INNOVATIVE CONSULTATION PROCESSES AND THE CHANGING ROLE OF ACTIVISM

by Lyn Carson

***ABSTRACT**[i]*

Innovative forms of public participation challenge the idea that activists must inevitably be caught up in consultation methods that are tokenistic or manipulative. Citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polls and televotes—these methods hold promise for enhanced representativeness and offer the added benefit of creating deliberative spaces for sound decision making. These robust methods are described and their relevance to collective action is discussed. Activists are advised to engage in reflective practice and to relinquish the ineffective role of committee member in situations where representativeness is a requirement. Instead of claiming to represent the entire community, activists are encouraged to adopt more appropriate and satisfying roles including that of *expert*.

BACKGROUND

Citizens are claiming increased input into government decisions and governments are reciprocating by providing more opportunities. Daily newspapers contain advertisements calling for written submissions, notifications of public meetings and invitations to nominate for advisory groups or consultative committees. These

traditional forms of consultation are often designed to establish a mandate for a range of government decisions. Bureaucrats, elected representatives and community members are less than impressed by public gatherings (ie public meetings or public hearings) that seem to attract 'the incensed' and 'the articulate'. These events do little to improve confidence in public consultation methods. Formal (written) submissions give 'the highly-informed' and 'better educated' a chance to cast their collective writings into the policy-making wind. Advisory committees are dismissed as refuges for political appointees or, at best, an irrelevance to all but those groups who are fortunate enough to be represented (Curtin, undated). Dissatisfaction abounds.

Activists run the risk of being co-opted when they are invited onto powerful committees, often agreeing to confidentiality requirements that serve only to silence them. The ultimate risk is that activists will be managed out of existence. While 'the chosen few' are selected or elected onto committees, the general public is ignored and this exclusion of citizens from decision making leads to cries of a democratic deficit. Inclusion of (selected or elected) activists on advisory committees can be questioned in terms of its democratic legitimacy, particularly if the aim of the committee is to increase citizen involvement or improve representativeness in the decision-making process.

The author is a former local government councillor, a long-term activist, a university lecturer and researcher, and a practitioner in the area of community

consultation. Having assumed various roles and noted the strengths and weaknesses of each, I want to invite activists to join the debate about the crisis of legitimacy—a crisis that exists whenever representativeness is falsely claimed. In doing so, this paper also provides some resources that might be useful for democrats engaged in collective action. This paper has two aims: (1) to describe some innovative consultation processes that are steadily gaining acceptance as confidence in them grows; and (2) to speculate on the most effective roles for activists in an idealised democratic environment. The paper is based on an assumption that intelligence, sensitivity and good will are available to us all and that what is needed is clear information and an opportunity for debate in order for good decision making to occur. To begin, I want to offer a framework for discussing the changing roles of activism.

ROLES OF ACTIVISM

Bill Moyer classifies social change activists as rebels, reformers, change agents and citizens (Moyer 1990). A brief summary of these roles is described in Table 1.

Effective Citizen	Effective Reformer	Effective Change Agent	Effective Rebel
Promotes positive values, principles, symbols eg democracy, freedom, justice, nonviolence—eg via consumer rights or shareholder democracy.	Uses official mainstream system & institutions eg courts, parliaments, corporations to have movement's values adopted into law, policies, and conventional wisdom. Via lobbying, lawsuits, referenda, candidates. Professional opposition organisations. Also monitoring role.	People power: educate, convince, involve majority of citizens & whole society in change process. Mass-based grassroots organisations, networks. Places issue on political agenda. Promotes long-term strategies and tactics. Empowers grassroots. Promotes alternatives and paradigm shifts.	Protests: says 'NO!' to violation of positive values. Nonviolent direct action & attitude incl. civil disobedience. Targets powerholders. Places problems in public spotlight. Exciting, courageous, risky.

Moyer (1990)

TABLE 1 Moyer's (Effective) Roles of Activism

Moyer thinks all roles are essential for social change and that we swap roles throughout our lives and often occupy more than one. The citizen role is the one that is most ignored. The citizen role can be located in the centre of innovative forms of community consultation—those methods that attempt to involve, effectively, a broad cross-section of various communities in political decision making.

