fact these are all public meetings, everyone is to have a reason to
be there. Having attended enough meetings as a new face, this is something that I tried experimenting with. On some occasions I would give no reason for being there other than 'I am just sitting in to observe' and on others I would be more explicit about being there as a graduate student researching committee, board, and commission meetings. Both of these approaches seemed to have the same effect, wherein it seemed to pique interests and place one or two people on guard about their conduct, but it didn’t seem to affect the meetings very much given their highly structured and agenda driven nature. There was one notable exception to this statement. After having already interviewed the chair for a particular board, Aaron, I attended their next meeting. Before the meeting began Aaron recognized me and went out of his way to come around the conference table and say hello and ask how the research was going. What followed stood out to me in my field notes, because it appeared to be a much more rigid and professionalized meeting than in other instances with the same board, which seemed to be more active in keeping everything on point to maximize the efficiency of that particular meeting. There are a number of other things this could have been a result of, like staff or participant pressures to keep this particular meeting short and concise because of its lunch hour timing or prior engagements, but it did seem fairly closely related to his recognition of me prior to the meeting. This presents a potential limit to the study in that once it was known who I was and what my research project was roughly about, that it can affect the on-goings of the meetings regarding subjects that were already interviewed.
4 Background

4.1 Participatory Bodies

Before moving onto the findings it is important to set the scene as to what these participatory bodies are, what they do, how they are governed, and who participates on them. There a few important rules and laws to consider with some of the different participatory bodies. Then a brief bit of background on each of the interview subjects will provide context for the findings.

The state of Oregon has 242 chartered city governments. With the exception of the 12 smallest, all of them have at least one participatory body in addition to their city councils or commissions. What constitutes a participatory body is a board, committee, or commission whose membership is composed of, at least in part, citizen members who are not employed by or an elected official of the city for which they are a voluntary member of a participatory body.

Nearly every city in Oregon has at least one participatory body. In fact it is a state requirement for most of the cities in Oregon to have at least a budget committee composed of citizens in addition to elected officials (ORS §294.008-433, 2015). In addition to budget committees, nearly every city with more than 1000 residents has a planning commission, which is structured and authorized at the state level (ORS §227.020-600, 2015). Some other common citizen participatory bodies include Library Boards, Parks and Recreation, Streets, Public Works, Utilities, Community and Economic Development. The largest city
in the state has 42 active participatory bodies with a current citizen membership of nearly three hundred individuals.

There are three similar, but somewhat distinct types, of participatory bodies for cities in Oregon. Citizen advisory boards are often used to consider specific types of policies, programs, or problems in more detail than allowed by city council, which then in turn are often charged with voting to make recommendations that get passed upward for council consideration. Commissions tend to be a little more pointed and involve particular expertise and specialized experience, which often comes with greater authority to act on a city's behalf with prior authorization and charge from the council. Committee is often used as a blanket term to cover bodies that fall in between those authorized to inform the council and those authorized to act on behalf of the city, which also tend to include elected as well appointed officials in their membership. It is important that although many city participatory bodies fall cleanly into these categories, there are a significant number that blur the distinctions and function as advisory committees or commissions.

4.2 The Structure of Appointments

Nearly all participatory bodies require interested citizens to go through a formal application, review, and appointment process to become members. Applications tend to involve the interested citizen describing what they hope to bring to the board and what their expertise might be. An example of a generic application for participants can be found in Appendix 3. Although there is some variation in the specific questions being asked on the
applications, they are essentially homogenous in inquiring about interests, expertise, and previous experience.

There are essentially four types of processes for appointment to a participatory body. Some cities review and pass appointments directly through the city council. There are often commissions where membership is a simple approval by the mayor. Another form utilizes an internal committee of appointed and elected officials to review and approve appointments. Lastly, some cities have departmental staff or city administration review and recommend appointees to the council. There are other means of approving membership, but they are less common than these four. It is often the case that a city with multiple participatory bodies will have different appointment processes for the different types of boards, committees, and commissions. However, it is important to know that in all cases there is some form of formal review for appointments to participatory bodies.

4.3 Who were the subjects?

Through the course of this research project, the researcher was able to interact with a large number of participants, staff, and politicians. In the end, interviews ended up being conducted with five participants and one higher-level administrator. The group that was interviewed seemed on the whole to be somewhat representative of the membership of most of the meetings that were observed, which may speak to the homogeneity of Oregon’s active citizenry. The homogeneity of the participants is not something that speaks to their makeup in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, or age necessarily, but rather that all of the subjects that I interacted with had a higher than normal level of education and experience
with operation of similarly structured participatory bodies in the corporate, non-profit, or public sectors. This can be seen in the table detailing the demographic information of the interview subjects in Appendix 4. What is important to note is that all of them possess a graduate level education and had some level of previous board experience. It is also noteworthy that with the exception of two, all of their parents had received a higher education degree, which is a common critique of how these participatory bodies are composed (Rebori, 2007).
5 Approach and Theory

The core of this research project was a continued reflexive process of searching for, considering, and extending certain lines of literature while inductively approaching sites and subjects with theory in the background. The theoretical approach was not oriented towards developing epistemologically based claims, but moreover about gaining experior in what matters to those who participate in governance that may evidence ways to, not only improve, but also start seeing reflexive effects of participants and participatory structures. Before beginning the research project, the background of what the scope and focus of the research process would be searching for was informed by the literature that could be found surrounding common forms of local government participation.

