

**Impacts of (un)civil discourse by organized groups on local governance
in sustainable development projects**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an examination of conflict surrounding local government and other public projects. Firstly, a national survey of facilitators of public dialogue is included to show the scope and range of conflict reported by these professionals. Through this study and additional research into media reports, we determine certain geographic “hot spots” of conflict, as well as certain “hot topics.” One of the hot spots discovered was Roanoke, Virginia, while one of the hot topics was sustainable development. We then discuss two sustainable development projects in Roanoke, Virginia, through the lens of the theory of intractable conflicts. Additionally, we introduce the term “new activist,” as a set of constituents engaging in public dialogue in ways unfamiliar or discomfoting to local government leaders. One case study focuses on “new activists” response to the development of wind energy in the county. The other case study examines “new activist” responses to the local government involvement in ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. We explain and examine the components of intractable conflicts, then describe evidence of such in each of these two conflicts. Lastly, we make recommendations for various stakeholders in how to work through highly contested projects.

DEDICATION

For ERD-LMH – The light in my heart no matter where you are.

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Hodge Cowgill: Impacts of (un)civil discourse by organized groups on local governance in sustainable development projects

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
ATTRIBUTION	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM	1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	2
THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS	5
THIS DISSERTATION.....	7
REFERENCES	9
CHAPTER TWO: DISRUPTING DELIBERATIVE DISCOURSE: STRATEGIC POLITICAL INCIVILITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL	11
RISING POLITICAL INCIVILITY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL	13
LOCAL PUBLIC FORUMS AND STRATEGIC POLITICAL INCIVILITY.....	14
<i>Legal Foundations</i>	15
<i>Public Participation Literature</i>	17
RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODS	20
<i>Defining Terms</i>	22
STUDY FINDINGS	26
<i>The incidence of disruptions</i>	26
<i>Characterizing disruptions</i>	27
<i>Examples of disruptions</i>	28

DISCUSSION	33
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE	35
FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS.....	38
APPENDIX A. INTRODUCTORY TEXT FOR SURVEY	40
REFERENCES	42
CHAPTER THREE: INTRACTABLE CONFLICTS OVER LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN ICLEI - LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY	46
INTRODUCTION	46
<i>Framing</i>	47
<i>New activists</i>	48
<i>Sustainable development</i>	49
THE CASE: ICLEI MEMBERSHIP IN ROANOKE	51
ICLEI IN ROANOKE AS AN INTRACTABLE CONFLICT.....	54
DISCUSSION	55
REFERENCES	57
CHAPTER FOUR: INTRACTABLE CONFLICTS OVER LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RESULTING FROM "NEW ACTIVISM": A CASE STUDY OF OPPOSITION TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE OF WIND ENERGY	58
INTRODUCTION	58
<i>Long-standing and eluding resolution</i>	60
<i>Divisiveness</i>	61
<i>Intensity – role of emotions</i>	62
<i>Pervasiveness</i>	62
<i>Complexity</i>	62
<i>Framing</i>	63
METHODS.....	64
RESULTS	67
<i>The Case: Wind Energy Ordinance</i>	67
<i>The Case Examined Using Intractable Conflict Theory</i>	70

Long-standing and eluding resolution.....	70
Divisiveness.....	71
Intensity.....	72
Pervasiveness.....	73
Complexity.....	73
Framing.....	74
DISCUSSION	79
CONCLUSION.....	83
REFERENCES	85
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS.....	88

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1.1: SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTRACTABILITY	7
TABLE 2.1: DEFINITIONS OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS PROVIDED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS	24
TABLE 2.2. CHARACTERIZATION OF DISRUPTIVE GROUPS	30
TABLE 3.1: TOTAL U.S. MEMBERSHIP IN ICLEI BY YEAR	53
TABLE 4.1: SET OF CODES DEVELOPED FROM THEORY OF INTRACTABLE CONFLICT.....	66

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 2.1. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO THINK DISRUPTING BEHAVIOR HAS INCREASED, STAYED THE SAME, OR DECREASED	27
FIGURE 2.2. NUMBER OF FORUMS IN WHICH THE FOLLOWING BEHAVIOR WAS PRESENT	28
FIGURE 2.3. PERCEIVED MOTIVATIONS FOR GROUP DISRUPTIONS	29
FIGURE 2.4. NUMBER OF DELIBERATIVE FORUMS IN WHICH THE VARIOUS TYPES OF RESPONSES TO DISRUPTIONS OCCURRED	31

ATTRIBUTION

Two of the manuscripts within this dissertation have been co-authored. Chapter Two: “Disrupting Deliberative Discourse: Strategic Political Incivility at the Local Level” was created by a research team (listed below), who joined together to examine this issue in greater detail in the hopes of figuring out what conditions exist that foster this type of communication. The team examined what is happening to local democratic processes, to public policy programs (in this dissertation, specifically surrounding sustainable development), to the ways citizens and politicians engage in discussion about these issues, the ramifications of this type of engagement, and potential paths forward through these disturbances.