Within each of these roles is a further classification. Moyer sees each as having a positive and negative manifestation which he labels *effective* and *ineffective*. As an effective rebel, for example, an activist might target powerholders using non-violent direct action. As an ineffective rebel, an activist might adopt tactics

without any realistic strategy or might act out his/her personal emotions regardless
of the movement's needs. The ineffective roles are described in Table 2.

Ineffective Citizen	Ineffective Reformer	Ineffective Change Agent	Ineffective Rebel
Naive citizen unquestioned acceptance of official policies. Blind obedience to government and country.	Promotes only minor reforms acceptable to powerholders, not paradigm shifts. Own organisation is hierarchical, patriarchal. Organisation more important than movement. Co-option has occurred— identifying with powerholders not movement's grassroots.	Utopian: promotes visions of perfection or alternatives in isolation from practical, political & social struggle. Promotes only minor reform. Tunnel vision: advocates single approach while opposing alternative strategies. Ignores personal issues & needs of activists.	Anti-authority, anti-organisational rules & structures. Identifies as radical militant, a lonely voice on society's fringe. Any means necessary incl. violence. Tactics without realistic strategy. Victim attitude & behaviour. Strident—acts outs personal needs & emotions regardless of movement's needs.

Moyer (1990)

TABLE 2 Moyer's (Ineffective) Roles of Activism

Ineffective roles can only be recognised and altered if a process of reflective
practice occurs (Schön 1983). Though I have always found Moyer's four roles to
be a useful explanation for the roles enacted in social change, I considered that one
was missing. In collaboration with Kath Fisher we identified a further *inquirer*
role that is fundamental to a movement's development.

This inquirer role is outlined in Table 3 and is a role that is sorely neglected within
activist circles. The role can be neglected within activists' immediate sphere of

interest even though activists appreciate the value of inquiry in the broader political milieu—for example, inquiry is a cherished democratic process that is expected of the media, the judiciary and opposing political parties. If inquiry is fundamental to nation-state governance, it is just as requisite for the internal *modus operandi* of social-profit organisations. This can be defined as small group democracy (Blaug 1999; Gastil 1993) or inner democracy (Metzger 1990). The critical inquirer dares to question the principles, values and assumptions of a social movement; puts new ideas on the table for consideration; reflects on his/her own practice as well as the movement's practices and the wider socio-political context.

Inquirer Role[ii]	
Effective Inquirer	Ineffective Inquirer
Asks strategic questions, engages in active listening and responds meaningfully. Promotes need for genuine inquiry, evaluation & reflective practice. Respectful questioning of movement's ethics, direction & achievements—incl. wellbeing of members. Stimulates debate on movement's underlying philosophy and principles. Could include participatory research.	Questions without listening or responding meaningfully. Questions disrupt rather than deepen understanding. Undermines movement as persistent antagonist. Obstructs progress through negativity. Inquiry is promoted as more important than action. Research that is completed for its own sake, not to effect change.

TABLE 3 Inquirer Role

It is from this inquirer role that challenging questions can be asked. For example, some evaluation questions that could be asked of a group or organisation might be:

Evaluation Questions
- How do you view the general public? How involved should they be in decisions that affect your cause?
- Do you consider that your own domain of collective action should be democratic? If so, is it?
- Is power shared? How inclusive is your group?
- How does your group engage in deliberate thinking about its actions with a view to improvement?
- How much blame for non-achievement of goals does your group attribute to external forces?

Some reflective questions that relate to one's own experience might be:

Self-Reflective Questions
- What influenced you to become an activist?
- What are the fundamental values that inform your activism (ie what is most important to you)?
- What assumptions do you make about the way ordinary citizens view your cause?
- What are your beliefs in relation to the current state of affairs of your cause (ie why is the world in the state that it is)?
- How do your beliefs, values and assumptions [iii] influence the activist role you play?

Becoming a reflective activist will involve anticipating events (reflection *for* action), developing an awareness of what is occurring in each moment (reflection *in* action) as well as evaluating after the event (reflection *on* action)—and reflection is not just about *action* (Schön 1983). Reflective practice involves consideration of ethical and moral dimensions and 'locates any analysis of personal action within wider socio-historical and politico-cultural contexts' (Hatton & Smith 1995: 35). However, an examined life is surely the only one worth living.