The initial thoughts for this research project were to enter the field and find some level of conflict between the participants in their attempt to strive for democracy and staff trying to strive for bureaucracy. This original hypothesis was informed by a body of literature concerned with public participation more broadly, that when taken together show the general breadth of public want for accountable democratic processes and the staff want of professionalized expert driven deliberation (McAvoy, 1999; Tuler & Webl, 2010; Yang & Pandey, 2011). Thus, a divide between public want for inclusive democratic citizen driven processes and a staff want for professional technocratic expert driven structures was expected. This public versus professional distinction has ground to stand on, in regards to local government structures, in the United States going back at least to Jane

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2 Experior as related to experius referring to the Latin terms that are the basis of the prefix exper-used in modern English words like experience, expert, experiment, etc.
Addams at the beginning of the 20th Century (1904). The original hypothesis was also informed by the idea that when it comes to local outcomes and preferences for governmental ideology there is a public tendency to want more deliberation and less potential inequity (Gastil & Levine, 2005; Hajnal & Trounstine, 2014). Some initial evidence in the literature even related this conflict to broader political ideologies, which treated staff as indifferent, that show how participation increases and becomes self-reinforcing with the presence of extreme political ideologies (Whitford, Yates, & Ochs, 2006), which of course is supported by the administrative theory in the structural preferences given by some of the classic lines of reasoning in administrative literature that entails the distinct divorce of political interest to aim towards a type of objective indifference in administrative on goings (i.e. Taylor, 1912; Weber, 1922). What this set the research project to do was to identify some of the structural elements put in place by the dichotomy of previous administrators and participants and see how current participants were navigating and being affected by this structuration while being treated as freely choosing agents. Structuration can be roughly thought of as the creation and reproduction of social acts, organizations, habits, and assumptions, which constrain individual agency without eliminating it (Giddens, 1984; King, 2009). In looking for structuration, in the broad sense this research project cast a wide net by inquiring into both states and processes of being and becoming organized both as individuals and as groups to conduct smaller parts of the public’s business at the local level. With a concern for structuration in mind, it seemed best suited to approach this research project with qualitative methods to dig deeper into how the processes of structuration are received. Despite the initial research project
being framed by these theories, where it ended up is some place different than more research revealing elitism and simply calling for more inclusion.

As the research process started to progress, focus shifted from treating the relationships between participants, staff, and elected officials as a source of conflict, as would be symbolized by how participants were navigating and perceiving the structures, toward asking why there was respect, recognition, and appreciation where previous research and experience had built up an anticipation for divides between preferences for professional structure versus egalitarian deliberation. This question became one of the core foci of the research project before exiting the field. Further, it became more and more apparent that the individuals and their relationships and experiences really mattered. In pursuing a deeper understanding of these elements, social and cultural capital seemed applicable to compare with the evidence.

One of the background theories that lingered throughout the research process was considering the role that certain types of social and cultural capital played. Examining the elements of social capital at play in this research project makes sense given the data. However, it did appear that the associational use of the theory of social capital may not have explained a lot of what was found about the participants and their interactions in the field sites. Social capital theory in the associational sense can be roughly summarized as the idea that a network of professional and personal memberships and associations of individuals within a society enable the society to function. The role of associational social capital in making democratic governments function is a well-studied area (Paxton, 2002; Putnam, 1995, 2002). It has even been explored as an explanatory idea in the field of
collaborative government schemes (McDougall & Banjade, 2015), which have a number of resemblances to local government participatory bodies. Given that all of the participants that were interviewed, a number of conversations with staff and participants at meetings, and a few participants that were present at multiple organizational meetings all had previous and multiple organizational memberships, it would make some sense to apply it here. However, a number of studies have focused on the idea of social capital and there is evidence highlighting the importance of deeper understanding of the relationships as more than simple associations (i.e. Fleischmann & Pierannunzi, 1990), this study attempted to focus beyond the role of the associations to the relationships as they are conceived by members. Further there has been research suggesting that more than associations and demographics, what really matters in gauging effectiveness of participatory bodies in terms of council approved outcomes is the quality of the conjoint efforts of members and the reasonableness of decisions, conclusions, and recommendations to staff and elected officials (Halvorsen, 2003). Thus, although frequently returning to the role of social capital theory, it constantly appeared that there was more to find and begin to understand. One of the concerns is that associational social capital doesn’t account for the deeper social and intergenerational reproductions of capital that are at play in these cases. There are applications of the social capital theory that try to account for this (i.e. Schwadel & Stout, 2012), and it is often examined in terms of how it is declining across time and impacting public participation (Putnam, 1995; Rebori, 2007; Verba, 1995), which would possibly account for those absent from these deliberations and explain how some of the participants became involved, however, the crux of this research project was aimed for explaining more
about the structuration of those that do participate. Thus, it became useful when considering what social capital looks like when it is activated and accumulated to more fully explain why there was reverence where conflict was expected, which led to deeper consideration for the idea of cultural capital as an extension of social capital that is more inclusive of dispositions and experiences that would enable more cohesiveness between participants and other groups involved in the structure.

From Pierre Bourdieu, cultural capital is evidenced in three states forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized (1986, p. 242). Dispositions of the mind and body, much like those one might gain from junior cotillion, sport and military training, or simply being brought up in a particular social group wherein one’s language use and means of walking through spaces are held in common constitute the first state. The objectified state can be seen in the possession and use of cultural goods, i.e. machines, books, trinkets, etc. The institutionalized state is in educational and experiential attainment. Some studies have had much success in the ability to track cultural capital in terms of its ability to propagate political power, social, and educational attainment over time and across generations (Huang & Liang, 2016; Menardo, Balboni, & Cubelli, 2017). Through this research process this line of literature remained interesting because in a broad sense, knowing how to make a difference in your community through participation seemed to be an important type of cultural capital with intergenerational effects. There is a proven capacity to assess and even quantify and qualify the intergenerational mobility of cultural capital, following Bourdieu on three grounds; parental possession of cultural capital, transference to children, and absorption and conversion by children into success (Jæger, 2009). For the purposes of this
research this line of literature meant keeping an on-going consideration for what this capital might look like as it was being used by participants to promote cohesion between different parts of participatory structures. Looking more closely at the tight relationships between staff and participants it started to seem like the same symbols being drawn upon to consider cultural capital were also presenting a greater sense of cohesion in certain cases. Thus, there seem to be activities described in parts of the participants’ narratives that resembled pursuits of the ideals of growth and democracy as put forth by John Dewey.