Research Team

Frank Dukes, PhD (University of Virginia)

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My role in this collaborative research was to assist with literature review, writing, and editing the piece as it related to my expertise. I also participated in presenting this research and related case studies at three conferences:

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Chapter Four: “Intractable Conflicts Over Local Sustainable Development Resulting from “New Activism””: A case study of opposition to local governance of wind energy” was co-authored by R. Bruce Hull. Parts of this case study were also presented at the 2014 annual conference for the Association for Conflict Resolution.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Anecdotal evidence in the media and from personal conversations suggests that inflammatory rhetoric in the collaborative governance setting is increasing, especially during public meetings about sustainable development projects. Planners, mediators, facilitators, and government officials are facing a shutting down of public deliberation by “new activists” who are engaging in public forums in very emotional and uncompromising ways. This dissertation is a direct examination of actions by new activists. It includes two case studies in Roanoke, Virginia as well as a broader look at the inflammatory rhetoric and disruptions in local public meetings now occurring across the country.

All of the manuscripts in this dissertation either are built on, or lay the foundation for, sustainable development work. The most common definition of sustainable development is: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UNCED 1987). This definition was first written in the United Nation’s Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. The report, written in 1987 after a meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, is commonly known as the Brundtland Report – named after the chairwoman who oversaw the report, Gro Harlem Brundtland. This definition is quite broad, which can be a hindrance to the research process. To gain perspective on the kinds of activities that are covered in sustainable development, we looked to Agenda 21 – the UN’s plan for project implementation at the local

level. Activities that fall under the headline of sustainable development in this document include topics such as poverty reduction, ecosystem maintenance, protection of the atmosphere, protection for women's and children's rights, enhancing technology, and creation of policy (UNCED 1987). The two categories chosen for case studies were wind energy and Roanoke County's participation in ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability.

Since the United Nation's report, "Our Common Future," was released in 1987 detailing the initial understandings of sustainable development, many government structures have adopted policy plans for sustainable development projects. However, sustainable development is a "new environmental conflict" that is a "complex and continuous struggle over the definition and the meaning of the environmental problem itself" (Hajer 1995, pgs. 14-15). Because this approach to policy and programming is so new and involves many different actors, we often see conflict arise around how to best create these policies; however, it is suggested that the scale at which to best create and implement programs is the local level (UNCED 1987; Hess 2009). This scale became the focus of our research, with "local" meaning within a locality or region. Thus, the size of "local" changes with the size of the sustainable development project.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

"After years of complaining that no one shows up for our public hearings on the comprehensive plan, planners now find that we have TOO MUCH CITIZEN PARTICIPATION!"

The above is a quotation (with original capitalization) from a presentation given by the Virginia Association of Counties (2011) in response to increased citizen response and participation in public sessions regarding amendments to local comprehensive plans. For years,

local officials were used to going about their business with limited engagement from citizens. Perhaps a citizen might come to a zoning meeting to talk about the impact of a new zoning ordinance, but rarely had citizens come out en masse to confront the foundations of local planning and development. However, it's not that this new form of participation was just an increase in attendance at public meetings. No – this growth in attendance was outspoken, emotionally driven, and willing to challenge. Local planners saw this feeling of “too much” participation as being connected to views of participants of passion, anger, trying to be disruptive, and acting paranoid.

Currently, there exists a type of citizen involvement in politics that is no longer built of political struggles surrounding traditional political parties. Political struggles are now “movement politics” or “novel groups of political actors” (Benhabib 1996, pg 4). Called political and cultural fundamentalists by some, these groups are now common globally and locally, and they are driven by “a narrowly rational ideology of individualism and competitiveness” (Sneddon 2006, pg. 255). “It’s a movement born of fear and anger and distrust” (Valentine 2010). The people involved in this movement have been labeled as “mad as hell” and “boiling mad” by those who have studied the movement and the anger associated with it (Kirby and Ekins 2012).

Emotion, rhetoric, and political maneuvering on the part of conflict participants can stifle fairness and deliberation (Lewicki et al. 2003). This is particularly pertinent in the face of new forms of political activism that are emerging to challenge traditional planning efforts. This kind of involvement has similarities to the property rights and “wise use” challenges of the 1980s (McCarthy 2002), but is organized to champion values and agendas of the Tea Party and several

other loosely defined groups, such as new activists (VACO 2011). To answer to this new type of activism, some have called for a focus on problem-solving efforts at the local level (Hess 2009).