CREATING DEMOCRATIC SITES

Citizens are becoming cynical about their participation in a system that provides an opportunity every few years to vote for pre-selected candidates who represent political parties that are increasingly indistinguishable. Those minor parties that *are* distinguishable have the electoral odds stacked against them. Though it could be assumed that citizens would collapse into apathy given this scenario, they continue to want to exercise their rights and responsibilities (Carson, 2000).

Citizens have a right to be heard and a right to influence decisions that affect them, and citizens have a responsibility to share in the burden. To do so is to decentralise power and to diffuse the influence of powerful elites. Equality, social justice—these are moral dimensions that any self-respecting activist would hold dear. Decision making, then, is something to be shared—not just restricted to those who would profit from them or those who believe themselves to be superior to others. The latter belief underpinned the creation of representative government which was meant to protect the interests of wealthy elites (Manin 1997). It has succeeded.

Powerful elites have always been wary of the masses or 'the mob' and they are not alone. Activists too, are known to have doubts about the competence of citizens. In recent research in relation to consultation on waste management (Hendriks *et al.* forthcoming), activists were quoted as saying:

- *The community is generally ignorant and doesn't wish to look at problems. The disinterested have such busy lifestyles and they tend to ignore the issues.*
- *The public have a limited capacity—they do not understand the message.*

Advocates of participatory democracy (eg Barber 1984; Dryzek 1990) are less wary. However, those who support genuine participation by the wider population would still harbour fear of an uninformed citizenry or decisions based on populism—ie leadership through inadequate opinion polling (Barber 1992; Walton 1999). Therefore, any deliberative consultation method that is meant to facilitate civic engagement must be able to be accommodated within busy lives. How can this best occur?

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION

Considerable effort has gone into the creation of principles for effective consultation (Carson 1999, UK Cabinet Office 2000, UK Local Government Association 2000). Ten principles can be identified (Carson & Gelber 2001). The first two principles relate to the important need for enhanced representation and the need to build deliberative capacity. These two principles—representativeness and deliberation—will be taken up again later.

1. *Make it inclusive*
2. *Make it interactive and deliberative*
3. *Make it timely*
4. *Make it community-focussed*
5. *Make it effective*
6. *Make it matter*
7. *Make it well facilitated*
8. *Make it open, fair and subject to evaluation*
9. *Make it cost effective*
10. *Make it flexible*

Referring back to Moyer's roles, change agents and reformers have important roles to play in the establishment and monitoring of these principles. Change agents are the activists who are most likely to be concerned with people power—involving the majority of citizens in the change process. One task of reformers would be to monitor these change processes as they become institutionalised.

CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK

Having determined the essential principles, a consultation practitioner would turn her or his mind to designing appropriate consultation methods. A consultation framework is helpful to achieve this. For example, a four-step approach (based on the work of Renn *et al.* 1993) works well in many situations.

Step 1: VISIONING
Random selection of community participants who
create a vision or goals and
establish values and criteria for measuring success.

Step 2: OPERATIONALISING
Collection of 'expert' and specialist knowledge from a small reference group
which works with the information provided in the first step, for example by
devising an action plan or
creating a list of options and assessing their viability.

Step 3: TESTING
Randomly selected citizens meet,
to test the acceptability of the options presented
against the values established earlier.
The group offers recommendations.

If at Step 3 it is decided
that the options are unacceptable
in light of community values,
the process returns to Step 1.

If at Step 3 it is decided that
recommendations can be made
which reflect community values,
the process moves on to Step 4.