In a way, what was discovered was that what some of the participants are doing is aiming towards the joint ideals of growth and democracy as put forth by John Dewey. Growth for human beings to Dewey is a result of the linking together of experiences that have a continuity in their relation to an individual’s total sense of meaning into culminations that result in an experience (Dewey, 1979). An easy example of this is one that many in this university setting will experience at the end of each school year, wherein the last few exams are taken and a gown is donned during what can be a somewhat overwhelmingly reflective experience loaded with anxiety and consideration of the future, celebrating the present in light of past accomplishments in such a way that they have the potential to all flow together to enable a full conception of selfness for an individual within that experience. That linking together of experiences as sense of self within a reflection of past accomplishment, excitement of presence, and hope and anxiety of what is to come is the basis for aiming for the ideal of growth. Growth, then, is the ideal wherein all of these experiences are tied together to represent the totality of an individual’s existence. As an ideal, it is not something that can be found, but the symbols that signify which activities
aim for it could be found in the linking together of personal experiences in such a way that they all have a sort of logic that leads to the natural conclusion of one's existence in the presence with regards to one's potentiality in the future. The other ideal to consider from Dewey is that of Democracy. Dewey is somewhat cryptic about what exactly democracy is as an ideal, but its relationship with groups and communities can be seen in the following (1927):

In a search for the conditions under which the inchoate public now extant my function democratically, we may proceed from a statement of the nature of the democratic idea in the generic social sense. From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common. Since every individual is the member of many groups, this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly and fully in connection with other groups... Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it, and where the realization of the good is such as to effect an energetic desire and effort to sustain it in being just because it is a good shared by all, there is in so far a community. The clear consciousness of communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy. (pp.147-149)

Thus, in searching for the ideal of democracy in these groups there are a few things that might evidence the activities that aim for it. First, for individuals it would be symbolized as present where the capacity of individual, in the broad sense of capacity, is directed towards participating according to the valued needs that are sustained by the groups. One way of thinking about how to find this is to say that activities aim for the democratic ideal in an individual when they conduct their participation in such a way that it represents the intersection of interests, expertise, capacity, and passion. For groups then,
it is a matter of meaningful interconnectivity in the broad conducting of public business. The place to find this interconnectivity is in narratives as presented by various group members related to their participation, self, and profession. A narrative can be thought of generally as a written or oral account that presents a setting, characters, and a plot (Jones & McBeth, 2010). A cohesive narrative then is narrative that presents different characterizations of self, i.e. personal, professional, and participatory, in such a way that they have a logic that makes sense of all characters as self in light of each other. In other words, that a narrative that makes sense of personal self by a connection to participatory or professional self.

For John Dewey these boards are potentially over structured, but acceptable activities aimed at the ideal of democracy in many ways. Conjoint perception of problems, community, and interconnection of groups stemming from individual towards social culminations. John Dewey consistently argued for definitions of things that in one form should be considered “inchoate” and in another would be “an,” which represented the disparity between activities that strived for ideals in a virtue-like practice and others that lead to disconnectedness in existence. At the end of the research process, the two ideals that seem most ready for application in these cases are those of experience and democracy (e.g. Dewey, 1927, 1979).
6 Findings and Discussion

During the process of the research focus shifted. It began with an anticipation of finding conflict and power, as outlined previously, but shifted towards asking how the functioning of participatory bodies represents some kind of activity that is good for the development of participants, in terms of efficacy and capacity to act as a participant. The aim of this section is to show the transition by following the same trajectory. It started with the initial concern with power and structure with consideration for what the literature and findings to consider were at the beginning. Then how some elements started to seem more relevant in looking deeper at the relationships and use of experience of participants to navigate structures in becoming participants. And finally to show where there may be some deeper considerations for how participants pursue ideals of growth and democracy. The findings are organized to follow this trajectory, which also represents the chronology of the theories considered during the course of the research process.

6.1 Previous Professionalization

Despite expectations from previous experience, all of the participants interviewed were already professionalized by experiences prior to participating on the particular board, committee, or commission. From the outset of the actual research project and field observations, it seemed quite obvious that the initial research and interview questions could have quite simple answers.

In asking how people are structured by their participation on local boards, committees, and commissions, it would have been easy enough to make a thesis from
discovering that they in fact are not structured by their participation, but rather that they were structured professionally or through some other flavor of experience and then used those skills to become participants in conjunction with special interests and/or expertise. Most of the interviewees and subjects that I had queried had some previous exposure to the way meetings are run with general formal agendas, Robert’s Rules in some form, and the nature of discussing items of interest in a highly structured and controlled group. This generates a sort of base professionalism that is fairly homogenous that then gets built upon by the structures of rules, appointments, subjects, topics, and other participants into what is seen on these local boards committees and commissions. Thus, there is an appearance that it is actually the participants that professionalize the participatory bodies rather than the staff or the way that they are structured.

6.2 Staff, Participants, Politicians, and Things Between

There are four main categories of individuals involved with participatory bodies. Staff, participants, politicians, and the public all played a role in the on-goings of any committee, board, or commission. Among these four groups of individuals, there were some noteworthy relationships between group memberships. The policy and activity effects of local government boards, committees, and commissions may be predictable based on the relationships participants have with city officials, the public, and each other (Fleischmann & Pierannunzi, 1990). This research project was, of course, centered on the participants. Thus, the main relationships of interest were between participants and staff, participants and elected officials, participants and the public, and participants and other participants. The relationship with the public outside of the very rare instance of public
comment in the meetings was something that wasn’t really captured in the scope of this research, thus, the focus of the following findings is centered on the other three relationships. First, it is best to look at the most consistent and visible of these relationships, which was between the staff and the participants. Then, there are considerations for the relations between the participatory bodies and elected officials while considering relationships amongst participants.

6.2.1 Staff and Participants

Staff tended to be the main source of insight and communication between any of the other three groups. Direct conflict between the objectives of staff and the objectives of board members was not observed and rarely mentioned. Although the literature seems to suggest that there would be more of a democratic technocratic divide, all of the evidence I found seems to suggest that the conflict is either washed out by the professionalism and expertise of the membership or it is so muted as to not be very visible at the local level where issues tend to be less complicated in their need for more technical expertise.

Generally speaking, one of the most consistent elements across all of the subjects encountered was a reverence, respect, and appreciation for the staff that structure, inform, and enact the official faces and spaces that all of the boards, committees, and commissions occupy. Examples of this respect and recognition can be seen in the way that Thomas, Aaron and Kurt discussed their board or commission’s staff liaison:

*Thomas: I don’t think ever, it’s all through Annie, and Annie does a great job of communicating. I feel well communicated with and informed, the way that she operates, so that is valuable. Yeah, there has been turnover*
the couple of years that I have been there at the higher levels and so that... with that turnover she has been consistent.