Discussed as a way to bridge conflicting and competing ideologies, a local focus is seen as one possible way to work towards resolution of conflict. Localism involves an active effort to change social, political, and economic institutions at the local level to best benefit those citizens living within close geographic proximity. Much of the focus is on regaining power from large multinational corporations and the federal government, both of which seem too far removed from local interests and are not often seen by citizens to have their needs in mind. Reform efforts may focus on devolution of national government functions and responsibilities, “voting” with dollars by spending locally, and strengthening local government regulatory action (Hess 2009).

Local planners feel pressure from a variety of sources when dealing with local development. An idealized view of planning for economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity is one that is often sought but rarely, if ever, achieved (Campbell 1996). Sustainable development efforts are positively viewed by planners, but they are still sorting out exactly how to create communities that reflect those tenets. Planners have to try to strike a balance between competing needs within their communities without ignoring how they fit into regional, national, and global contexts. Planners must also be willing to work with the ever-growing changes in the community and navigate the conflicts that will inevitably arise (Berke and Manta Conroy 2000).

These planning efforts have substantial consequences, affecting community development and the lives and livelihoods of residents. Environmental conflict is common and rarely has simple solutions (Beierle and Cayford 2002). As a consequence, a two-way dialogue between creators of public policy and citizens, as well as public participation in decision-making, is essential (Abelson et al. 2003).

In the best of cases, we can reason our way through discussions to reach consensus and/or cooperation in decision-making processes: “In legislative politics the supply of information and the rational choice of strategies are interwoven with the balancing of interests, with the achievement of ethical self-understanding and the articulation of strong preferences, with moral justification and tests of legal coherence” (Habermas 1996, pgs 25-26). However, what do we do when the “supply of information” is emotionally driven? What happens to the rational approach to deliberation that is called for when engaging in sustainable development practices?

THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

Theories of civil discourse were used to flush out the actions and discourse being used by these groups to participate in sustainable development projects. Incivility is difficult to define; however it can be seen when there is such rude or impolite behavior that crosses agreed-upon social norms (Maisel 2012). Political theorists have questioned the role that uncivil behavior has played in the history of America’s democracy (Maisel 2012, Jamieson and Hardy 2012), as well as the role of power in the way we expect civility in our public interactions. Do those who have power in governing and decision-making set the rules of civility? Is it fair for us to expect that everyone participating in the public process to be aware of these conventions and abide by them? (Harcourt 2012)

We may be seeing a rise in incivility because, at this time in history, there is no common cause uniting citizens towards one goal. In addition, politicians are using uncivil tactics more often, because they are seeing results in their political power plays, without worrying about opinions of their constituents. These inflamed tactics and opinions are revealed in polarized 24-

hour news cycles, which drive up the passions of the citizenry and shape the way participants act in public settings (Maisel 2012, Jamieson and Hardy 2012). These power plays, uncivil tactics, and displays of passion on the part of many actors involved in issues can, and have, led to conflicts becoming more intractable or make difficult to resolve. We examined intractability when discussing the two case studies used for manuscript two and three.

The theory of intractable conflicts by Lewicki et al. (2003) provides a broad overview for examining conflict. What makes a conflict intractable is when it is long-standing and eludes resolution, is divisive, emotionally intense, permeates many different institutions, and is complex with a large number of issues and participants. These conflicts go through different stages, which may occur at different times for the participants. Perceptions of the conflict change over time and the parties involved may or may not see opportunities for resolution at the same time.

In this examination of conflict, resolution does not necessarily mean that the parties will overcome all conflict involved. Rather, it means that the parties will decide to begin working towards resolution, start addressing central problems, and work towards mutually acceptable decisions. While working through these issues, parties may have different strategies and tactics for settling the conflict. While some may avoid the resolution process altogether, others will work more actively. Possible tactics include finding facts to back up positions, working on joint problem solving, leaving the decision up to authorities, seeking adjudication, lobbying for political action, and working with market-based economic solutions (Lewicki et al. 2003). In our case studies, we are unsure if long-term resolution was achieved. One case went to the legal system; the other case was “resolved” when a line item funding the program was removed from the local budget. In both cases, we expect that the conflicts will arise again should the issues be brought to the table. For explanation of what makes a conflict intractable, please see Table 1.1.