Step 4: EVALUATING
Information is provided to the entire community affected by the decision.
The consultation process is evaluated against the criteria earlier established.
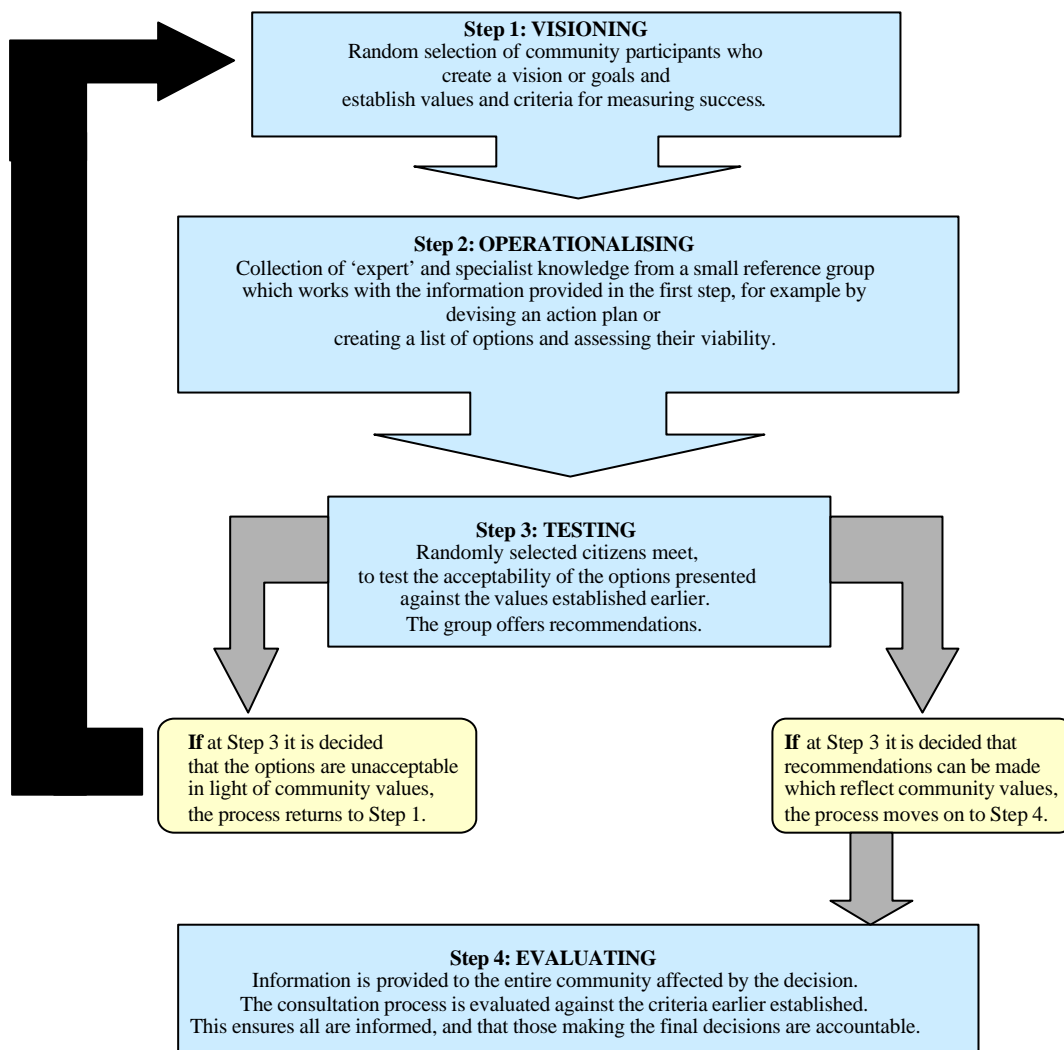This ensures all are informed, and that those making the final decisions are accountable.

FIGURE 1 Four-step Procedure for Consulting (Carson 1999)

Note that, in this framework, the important expert role is sandwiched between
representative groups of citizens who establish the vision, then later test the
acceptability of expert advice against their own values (Renn *et al.* 1993).
Activists are often experts. They belong in this significant second step. Their
expertise is essential if full information is to be available and if debate is to be
meaningful.

REPRESENTATIVENESS AND DELIBERATIVE CAPACITY

Those who are engaged in consultation exercises or those who observe them, cry
'foul' when participants are not representative of the wider population. There are
times when representativeness is not necessary—for example, when a consultation

is designed to gauge the attitudes of a specific group or when the diverse opinions and expertise of a well-informed group are sought. However, when the consultation is seeking to find out what an entire community thinks about an issue, representativeness should not be a preferred option, it should be essential. Random selection provides a method for selecting participants that is both fair and seen to be fair (Carson & Martin 1999:15). The term 'random' is intended to mean that each member of a community has a statistically equal proba bility of being selected to take part in a consultative process. Random selection is an essential component of the consultation methods described in this paper.