Aaron: The good news about the City is that staff... staff are very patient with you if you make mistakes and are very willing to kind of assist you in that, I mean they also understand that it is a volunteer organization as well and that we are not career politicians or things of that nature.

Kurt: She does, yeah, Sherry Bethel. Actually, she should have at least one assistant to run secretary, she doesn’t, its, I don’t know how she handles all of it as it is.

This respect also went the other direction. Staff often discussed participants with respect for the sacrifices of time and energy the volunteer participants put into their respective board, committee, or commission. There were also elements of respect coming from staff for how the participants enacted and symbolized democratic ideals through how they interacted with one another, which was something that was heard from multiple administrators and captured fairly well in the interview with Martin:

Martin: I like to see people debating alternatives, um... healthy debate... respectful debate. A lot of times politics is put aside to a certain extent in committees, and boards and commissions if they are really... truly... trying to get to the best outcome. So, I have always enjoyed working with boards, commissions, and committees because it is kinda grass roots democracy at its best. Grassroots problem solving.

There are a couple of things that were persistently noted about why this relationship might look different than originally conceived. One possible element being overlooked is that the respect stems from some unseen recognition of the role that each of these groups plays in legitimating the actions of the others groups. Bourdieu has claimed that commissions are often a form of theatre to act in such a way to legitimate the activities of governments by giving them a democratic appearance despite the fact that they are professionalized extensions of bureaucratic structures (2014). It does appear here that each
of the different groups recognize that the perceived legitimacy of each individual part of local government can largely effect the perceived legitimacy of the whole in the eyes of the public, but it would take a lot more evidence to sort out whether this is consciously enacted more than passively recognized and reproduced.

For participants that have been involved for long periods of time, they eventually gain enough skill, knowledge of the structure, terminology, and expertise to act as though they are staff. The presence of this phenomena was evidenced at several moments in the interview with Martin, the administrator, and Cassidy, an advisory board chair. Martin: “You have people that have served on boards and commissions so long that they can talk just like a staff person.” Whereas Cassidy’s self-reference confirms this: “…although I have been called the best unpaid city staffer they have ever had.” This was something that came out in discussions following meetings, as seen in this note:

A follow up conversation with Susan, the staff liaison, regarding the comment Martin had made in an interview the other day. Susan’s take on it was that chairs in particular that have been around for a while can really make things easier for staff by serving as an additional voice to speak to complex issues and processes, which saves staff from having to explain things in meetings. They do reiterate things related to process in the materials they distribute, but it seems a long serving participant can really help bring clarity to the issue or process.

There were several responses that signify that the tendency to turn staff-like in the way participants conduct themselves leads to a reduction of the potential for conflict between professional staff and volunteer participants. One explanation for this is that the boards have become structured in parallel with broader labor and social trends entailing increasingly specialized and professionalized individuals, which in this case act more like
staff in the long run (e.g. Wilensky, 1964). This is an interesting finding in light of the original hypothesis of conflict between technocracy and democracy. This makes sense because technocratic operations are dependent upon expertise that is presumably gained through experience of some sort, which doesn’t preclude it from being gained through participatory democratic processes. It is also possible that this relates simply to the elements of age, which would hold that with greater experience and free time comes the ability to better understand the rules, processes, and nuance of specific issues that get brought before participatory bodies. However, there are younger participants that know a lot about the structure in terms of the rules, tools, and processes they have at their disposal to address issues brought before them. Thus, it does not seem to correlate with age, but has more to do with familiarity of the language and the technical aspects of any one specific board. Then these are elements that become more integrated with length of involvement and help to perpetuate the tenure of participants. Solidifying this would come from knowing when the long tenured participants originally gained knowledge of the rules and issues with staff-like levels of technical understanding, because it may in fact be that they took the time to understand technical details early in their participatory careers, which enabled them to be involved for so long. This would also be confirmed by tracking a few of the younger participants that have taken the time to understand the rules and structure really well and seeing if they do in fact remain participants for longer or at a higher rate than other subjects whom lack substantiative knowledge about the structure. Other studies in the same area have found that although demographics like age are easier to get from survey data and somewhat predictive of participation, civic skills in terms of knowledge of
the structure and substance and local government bodies, can be more accurate for predicting who participates and how long they may be involved (Rebori, 2007), which means that there is ground to extend this finding in further research.

6.2.2 Elected Officials and Participants

When it comes to the relationship of city councils and participatory bodies, the two way flow of information is a really mixed bag, which was viewed by the subjects to vary greatly with political and personality changes on city councils. One the one hand, participatory bodies have a very high rate of having their motions and recommendations agreed with and carried through their respective city councils (Rebori, 2011). On the other, most of the participants noted the absence of city councilors at their committee, board, or commission meetings. However, some of the participants, particularly the most long tenured, could cite instances where they or other board members took the initiative to approach councilors. There were also moments in the interviews where participants spoke of city councilors with a level of empathy for how much they really have to consider in light of how often they agree with the decisions of participatory bodies. A good example of this came up in the interview with Aaron:

Um, I kind of get the impression that a lot of the stuff, that there is so much going on for a councilor that ah, well I don’t want to say that they rubber stamp it, but they do, they take the input of the commissions and agree with it generally speaking. I don’t know how they can take in all the information and try to process it, to be honest with you...I mean if you think about it the city council is volunteer and there is so much stuff that needs to be done, they depend on the boards and commissions and there are only so many people in the community that want to help out, it’s tough to get people to not overcommit.
This establishes that these participatory bodies can act as an extension of the city government in that they serve as sort of deliberative reserves to consider issues that a council may not have time to review at greater depth. Thus, the participatory bodies’ relationships with elected officials can be more lateral than hierarchical. Further, there was evidence of this lateral flow of influence being supported by councilors being charged with the solicitation and selection of some participants and some councilors approaching participants to gain insights and/or prompt the participatory bodies to consider particular policies or programs, which was highlighted in the way that Thomas and Aaron told the story of how they were solicited to participate by councilors:

_Thomas_: “After that presentation, ah, one of the councilors said ‘hey, you should get on that board, we need people who think like that’.”