TABLE 1.1: SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTRACTABILITY (BASED ON LEWICKI ET AL. 2003)

	More tractable	More intractable
Parties	well-organized clearly defined roles	unorganized, no structure loose collective of roles
Issues	agreement on values disagreement on allocation	fundamental value differences
Social system	well-defined structures clear rules/procedures legitimate authority	ill-defined structures uncertain procedures absence of clear authority
Conflict process	contained/focused commitment to resolution	growth in parties/issues/costs polarization/segregation

When actors participate in a conflict, they frame their involvement by outlining the details of said conflict and discussing why it is happening. Participants are often clear about the motivations of the parties involved and may discuss how they would like the issue to be settled (Lewicki et al., 2003). Framing a conflict over values and ideas of personal rights often leads to greater intractability than does disagreement over interests. When parties frame arguments that direct “ought” and “should” towards the other parties involved, it is likely that the conflict will escalate to being more intractable than if not used (Lewicki et al., 2003).

THIS DISSERTATION

In response to problems associated with conflict at the local level, the studies reported below used quantitative survey data and the theory of intractable conflicts (Lewicki et al 2003),

as well as other theories of civil discourse and framing reviewed above, to examine and suggest strategies for resolution of explosive conflicts such as new activists objections to local government sustainable development efforts. We attempted to describe and explain the motives and tactics of “new activist” objections to regional planning efforts associated with sustainable development. These “new activist” groups include individuals from such groups as the Tea Party, federalists, libertarians, patriots, 912 organizations, Reform Party, environmental advocacy groups, and “those of all persuasions generally upset with government” (VACO 2011). We also attempted to describe and explain the motives and tactics of sustainability planning advocates and local project facilitators responding to new activist objections. Once these motives and tactics were outlined, we describe the various components of an intractable conflict, the evidence we have to illustrate those elements, and finally outline our understanding of the ideologies of the parties through the lens of intractable conflict theory. After arguing that our two case studies show evidence of intractability, we examine possible solutions for resolving the conflict we analyzed – or at least making them less intractable.

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CHAPTER TWO: DISRUPTING DELIBERATIVE DISCOURSE: STRATEGIC POLITICAL INCIVILITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Tensions flared Monday evening during discussions about a long-range plan for land use as well as roads, trains and other transportation systems in Sonoma County and the Bay Area... A vocal group of about 20 tea party activists interrupted the speakers and audience with charges that the government can't be trusted. A woman pushed a sign that read "protect property rights" close to Santa Rosa Councilman Gary Wysocky, who was in the audience.

"Get out of my face," Wysocky said.

"Get out of my council," she said.

Police were called to the West College Avenue center after reports [unfounded] that someone had been struck with a chair...

Quote from The Press Democrat (Johnson January 10, 2012)

The Occupy Wall Street movement expanded to classroom politics, as a group disrupted a special meeting of the panel for education policy in Manhattan on Tuesday night. The public meeting at Seward Park High School at 350 Grand Street was supposed to be a meeting for parents to learn about new curriculum standards. But as soon as Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott began speaking through his headset microphone, a different type of microphone drowned him out. Called the "People's Microphone," the protesters' call-and-repeat chants, now a trademark of the Occupy Wall Street movement, derailed the Department of Education meeting...Loud, angry crowds are nothing new at education panel meetings but this was the first time that a meeting was ever so disrupted that it had to be relocated...

Quote from the NY1: News (Christ November 25, 2011)

There's only one ring in the room where the governor's Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission meets, but on Wednesday it was a circus... After noon, the meeting was delayed because commission members could not squeeze through the scrum of protesters jostling in the hallway outside the room. Once it started, the protesters held anti-drilling placards against the window and chanted 'This is what democracy looks like.' Then, as the meeting proceeded, anti-drilling activists in the audience regularly interrupted by speaking out of turn. The loudest were ejected by guards, the others simply annoyed those within earshot. It was an organized and effective distraction from the topic at hand — scientific evidence of the environmental impact of drilling.

Quote from The Patriot News (Gilliland April 27, 2011)

Evidence suggests that the 21st century has witnessed increasing incidence and severity of political incivility in national political forums. But what of political incivility enacted among citizens in local public forums as illustrated in the above reports? Has the tenor of political discourse on the national political stage and in the media affected civility on the ground in our communities? More specifically, has political incivility at this level become a tool used by citizens to disrupt, impede, or delegitimize the forums of deliberative democracy (Herbst 2012; Massaro and Stryker 2011)? It is this *strategic* political incivility that has the potential to be the most damaging because it can undermine the very process of governance.