Having gathered together a representative sample of the population, how can a democratic site be created? We have few democratic models and it may be that the best we can do is create an environment in which democracy can be encouraged or enabled to 'break out' (Blaug 1999). Deliberative capacity is crucial for democratic outbreaks and can be nourished, coaxed and rewarded. Deliberation moves us away from superficial 'public opinion' to more thoughtful 'public judgement' (Yankelovich 1991 cited in Walton 1999). Many of us have experienced those rare moments when democracy has been experienced—when participants are engaged in lively debate, when all opinions and ideas are sought and heard, when there is movement towards consensus, when the general will, not self interest, is being considered.

How do political institutions enable democratic 'break outs' whilst providing uninformed citizens with solid information and space for creative resolution of serious problems? Fortunately considerable experimentation has occurred over the past three decades and consultation methods have emerged that continue to arouse interest. The methods that follow are those which the author knows best but the list is far from exhaustive (for further examples see Appendix, Carson & Martin 1999).

(i) Citizens' Jury

Citizens' juries have been trialed extensively in the US and in Germany (where they are called 'planning cells'), and more recently in the UK (Coote & Lenaghan 1997) and Australia (James 1999). The name 'jury' gives an idea of the process—expert witnesses are called and a representative group of citizens (usually 12-15 people), deliberate on the soundness of the arguments. Citizens' juries have been used to deliberate on a range of policy and planning issues, including health, environment and social justice issues.

This consultation method allows for the inclusion of expanded levels of expertise, knowledge and skills in the deliberative process (Carson & Gelber 2001). Experts could be from universities or non-government organisations or amongst the key stakeholders. Because it is held over a few days, the discussion can be quite in-depth, dealing with complex material.

Because of the small pool of participants it can be dismissed as being insufficiently representative though highly deliberative. Peter Dienel's German planning cells partially solve this problem by holding a number of juries simultaneously in different locations (Dienel & Renn 1995). The deliberative poll and the televote address this issue of insufficient numbers but before describing them, a method similar to the citizens' jury is worthy of comment—the consensus conference.

(ii) Consensus Conference

Consensus conferences are very similar to citizens' juries, but with some important differences. Australia's first consensus conference, on gene technology in the food chain, was held in old Parliament House, Canberra, in March 1999 (Renouf 1999). The Australian Consumers' Association initiated this conference so that consumers could have a voice in assessing the risk, acceptability and regulation of genetically modified food. Consensus conferences have been held throughout the world on similarly contentious issues, with Denmark having led the way in developing this consultative method.

The consensus conference has all of the attributes of a citizens' jury but is performed on a larger scale over a longer period of time—for example, there are usually several preparatory weekends. The consensus conference has the added advantage of giving participants greater control over the agenda—for example, participants select the expert witnesses and can modify the agenda. This makes the process more involving and meaningful for participants, and provides the commissioning authority with richer community input (Carson & Gelber 2001). To date consensus conferences have focused on controversial issues of science and technology and activists have played a significant role as expert witnesses.

(iii) Deliberative Polling

The deliberative poll tackles the issue of delivering a statistically significant sample; it is both representative and deliberative. A number of deliberative polls have been conducted in the USA, the UK, Denmark and Australia (conducted by the creator of the process, James Fishkin).

A deliberative poll aims to correct the deficiencies inherent in standard opinion polls (Fishkin 1995). Participants are selected randomly via telephone numbers and then come together to discuss the issue—thereby building in a deliberative component. They are not required to reach consensus; participants are simply polled before and after the event. Briefing materials are sent to the representative sample of hundreds of citizens. Then when the group meets, participants spend time in small groups led by independent facilitators, developing questions that are taken into plenary sessions. Expert speakers offer opinions and answer questions, and then the small groups deliberate further on the issue/s.

Australia's first deliberative poll was trialed at the time that Australia was considering whether to become a republic in October 1999. The outcome was of particular interest because it indicates how Australians would have voted on the referendum *had they had an opportunity to have all of their questions answered and their fears allayed.* The participants at the deliberative poll moved from opposition to support for the proposal. Of course, history tells us that the proposal was later defeated at the ballot box.

The deliberative poll is a very costly exercise and those held to date have relied heavily on sponsorship and donations and this financial support has been made easier by its novelty—for example, Australia's *first* deliberative poll. However, the deliberative poll is highly representative and also quite deliberative.