_Aaron_: “well one of the councilors said um, ya know, ‘we have boards and commissions if you are interested take a look, we love to have people involved’ and I thought hey that’s a good idea.”

This is an area where further research could benefit our understanding of this relationship by sorting out what really effects these relationships and whether or not there is significant variation in terms of the form or specific charge of the participatory body or the political leanings of the councilors and how they perceive specific participants over time. In other words, in what cases and under what conditions are the relationships actually lateral between participatory bodies and elected officials?

There were also cases of a lack of discussing specific issues with councilors to see if there was interest on the council for specific policies and issues, which was something that Kurt had mentioned having brought up with his fellow commission members:
"But, well, ‘we’ll have to see about that’ or ‘well that would have to go to the council,’ we don’t know if they would be open to that.’ So, ‘how do we find out if they are open to that?’ And they just look at me like ‘oh, I don’t know.’"

Thus, a deeper explanation of how the lateral relationships develop between participatory bodies and councils is that these somewhat ambiguous relationships with councils are one directional by default, then become more collaborative and lateral with more knowledgeable, connected, and engaged participants. The effect of knowledgeable, experienced, and connected participants is where the focus started to shift to some of the deeper on-goings in this research process. In the following section a greater focus will be had on this relational capacity of the participants themselves and what the implications of this might be.

6.3 Social and Cultural Capital

Time and the accumulation of experiences related to previous participations and associations mattered in how the participants built relationships with other group memberships. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital may help us understand the power and place of this accumulated experience. There are some commonalities between participants, their educational backgrounds, and their parents’ education levels that suggest an element of cultural capital being built up intergenerationally and used by participants. Compared to the general population, participants had unusually high levels of both individual and ancestral education. See Table 1.
Table 1: Participant and Parental Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Parental Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>B.S. Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>B.S Accounting (Father)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee &amp;</td>
<td>M.B.A.</td>
<td>B.S. Business (Mother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>B.S. Religion</td>
<td>B.S. Economics (Father)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Advisory Board)</td>
<td>M.S. Intercultural Studies</td>
<td>B.S. Home Economics (Mother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PhD. (ABD) Political Science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>B.S. Geography</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Administrator)</td>
<td>M.U.R.P. Urban and Regional Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Advisory Board)</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J.D.</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurt</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Commission)</td>
<td>M.A., M.Div., M.S. Education</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PhD. Intercultural Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Commission)</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J.D.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every participant interviewed had some sort of advanced degree, which was often related in some way to the area in which they participated in civic affairs. It was also clear from conversations with staff and participants outside of meetings and interviews that the possession of advanced degrees in fields related to the specialty of the participatory bodies is really common. Although the data may not be there to conclusively say that there is a sort of Bourdieusian reproduction of capital in terms of the participants’ education and expertise, it does seem suggestive enough to warrant further consideration. Given Bourdieu’s take on the historical and present role of the commission, which treats the commission as a form of legitimating theater for public action (Bourdieu, 2014), there may
be grounds to label these local government bodies as elite political processes (e.g. Domhoff, 2006), which would be consistent with previous research revealing the prevalence of higher education levels and more advantaged socio-economic status of local government participants in general (Verba, 1995). However, stopping the theoretical inquiry with elitism may not be as beneficial, because it leads back to the idea that we need more comprehensive participation and does little to reveal the current value of these participatory bodies as they are composed now. Granted that more comprehensive participation would be beneficial, this research attempted to look further into what aspects of the current composition of participants would benefit future participants by being unpacked further.

Returning to the idea of cultural capital and allowing that there is an amount of cultural capital that enabled participants to effectively conduct activities, it became increasingly interesting through this research project to see how different participants would utilize their cultural capital by expressing how they navigated structure and displaying their dispositions that enable them to operate in this field. The most noteworthy references toward utilizing experiences and knowledge from the structure came from the two longest tenured participants. These two participants spoke openly of the cultural and educational distinctions between themselves and other, less-engaged participants. In Cassidy’s case the use of cultural capital was to take an ability to understand and interpret staff reports to establish rapport and train incoming city councilors, which is an act above and beyond any of her official roles:
Cassidy: "since then when new city councilors come on to the job, which they did this time because we got three new city councilors on the job, we try to get them to come out for a cup of coffee and I go through a staff report. And, I say 'well ok, this is how these are put together and the only part of this whole staff report that is of any importance whatsoever is the recommendation.' Now they'll give you three alternatives, which say that the city council should do A, B, or C. Everything else is just either a justification for the recommendation that they want you to make, supposedly facts. Well, sort of maybe, kind of facts. Supposed to be facts. Not necessarily all in facts, however, which is one of things that you seem to discover about staff reports."

Then, in Kurt's case, understanding the structure and means of gauging support while utilizing previous experiences enabled him to speak to some of the core differences that he saw as flaws within the city's system as opposed to other places where he had served:

Kurt: So again, being a little more patient, strategizing, talking, going in and formally sounding out some of the other stakeholders. Will they work with this? Will they see this as a priority? Would they see the benefit in it? Do they have somebody they can take and send? What about research? What about a qualified, not just an interested person, but somebody who is qualified that can actually begin to do some research and some studies that can come back and make an evidenced based report to the county commissioners, to the city council, to the... with some concrete interventions where we can generate a list of alternatives of what we can do, but then to what cri... who is going to set up the criteria that we use to evaluate these to make a recommendation?... I have been disappointed at the lack of understanding of administration in this city, on all levels of this city, the good people might now the politics, know the old families, know the money lines, know where the real flow chart is under the table, ya know, but actually knowing theories, practice strategies, um, analysis of administration, um, they might have heard of a couple neat programs and bought into them, but they bought into them to be told what to do, how to fix their problem, rather than to pick up some strategies and learn philosophies and apply them to the local situation, making the modifications that are necessary. So, very little administrative training, or philosophy. And, of course, ya know when you have a city and a county that 90% of your functionaries are volunteer, (laughs) but then back to
meritocracy, ya know, but if all of your volunteers are there just for low level 'name on a resume' kind of reasoning...