Our paper begins from the basic premise that understanding the incidence, form, and ramifications of strategic political incivility at the local level is as important, if not more important, than at the national level. It is in local public forums that citizens can directly participate in governance through public forums such as roundtables, community planning exercises, community dialogues, and hearings. Increasing incidence of strategic political incivility at this level has the potential to not only to hinder the process of deliberative democracy on which this nation was built, but also to discourage direct citizen participation in governance. On the other hand, if strategic political incivility is not perceived as problematic at the local level, are facilitators of these forums doing something that merits more attention from those working to promote civil discourse at the national stage? Local public forums represent the most visible and accessible nexus between government actors and citizens. It is here, we argue, that attention to strategic political incivility needs to begin.

This paper represents an initial exploration of strategic political incivility in local public forums by studying the perceptions of actors who are best positioned to report on its incidence, form, and ramifications: the professional facilitators who design and manage public discourse

and democratic deliberation. Contrary to our expectations, more than half of the respondents to our survey reported that the incidence of strategic political incivility was not increasing. Moreover, respondents felt that the primarily verbal incivility was handled well and did not substantially hinder the process of deliberative democracy. In the latter half of the paper, we explore these findings in greater detail, suggest some potential reasons behind them, and propose future avenues of research that will provide greater understanding of this concept.

Before detailing and discussing our findings, we begin by reviewing the evidence of political incivility at the national level because local public forums are ultimately still part of, and thus reflective of, the national mood. The study of strategic political incivility is, of course, embedded within the study of political incivility more generally. Due to the lack of studies on strategic political incivility, our background sections refer to evidence of political incivility in general. Our survey, however, focuses on behavior at local forums that is organized, and thus strategic, and political, though not necessarily partisan in nature.

We then review research in two main fields that contribute to understanding the issues involved in local public forums: the legal foundation for direct citizen participation and its implications for civil discourse; and research on public participation and designing effective local public forums.

RISING POLITICAL INCIVILITY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Political incivility in American politics is by no means a new phenomenon. Incivility during the 1800 presidential campaign between Jefferson and Adams is often cited as an early, particularly egregious example (Brady and Han 2006). During the post-civil war reconstruction era, partisan incivility reached another fever pitch, exemplified by the dramatic and severe

caning by Representative Preston Brooks of Senator Charles Sumner in the senate chambers in 1866 (Brady and Han 2006; Stryker 2011).

Contemporary evidence suggests that political incivility at the national level persists. In a series of research briefs prepared for the National Institute for Civil Discourse, Dr. Robin Stryker and colleagues document increasing incivility among political elites during political campaigns, but also during floor debates in Congress. Media commentary, in turn, reflects the tenor of this discourse in its reporting (Stryker 2011-2013). Sobieraj and Berry's (2011) study of prominent syndicated journalists provides further evidence of the rise of incivility in the media discourse. They find a dramatic increase between 1955 and 2009 in the incidence of extreme political statements of outrage—insults, character assassinations and obscenities—in syndicated columns.

Indirect indicators also point to the conclusion that incivility in political discourse is seen by society as problematic. A recent national poll found that people perceive incivility in political discourse to be on the rise (Weber Shandwick 2011). Furthermore, the number of professional and university-based centers and programs that have recently been founded to study and take action on the problem of incivility in our times provides more of such indirect evidence (see partners network at National Institute for Civil Discourse's website www.nicd.arizona.edu).

LOCAL PUBLIC FORUMS AND STRATEGIC POLITICAL INCIVILITY

We know far less about the extent to which political incivility in general and strategic political incivility in particular pervade local political, or public forums. While anecdotes similar to those at the beginning of the paper abound, no systematic examination of either concept exists. Therefore, we do not know whether these events were isolated incidents or whether they are representative of a larger trend.

We believe that local public forums are especially susceptible to strategic political incivility because it is in these venues that government actors engage directly with citizens on policy matters; thus, (in)civil discourse at the local level has the potential to impact democratic deliberation in a meaningful way. Though to our knowledge, local strategic political incivility has not been directly addressed by scholars, we suggest that to begin to understand what it is and what its implications are, it is important to first ground our work in the principles of public participation. In particular, we review the legal basis for public participation and the gray areas surrounding planned disruptions in public forums; as well as the lessons learned from scholars who study public participation more generally.

LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

From a legal perspective, the First Amendment to the Constitution provides: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; *or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances [authors’ italics].*” At least three prongs of the First Amendment are implicated by deliberative public forums and potentially by strategic political incivility, as well: 1) the freedom of speech; 2) the right of the people to petition their government; and 3) the right of the people to assemble, which is also construed to include a right of association.