The coordinator of Australia's first poll, Dr Pam Ryan, organised a second deliberative poll in 2001—on the important social justice issue of Reconciliation. The method used was slightly altered—with small gatherings and some recruitment of Aboriginal people occurring in regional and urban areas prior to the main event. In my opinion, this corrected a couple of deficiencies of a deliberative poll—(1) it enabled greater input into agenda setting and (2) created space for additional marginalised citizens whose input was essential for the Reconciliation debate. Had random selection alone been used, only a few Aboriginal Australians would have been selected (mirroring the proportion of the population).

(iv) Televote

The televote addresses the problem of prohibitive expense. Though it results in less interactivity and therefore less deliberation, it is a considerable improvement over standard opinion polls.

A randomly selected, statistically significant sample of typical citizens is contacted by phone. Participants complete a phone survey and are then sent briefing materials. The briefing materials are prepared either by an independent third party or a steering group of stakeholders; either way all stakeholders' comments are worked into the final product. Televoters are encouraged to discuss the briefing materials with family, friends and colleagues. After a week or two, they are contacted again and a further survey is completed. Market researchers call this 'pre-recruit and placement'. Televotes have been conducted for the purpose of social research in the US and New Zealand (see Becker and Slaton 2000) and more recently in Australia (Carson *et al.* 2001).

Televotes can be useful if an organisation wants a snap shot of the population to establish opinions on a contentious issue with the benefit of some deliberation. It can be done quickly and is reasonably cost effective.

Having been involved in many of the above case studies it was apparent to me that typical citizens are entirely competent to deliberate on complex matters to good

effect. Interactive spaces filled with representative participants can provide not only insight into the views of citizens (focus groups can do this equally well)—but these democratic sites can also lead to thoughtful, intelligent decision making, with recommendations arising that reflect the diversity and collective views of various communities. In these democratic spaces *self-interest* seems happily to take a back seat, and the *common good* slips willingly into the driver's seat.

INSTITUTIONALISING INNOVATIVE METHODS

The consultation methods that have been outlined have been trialed for three decades yet remain largely unknown in the wider community. Only in Denmark could any of them be seen to be institutionalised—ie part of the everyday functions of government and influential in terms of decision making (Joss 1998). Until this happens these innovative mechanisms will remain novelties, a side show beyond the main political arena of (non)representative government.

However, within our flawed representative system, small gains are possible. Here is a recent case study that relates to a review of environmental legislation that provides a glimmer of hope:

Televoting in Australia - Container Deposit Legislation in NSW

In 2001 the Institute for Sustainable Futures (University of Technology, Sydney) conducted a combined televote and citizens' jury. Dr Stuart White had been appointed to complete an Independent Review on Container Deposit Legislation (CDL) in NSW and this innovative social research was incorporated into his review.

In order to gauge the attitudes of the wider community to CDL, approximately 400 people were randomly selected from across the state, and asked to participate in a televote. They were sent written information about CDL that was agreed to by all stakeholders and were asked to talk with friends, neighbours and colleagues about the idea. Their attitudes were surveyed at the beginning and at the end of the process which took approximately one month. Participation occurred by telephone from participants' homes.

In addition to the televote, 2000 randomly selected citizens from across the state of NSW were invited to volunteer to be selected as a member of a Citizens' Jury. Out of the pool of volunteers, a cross-section of 15 people were chosen (using a stratified random selection method), to participate in the Citizens' Jury. This involved their attendance over a weekend of deliberations and discussions guided by two independent facilitators. The participants wrote their own recommendations which were incorporated into the final report for the NSW Minister for the Environment.

Case Study: Combined televote and citizens' jury

The combination of televote and citizens' jury is possibly unique to Australia. The two methods are quite different but potentially complementary, with the deficiencies of one being corrected by the strengths of the other. Table 4 helps to explain these similarities and differences.