The evidence for the role of cultural capital in its multiple states in these quotes can be recognized by the ability to ask pertinent questions, share knowledge of structural elements, and possess the knowledge, confidence, and alternative experience to highlight systematic differences between the participatory bodies in these cases when compared to other places. What this shows is that there is something powerful about the accumulation and use of previous experience by way of giving them an interconnectivity between professional, participatory, and personal experiences and then employing them into present participatory situations. In narratives provided by the subjects it appeared that there is an ability to use cultural capital to make further connections in light of elements of associational social capital to add depth to its role in understanding policy processes. This is where it becomes useful to consider these narrative elements in light of pursuing broader ideals.

6.4 Finding Democracy in Participation Narrative

In a way what these participants are doing is aiming towards the joint ideals of growth and democracy as put forth by John Dewey. Where the ideals of democracy and growth being pursued started to become apparent was during each interview when a question was asked that forced participants to consider their own story about becoming involved. By far the most enjoyable prompt for each of the participants was some variation of ‘tell me the story of how you became involved.’ This prompt seemed to get all of the participants to speak to their own narrative. The way that these personal participation
narratives unfolded also seemed to speak a lot to the level of continuity there is between the participants as private individuals and as active public participants. There seemed to be two distinct types of narrative here. The first related the story to professional identity and community representation and the second related the story to a more central part of their existence. Two of my interview subjects really emphasized a history that solidified not only their drive to participate, but moreover, their need to be active in local government. Here, for example, is Cassidy:

*I went to college at UC Berkeley, in the heyday. So, everybody I knew was active in everything, we were marching and I had a little apartment... overlooking Fifth Avenue and I could watch the SWAT team come in and their gas canisters that would go by my window, ya know, chocolate cake and tear gas don't really go that well together. But, anyway, I was just in an environment where everybody was always active somehow or another. And, my parents were very active and they were active in the... um, non-violent anti-nuclear era and we marched in New York and we marched on the U.N. and we marched on Washington D.C., and this all well I was twelve or thirteen, something like that. So, it has never dawned on me that we shouldn't be active. I mean, I don't even understand that concept. I mean if you live someplace and you like the place that you live, then you should do whatever you can to make it better... You know, I really do like this town, I have been hanging around for a long time and I am willing to put some effort in trying to make it better. And, I don't expect anything back from the city. Well you just do... what is necessary to do."

From this narrative it appears that to Cassidy there is very little distinction to be made between her current participation and herself as seen by this brief historical narrative, which might signal a cohesiveness that puts all of these historical elements together as “an experience”, in the words of Dewey (1927), with regard to her past, current and potential future participation by making sense of where the drive to become a participant began. Another element from Dewey that seems applicable here is his definition of inquiry, which is a requisite of growth. From Dewey, inquiry can be thought of as the process of sense
making, different than traditional use of it as the pursuit of knowledge. What inquiry really entails is the making whole of disparate occurrences by minimizing doubt, which is never fully eliminated assuming we don’t have access to general or universal truths (Dewey, 1991). Another useful way to think of inquiry in these terms is that it is the process of creation of connections that enable just enough understanding for its objects to be useful and meaningful in light of the larger wholes of experience. Thus inquiry, in this sense, is evidenced by the certainty one displays in a personal and professional narrative that makes sense of the whole of experiences for an individual imbedded within a broader society. It is all about finding the connections within experience that are presented without doubt. This is something that looks different when applied to broader senses of self in participation narratives. However, the idea to pay attention to in any participation narrative displaying growth and democracy as ideals pursued is that the way elements of the narrative are produced make sense by way of doubt-less interconnectivity with broader wholes. The other participant to have such a closely related narrative was also around during the civil rights era. Kurt’s response to this prompt, however, related his drive to participate to longer running historical genealogical story:

*Well, my heritage is German-Jewish, so it’s called survival, ya know, basically, I mean my grandparents came here escaped. My parents are first generation, I am second and for us a lot of times you had to able to move at the drop of a hat... well we moved within that area with the big programs, the big programme of Freiburg in 1501, but we are from that area and then in the war as well, even my family that had come here, one of my uncles was with the French underground because we speak German and French without any trouble, but we have been a resistance family for centuries (laughs). And, the ah, I think that with the civil rights, ya know, I mean I was in high school between the civil rights era and it seemed like ‘of course we have to be involved.’ Jewish involvement is usually done in one of two ways, you either, and it doesn’t mean how religious you are or*
how observant, we don't say religious as Jews, we say observant, but ya know, the ah, you either become one of the pious, who are one of the lambs who walk into the ovens or become a partisan and guess which one I chose? (laughs heartily) We are the underground fighters, ya know, in the forests, in the swamps, and the underground... Dostoevsky’s Notes to the Underground Man. Ya know it's just like... Yeah, it's going on...

This tie between personal narrative and participation narrative is something that seemed to be juxtaposed by the other approach to the same prompt, which was more common and related participation to some form of networking or sense making from a professional standpoint. This was seen in the stories told by Aaron, Thomas, and Angela. Wherein, they seemed to be attracted or recruited based on some expertise or professional experience, which was not as clearly related directly to sense of self in the interviews and further returns us to a potential application of associational social capital theory. For both Thomas and Aaron they had the common link of gaining the critical mass to participate through the chamber of commerce. In Thomas’s case it was through a particular stance on Park’s issues:

Yeah, the in, the primary in was through the chamber of commerce, I participated, my first year here, three years ago, participated in the chambers leadership program and so during the leadership programs, of course we met with, connected with for a semester long, um, once a week, or maybe once a month, various entities. Governments, commercial, voluntary, and so one of them entailed us going to the city’s chambers and meeting with about half of the councilors and we were tasked with presenting to them on any issue that we wanted to present, ya know, given our couple of minutes that you are allowed in a normal meeting, um, kind of a scenario, right, kind of a hypothetical set up, and so I decided to present on, I scoured the city’s webpage of... to figure out what issue I thought was pertinent, and so I picked parks, and so I looked at the boards and I said 'look at parks and recreation and let’s see what going,' Then I proposed some planning, kind of master planning of ideas for the, ah, a bridge, so a couple of years after putting the bridge up, what are some of the issues that should be addressed? And are there other places that have done other things? That kind of stuff. That was fun, but that uh, after that
presentation, ah, one of the councilors said 'hey, you should get on that board, we need people who think like that.' Um, so that was the direct in, but as a political science professor, I am always looking for ways to connect with the community instead of just remaining in my ivory tower, right, so, I do, I absolutely value integrating into my community and being a part of it. That's, with four kids, that's the one way I have been able to do it, on a consistent basis.