It is not our intention to provide a rigorous constitutional analysis at this point, but it is important to lay out the basic constitutional framework since the First Amendment is invoked often by both activists and public sector lawyers. The level of free speech protection extended by the First Amendment depends upon the type of public forum used as the basis for assertion of the right. Traditional public forums—i.e., parks, public sidewalks, etc.—are the most protected

venues for free speech (*Hague v. CIO*, 307 U.S. 496 1939). Non-public forums, even if owned by the government, are the least protected. For example, even though the IRS building is clearly a public building, a back cubicle on the fifth floor is not a traditional forum for the public exchange of ideas. As a result, the government may reasonably restrict public access and expression in that area (*Perry Ed. Assn. v. Perry Local Educators' Assn.*, 460 U.S. 37, 47 1983).

Public meetings fall somewhere in between traditional and non-traditional forums and are often referred to as “limited” or “designated” public forums. Because those forums are created by the government expressly for the purpose of eliciting public speech, most of the free speech protections apply. In a designated public forum, the government may create time, place and manner restrictions on speech but cannot restrict speech based on the content or point of view. *See e.g., White v. City of Norwalk*, 900 F. 2d 1421 (9th Cir. 1990). In other words, a city council can limit public comment to two minutes per person but may not determine who will and will not be permitted to testify based on the opinion of the speaker.

It does not always play out in such a straightforward way, and the line between permissible time, place, and manner restrictions and content-based restrictions is not always bright, particularly when the speaker is perceived to be a troublemaker or a gadfly. Some local governments have gone so far as to attempt to ban personal or ad hominem attacks, but again, the line between properly restricting the manner of speech and improperly restricting the content of the speech is not crystal clear. *See e.g., Steinburg v. Chesterfield County Planning Commission*, 527 F.3rd 377 (4th Cir.2008). There is also an interesting sub-question about whether planned opposition to deliberative forums is in and of itself a political opinion that requires protection from content-based restrictions. But that question exceeds the scope of this paper.

In the context of a deliberative public setting, the analysis is further complicated by the effect of strategic political incivility on other individuals. In another type of limited public forum—public schools—the Supreme Court has determined that schools may restrict student speech if it “invades the rights of others.” *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969). In the case of a deliberative public forum, it is conceivable that strategic political incivility may rise to a level where it actually impinges on the rights of other participants to either speak or seek redress from the government.

All that is to say that there are complex and competing interests, both legally and morally, when strategic political incivility occurs in a public forum. Elected officials, public managers, and professional facilitators face volatile and sometimes fast-moving environments in which they have to determine how best to balance the interests and rights of particular individuals as well as the public as a whole.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION LITERATURE

Strategic political incivility at the local level can occur in public forums in which the general populace is invited to engage in matters of governance through mechanisms like participation in public meetings, public hearings, community planning exercises, and citizen advisory boards. Scholars from several, related fields—the public participation, civic engagement, and deliberative democracy literatures—have studied this type of public participation for years and thus, provide another foundation on which to base our understanding of strategic political incivility in local public forums (Fung and Wright 2001; Beierle and Cayford 2002; Innes and Booher 2004; Fung 2006; Leighninger 2006; Nabatchi et al 2012).

Opportunities for direct public participation have grown and become institutionalized since the 1970s through administrative law where requirements for public notice and comment

started being incorporated into both substantive and procedural federal, state, and local statutes (Bingham, O’Leary, and Nabatchi 2005). Today, involvement of the public’s voice in local policy matters in particular has become an accepted, if not expected method of governance (Roberts 2004), one that is anticipated to become more even important in the future (Bingham et al. 2003).

Supporters of direct public participation suggest that it advances the interests of both the government as well as the members of the public who participate. From the government’s standpoint, the process of identifying and prioritizing public values—a mission that Moore (1997) suggests is at the core of public management—are best identified and prioritized when the public is involved in the process (Nabatchi 2012). On a more general level, public participation creates a virtuous cycle whereby an engaged public begets more engagement and thereby promotes and upholds the democratic ethos of the nation (Nabatchi 2010; Oldfield 1990). The citizen, too, profits by participating. Roberts (2004) outlines several of the benefits, among them that participation develops character, that it legitimizes the decisions of government, and even that it is a therapeutic endeavor.

With that in mind, direct public participation is not a panacea in and of itself and must be actively designed and managed in order to be productive. In recent years, several of the leading scholars of public participation have offered design principles, or guidelines, to help practitioners make direct public participation more effective. Two of the main areas of focus around which these principles revolve is *who* is included in deliberations as well as *how* they are involved. In terms of the *who*, public deliberations that seek to be viewed as legitimate must be representative, inclusive of the diverse interests involved (Bryson et al. 2013). In terms of the *how*, the process of public deliberation should aim for what Nabatchi (2012, 702) refer to as two-way communication, or “the bidirectional flow of information, or the transfer of information

wherein individuals act as both senders and receivers.” In other words, the less the public is merely a spectator, the more invested and committed they will be (Fung 2006).