Televote	Citizens' jury
Randomly selected	Randomly selected but a level of self selection involved
Contacted by telephone	Contacted by mail
Representative	Diverse group
N= large numbers	N= around 16 people
Large number involved (directly and indirectly) means that potential for raising community awareness of an issue is significant	Limited number involved but can generate media interest and thus stimulate community learning and awareness
Approx. cost: A$20,000-$30,000 for 400 people	Approx. cost: A$10,000-15,000 for 16 people
Quantitative sample size is statistically significant	Qualitative output—recommendations in the form of a report prepared by the panel
Process has a greater perception of legitimacy due to numbers involved	Process may be perceived by key decision makers as illegitimate as the process only involves 'a handful' of people—the deliberative component is not quantifiable
More informed than an opinion survey	Highly informed
Individual deliberation though encouraged to discuss with friends, family, colleagues	Group deliberation—face-to-face, questioning of experts, facilitated discussion, variety of opinions and arguments, also opportunities for experiential learning and social interaction (eg could involve field trips)
Access to summarised, printed information—avoids persuasive power of experts though some exposure to opinions of others (could incorporate computers which would enable access to more interactivity and information)	Access to summarised, printed information up-front and then provided with more detailed, printed information through the course of the CJ as well as a range of visual eg videos, slides. Exposed to the persuasion, motivations and characteristics of those dominating the debate—in this way participants can also sense the values inherent in 'facts' and can use their own judgement to separate fact from rhetoric.
Decision based on self-interest, modified through discussion with others	Deliberation tends to steer people towards outcomes in the interest of others.
Aggregation of competing views; majority vote is noted.	Intensive dialogue and exposure to other opinions allows for learning and consensus building; all views are noted.

Table 4 Comparative and Complementary Characteristics of Televote and Citizens' Jury [iv]

This project was of significance because of its link with a traditional form of

legislative review. Such a review would usually involve public hearings or written

submissions and citizens would rarely be involved. This type of social research

therefore offers an entirely new way of approaching policy making. A broad cross

section of the community was drawn into the debate and activists were positioned,

along with industry and government representatives as experts. The views of

typical citizens were elevated and seen to be of equal importance as those of

stakeholders. Citizens were viewed as having much to gain or lose from

legislative change, and much to say about the legislation that should be enacted.

CONCLUSION

Do innovative consultative methods challenge the historical role of the activist at

the forefront of social change? Not necessarily. It has been argued that what is

required is an elevation of the citizen role—to increase representativeness in

political decision making. A leap of faith, perhaps, is required. Activists, like

bureaucrats and elected representatives, are often sceptical about the ability of

citizens to handle complex matters and to avoid manipulation. Activists are often

contemptuous of citizens' ability to come up with the 'right answer' yet the

methods described above consistently result in thoughtful, considered

recommendations. If consultation methods are fair and deliberative, participants

surprise even those who are most sceptical of the abilities of typical citizens.

Decision makers believe that activists are not representative of the wider

population—and indeed they are *not.* The good news is that stepping aside from

this *citizen role* will free activists from their possible *victim* status—as pawns in a system that may have them co-opted and silenced.

Activists can then strengthen their *change agent* and *reformer* roles—to be centre stage in the debate about democratic decision making. It has been argued that innovative consultation mechanisms should be institutionalised and it has been demonstrated that this is occurring—albeit slowly and reluctantly. Activists could broaden their sphere of concern, to add their insistent voices to the call for democratic sites that would give *all* citizens an opportunity to speak. In doing so, social movements might also become democratised and activists might pay due attention to small group and inner democracy, as they practise the role of *inquirer.* Engaging in reflective practice would sharpen the skills of activists and ensure that they perform *effective* roles.

Those involved in collective action should consider rejecting opportunities to participate in processes that do little to further their cause. Being co-opted onto advisory committees in order to satisfy the need for increased community involvement can be resisted and activists can suggest other ways for a more representative group of citizens to deliberate. Instead, activists can focus on what they do best—researching, campaigning, educating, lobbying, protesting, becoming experts. The expertise of activists has been devalued and a clarification of roles will enable their expertise to be acknowledged—by stating 'we are experts—we are not representative citizens'. Even though activists are passionate

citizens who have coalesced around an issue and engaged in collective action they cannot claim to speak on behalf of a community. This is best left to a representative group of citizens, engaged in informed debate—and this in turn should strengthen the cause. It is the role of activists to influence, expertly, the outcome of genuine consultation.

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[i] This material was first presented at the ANZTSR Conference, UWS, 3 December, 2000.

[ii] This additional role plus the questions that follow were developed in conversations with Kath Fisher, Southern Cross University, Lismore.

[iii] Kath Fisher distinguishes between assumptions, value and beliefs by asking the following questions: *Assumptions*—'what do I take for granted?' *Values*—'what is important to me?' *Beliefs*—'what do I think is true?

[iv] Carolyn Hendriks, Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, provided helpful comments on these comparative and complementary characteristics.