As opposed to Aaron’s participation narrative:

Yeah so we have a leadership program, which is basically put on the chamber of commerce... So, it all started with that. We did a tour, well we did public policy day and we went down to the city council and they just, well one of the councilors said um, ya know, 'we have boards and commissions if you are interested take a look, we love to have people involved' and I thought hey that's a good idea. And I applied for a position, which the city is notoriously slow in approving those, so it just sat there for a year and half, ah, and then in the interim it was about, well it was summer and I was looking for something to do, so I called the Common Cause and said I would like to find an opportunity to volunteer and I became a loaned executive with them. So, I was a loaned exec with Common Cause for seven or eight months and then a board position, well I talked with the CEO, and he said, well I said I am looking for a board position and then I started that. And then shortly after that [the tourism tax board] from the city called and Um, I joined that board and then this company does a big thing with the county food share. We have a food drive every June and um, I kinda dove into that head first I guess and so we created quite a few things there just to try to raise money for the food bank and they approached me and said hey this community services and housing commission is being formed and you have been a strong advocate of ours, so would you have any interest in joining that board and I thought it was a good idea and I reached out to the staff liaison and she told me some information about it and the rest is history.

And then Angela’s participation story relating interests, law school, and finding a way to participate that related those on the city’s webpage:

I was still in law school and I was really interested in finding out some more about human rights and there were some things that I was doing in one of the law clinics that dealt with immigration rights and a question came up with the city and when I was doing the search on the city
webpage, I notice that there were some commissions and I said 'oh, let's see what all these are.' And so, I just opened up several of them in addition to the human rights one, and I opened up a parks one and a library one, just some random ones to kind of get an idea of what they were about. And, of them all, the human rights one just seemed to sing with me, so I looked to see when the next meeting was. I sent an e-mail to Sherry, since she was on as the contact, since I didn't know if it was allowed, or if the public were allowed to attend those events, so I went, and she said it was fine, so I showed up and had an idea of how the event hap, or the meetings were run and it seemed interesting. So, when I went back to the webpage I saw that my area was, had a, was open, in fact it had been open for a while, so I applied and um, about two, three months later that's when they, the city council voted and I [was confirmed]...

This finding may be related to generational differences of the participants, or simply age wherein the older one gets as a participant, the more cohesive the participation narrative becomes relating participation to sense of self. There is something to be said for the professional accomplishments of the two retired participants in relation to Maslow's hierarchy of need, which would imply that the time and energy needed to reflect and compile a cohesive narrative is enabled by the fulfillment of all other needs in a middle class professional concept of the hierarchy (Gratton, 1980). Which supports the idea that one of the aims of participation ought to be the development of cohesive senses of self as evidenced by participation narratives. There is something significant about the cohesiveness of participation and personal narratives. This can help clarify means by which we aim for democratic ideals.
7 Recommendations and Further Research

This study is by no means a large N inquiry aimed at developing general claims. Rather, the focus of this research was to gain insights into the types of questions we need to start asking to better understand what parts of local governments have to say about democracy as an ideal and a practice, which can be treated as an ideal more than a mere political structure. As such it is the hope to leave bridges to extend findings and more-developed research questions into other areas concerned with democratic participation. At its base this study is about discovering symbols that might matter in the conducting of better policy and institutional analysis. With this aim in mind, this study did find that it is important to pay attention to how relationships between individuals are conceived and utilized by policy actors (in this case participants) to be effective at using experiences to navigate structures.

A large limitation of this study is that it is not oriented towards developing epistemologically based claims, but moreover about gaining experience in what matters to those who participate in governance that may evidence ways to, not only improve, but also start seeing reflexive effects of participants and participatory structures. Given the selection of field sites and participants and their geographic limitations, this study may indeed look entirely different in other settings, which it is strongly encouraged by the researcher to attempt. Areas that seem to be most applicable are governmental organizations that require a similar level of experience and expertise with potentially horizontal structures. There are many more of these types of participatory bodies in local and collaborative governance that
would add to our understanding of citizens’ participation by being further investigated with similar aims of grasping for the effects on the participants.

As the findings suggest, it is important to look at not only the relationships among participants and other groups involved, but also the amount of initiative taken by individual members of participatory bodies. It’s not only the mere association, but the strength of the connection that needs to be considered if gauging the efficacy of these groups on broader policy and activity outcomes. The way to do this might be to obtain the personal narratives of active participants in different policy settings. Something to recommend to local government actors found in this study is that the interconnectivity of personal and participatory narratives and the relationships held by participants with other groups are areas where efforts may be focused to increase the efficacy of these participatory bodies. The best way to promote this type of personal, professional, and participatory growth through interconnectivity of narratives without generating more barriers for attracting comprehensive participation is something that needs more research and experimentation.

Interconnectivity also partially explains why some actors appear to be more efficacious than others, as such there may be grounds to provide this insight to participants. The interconnectivity of personal, professional, and participatory narratives could also be predictive as it symbolizes a type of power to drive policy and activity within and between groups. It is not clear yet what matters most in trying to build this interconnectivity, but it is something that policy actors may do well to experiment with, which may help to bolster the strength of participation for newer and less specialized participants in relating elements of personal interest through these narratives. There are scholars that have recommended
the inclusion of the ideas of growth and inquiry in the curricula of public management to help further meaningful participation (Evans, 2000): Thus, what this research project has done is to unpack what inquiry, growth, and democracy look like when they are actively, even if unconsciously, pursued ideals by participants in local government.