The scholarship on designing and managing public participation is translated into practice by professional associations of meeting managers and process facilitators and mediators who train and set standards for best practices (IAP2 2014; American Bar Association, American Arbitration Association, and Resolution 2005). Public agencies assign personnel and hire outside expertise to assess, design and manage the proliferation of public policy forums (Office of Management and Budget and Quality 2012).

Though there is a sizable literature on managing public conflict and facilitating multi-party negotiation (Susskind 1987; Carpenter and Kennedy 1988; Susskind et al. 1999; O’Leary and Bingham 2003; Dukes 2006), the phenomenon of strategic political incivility in local public forums and its effect on deliberative democracy are largely unexplored. What we do know comes from anecdotal accounts of orchestrated efforts to disrupt public norms of comity at public hearings, open meetings, civic engagement workshops, and other public forums for public deliberation (Brown 2011). Within the community of professional facilitators, specific case experiences have raised concerns about disruptions of public assemblies specifically designed and managed by elected officials, public managers and professional facilitators and intended to foster deliberative public discussion and input. Practitioners have observed in some cases that such disruptions are leading public officials to limit public engagement in subsequent forums and constrain participation to comments at more formal hearing formats. Some have expressed concerns that such disruptions are increasing. Others have attributed the disruptions primarily to conservative organizers, such as Tea Party groups. However, no systematic evidence exists to confirm these impacts or trends. We are interested in documenting the extent to which these

disruptive strategies are being used today, by whom, and for what purposes. We are also interested in how professional facilitators are responding.

The potential impacts of strategic political incivility at the local level make this an important research subject. Not only is there the potential impact of disrupted deliberation on the constitutionally protected rights of other individual citizens, but more broadly, there is the potential for the de-legitimization and suppression of democratic deliberation and civic engagement itself (Jamieson and Hardy 2012). Strategic political incivility and disruptive tactics of well-organized and sometimes well-financed interest groups may have structural consequences beyond the moment of the individual disruptions. They may discourage local leaders from entering or staying in public service, making it difficult to recruit and retain talented public officials and contributing to greater political polarization, hyper-partisanship and ultimately the inability to effectively govern (Maisel 2012). In turn, they may also trigger responses intended to contain disruptions that instead lead to decreased opportunity for participation.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODS

This research begins to fill that information gap about strategic political incivility by gathering empirical data on the incidence, form, and ramifications of organized, disruptive behavior on civil discourse at the local level. To start this investigation, we used Qualtrics survey software to administer an online survey to a sample of professional public meeting facilitators. Although facilitators represent only one perspective on this issue, we began with them because their broad experience in managing public meetings makes them well-placed to discuss trends in

disruptive behavior. In the future, we plan to administer our survey to other groups, including public officials (elected and appointed) and professional planners.

The survey was sent via email in April 2013 to all members of two of the largest and most prominent practitioner groups that deal with environmental and public policy issues and conflicts: the National Roster of Environmental Conflict Resolution Professionals maintained by the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution and the Environmental and Public Policy Section of the Association for Conflict Resolution, a national professional association. We chose these groups because they represent a major segment of the profession that is explicitly involved in designing and facilitating or mediating public processes where conflict is likely to occur over a range of policy areas. The groups do not account for the majority of public meeting facilitators by any means, but provide a useful starting point from which to begin examining disruptions to civil discourse more concretely.

After accounting for overlapping membership, our survey was distributed to 518 individuals. Ninety-five respondents (18 percent of those surveyed) either fully completed or largely completed the surveys. “Email response rates of 20 percent or lower are not uncommon” for email and Web-based surveys (Andrews, Nonnecke, and Preece 2003: 191; Witmer, Colman, and Katzman 1999). Expected response rates for unsolicited external online surveys have also been decreasing over the years. In one early meta-analysis of published research surveys, average response rates to online surveys declined by 44 percent: from 43 percent in 1995 to 24 percent in 2000 (Sheehan 2001). Response rates are also highly variable depending on issue salience, length of survey items, and follow-up strategies, among other factors (Cook, Heath, and Thompson 2000). For this survey, we sent an initial email invitation with a brief description of the project and a link to the survey. We then sent two follow-up emails to non-respondents five

days apart before closing the survey. Had we been able to accompany the online survey with initial paper invitations and additional mailed follow ups, per Dillman’s methodology, we expect we would have increased our survey responses (Millar and Dillman 2011).