There has been a call to revisit the ideas of rhetorical analysis in public policy analysis and process research (i.e. Fischer & Gottweis, 2012), which return us to Aristotelian ideas of understanding the roles of pathos, logos, and ethos present in both policy development and policy analysis. What this research has shown, by way of the import of interconnectivity of narratives as evidencing Deweyan inquiry as sense making, is the importance of considering mythos. Mythos is commonly thought of in rhetoric as a type of appeal to higher powers or mythical things, but a more accurate translation is to think of it as the element makes sense of plots in light of broader wholes (Wuthnow, 2009). Where logos deals with logical relationships between objects and ideas, ethos deals with authoritative or power laden relationships, and pathos is concerned with emotional appeals, mythos may need to return as a tool for understanding rhetoric and policy processes because it relates the other three elements to broader wholes by making sense of their connections.

Given the finding that the relationship between authorizing councils and participatory bodies can be lateral more than horizontal, it would help to further relate the interconnectivity of participants and their narratives with the effect on policy efficacy by applying this method and its questions to other forms of government that are more explicitly horizontal. An easy field to do this in would be in collaborative governance,
which stems from a need for horizontal relationships to resolve complex social, environmental, and economic issues (E. Weber, 2012). Further, looking in this field may help provide depth to the role of participation narrative because much work has been done to shed light on what elements within these governmental arrangements matter in terms of processes and outcomes (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Rogers & Weber, 2010).

Another potential extension for this research project is to focus more on flipping the common questions related to participatory governments. It is often asked what individuals bring to particular participatory arrangements. However, it may be worth continuing to ask how participation effects an individual’s experiences and provides them with further capacities and dispositions to act effectively and connectedly, which is where this research project ended up. There is still a lot to be discovered about what really makes participants effective in a myriad of different settings and it is something that would benefit staff, participants, and academics alike to understand further. This may be useful in continued local and collaborative governance research because in light of research showing the declines of participation and utilization of social capital (i.e. Putnam, 1995), it may be a matter of providing insight into what the perceived costs and benefits to individuals in becoming participants. Further, it would help to give more substance to our understanding of what the practicality of pursuing ideals of democracy and growth is and give us a better idea of what these pursuits look like in practice.
8 Conclusion

In the end, this research project has attempted to constantly dig deeper into professionalized forms of citizen participation. The trajectory of the research process was far from linear. Hopefully the reflexive pursuit of the potential deeper meanings of citizen participation has been made clear. Participants were already structured to operate within participatory bodies. Where conflict was expected between staff and participants, respect was found. Participatory bodies can become horizontal in relation to city councils with experienced and connected participants. Participants seem to become effective by developing abilities to make connections between personal, professional, and participatory selves and between other groups around common problems, which is evidenced by cohesive narratives that account for these elements. Further, there may be some explanatory and predictive power in looking at the roles of social and cultural capital. Lastly, some of the evidence suggests that effective participants are those that aim for the ideals of growth and democracy. Notably, the public was not present in these field sites, which was somewhat expected given the literature around declining public participation (e.g. Putnam, 1995). There is still a lot to be learned from continued research around specific forms of citizen participation, particularly amongst the wealth of local governments present. This study has shed light on some of the elements that may be beneficial to consider for future research.
9 References


10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Observation Protocol

**Observational Protocol**

*Structuring and Legitimacy in Local Board, Committee, and Commission Participation: Participant Interviews and Field Research*

**Research Property of Trevor Plendl**

Under the supervision of principle investigator: Dr. Allison Hurst

Any contents herein are gathered for the sole purpose of the academic research of Trevor Plendl. As such the notes contained are strictly for use as data by the aforementioned researcher and are not generated as artifacts to show the conducting of the public's business, the subjects and the settings being described and analyzed in these notes are all available alternatively as public record. These thoughts, notes, and perceptions are all the intellectual property of the researcher, all rights reserved.

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10.2 Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Structuring and Legitimacy in Local Board, Committee, and Commission Participation: Participant Interviews and Field Research

Date: Time: Place:

Interviewee: Interviewer: Trevor Plendl

Position of Interviewee:

Brief description of project:
The purpose of this research is looking into the various roles of individuals and their preferences for processes and outcomes related to the structure of the process they are involved in and the processes and outcomes of that formal structure. This is being done in the hopes of generating a useful artifact for citizens, administrators, and councilors involved in similar participatory processes by providing insight into how these processes work.

Questions:

• How long have you had your position on the board/committee?
• Tell me the story of how you came to be involved in the board/committee?
• In what ways have your original goals for joining changed through your involvement?
• In what ways have your goals for involvement remained the same through the course of your involvement?
• What were your thoughts about the process and structure of the committee/board when you first joined?
• In what ways have your thoughts about the process and structure changed through the course of your involvement?
• In what ways have your thoughts about the process and structure remained the same through the course of your involvement?
• Is there something you like most about the process/structure of these meetings?
• Is there something you like least?
• What are some of the terms (words) you have learned to use, or notice yourself using more often after having been involved in this process?
• Have you noticed any changes in yourself about the way you communicate with others outside of this process?
• Now, without naming names, is there a person or group of people that you feel exert more control in the meetings than others involved? (Y/N)
• What kinds of things have you noticed about the way this control appears?
• How do you think they get to control the progression, language, topic, content of meetings generally?
• Is there anything else related to what we have discussed that you would really like to say more about?
• Do you have any questions for me?

Research Property of Trevor Plendl

Any contents herein are gathered for the sole purpose of the academic research of Trevor Plendl for the purposes of a graduate thesis project under the supervision of Dr. Allison Hurst. As such the notes contained are strictly for use as data by the aforementioned researcher and are not generated as artifacts to show the conducting of the public’s business, the subjects and the settings being described and analyzed in these notes are all available alternatively as public record. These thoughts, notes, and perceptions are all the intellectual property of the researcher, all rights reserved.
10.3 Appendix 3: Common Application

Application for Committee

Applications may be submitted in confidence subject to Oregon public records law. Applications of those recommended for appointment will be included in a public city council meeting.

Please answer the below questions.

Have you attended a meeting of this committee specifically? Y / N

I have served on the following citizen advisory committees, civic, charitable or other organizations (include dates & length of services):

Please explain what you believe you can contribute to the advisory board you are interested in serving on. Be brief, but be as specific as possible.
### 10.4 Appendix 4: Demographic Information from Participants

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