As important as response rates (Cook, Heath, and Thompson 2000), is the representativeness of the sample. The 95 respondents appear to represent a broad range of practitioners in terms of their experience, gender, and geographic practice. The mean level of professional experience in the field of the respondents was 21 years, ranging from 0 – 42 years. Forty-one percent of the respondents were female; 59 percent male. Respondents hailed from 26 states across the U.S. Eighty-two percent identified themselves as professional facilitators and another 10 percent identified themselves as public meeting participants, public managers or planners/elected officials.

Respondents attended an average of 24 public forums in the past five years (ranging from 0 – 250). In order to increase the accuracy of respondents’ recall, we asked them to report on deliberative forums they participated in during a limited period of time: between January 2009 and May 2013 and to provide more detail on one specific case during that period.

DEFINING TERMS

For the survey, we specified the public forums we were interested in learning more about as deliberative forums, defined as “government-sponsored meetings or series of meetings to which the public has been invited to discuss issues, opportunities, problems, or conflicts.” To make the concept of strategic political incivility more concrete, we operationalized it as “disruptions that were planned by two or more individuals acting in a coordinated fashion at public forums.” One of the goals of the survey design, however, was to avoid language

intimating that disruptive behavior is normatively bad. Therefore, we did not define disruptions in the survey language, but rather asked respondents to define the term themselves. The framing language presented in the introduction is provided in Appendix A.

Examples of definitions of disruptive behaviors solicited from the respondents range from silencing and/or preventing others' participation to physical threats. Table 1 below shows the variety of responses and examples given of disruptive behavior. We should note that many of these behaviors were defined as legitimate actions within the rights of public engagement, and that facilitators felt that it was important to protect the right of free speech for all participants, including those engaging in the potentially disruptive behavior. See Figure 2.2 below for frequencies of the various types of behaviors.

TABLE 2.1: DEFINITIONS OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS PROVIDED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Behaviors	Examples/description
Attempts to delegitimize the process (this was the most reported description of disruption)	Refusing (re)direction from facilitators Unwilling to listen Derailing or ignoring the legitimate process “If once the message is delivered... the individual or group continues to disrupt the process or the message is delivered in such a manner that the group can no longer do its work.”
Preventing others’ participation (this was the second most reported description of disruption)	Silencing others Intimidation Interrupting “When an individuals behavior attempts to prevent another from being able to express their opinion, either by interrupting them, precluding any rational conversation, or by consuming all the available time.”
Marginalizing populations or minority voices	“A key concern is massive campaigns organized to stop those who are marginalized or hold marginalized view from expressing their rights and views.”
Presenting false information	Lying Misleading Obfuscating the truth
Threats	Verbal attacks Personalizing Blaming, finger-pointing Using abusive language, profanity Physical violence Making other participants feel unsafe Bullying Carrying guns “When the right to protest becomes personal: either in verbal or physical attacks or even more subtle verbal slams/slurs.”

Acting out	<p>Repetition Chanting</p> <p>“The rights of others to speak are ignored or actually hindered (shouting, chanting, refusal to yield the floor, etc.).</p> <p>Stopping the forum from occurring or progressing becomes the only or primary thrust of these participants.”</p>
Manipulating attendance	<p>Deliberate recruitment of disruptive attendees Paying for attendees</p> <p>“...line holders who give their tickets to one body of constituents is a distortion of the actual voices attempting to be heard, paying them is not democracy and is a serious hindrance to public deliberation.”</p>
Invoking other “more legitimate” authorities	<p>God Military</p>
Close-mindedness	<p>One-sided viewpoint</p> <p>“When they enter the room with the belief that they, and only they, have the right position or answers, and willfully oppose the expression of other positions and ideas through non-collaborative, disruptive and uncivil behavior.”</p>
Blocking the flow of information	
Poor leadership that allows for disruption to occur	<p>“The line is crossed rarely in the way suggested here; however, is crossed regularly, with enthusiasm and effectiveness, when the chair/moderator is "weak" in perception, capacity to confront directly the facts (in a clear, quick, polite but controlled redirection, without being manipulated by assured protests), understanding of the need to protect the integrity of the group and process (as well as commitment and time of attendees), or, is intellectually too weak to perceive exactly what is happening, or possesses a defective idea of "civility" which permits such manipulations.”</p>

STUDY FINDINGS

THE INCIDENCE OF DISRUPTIONS

The survey respondents had varying experiences with disruptive behavior in public deliberations. Less than half of the 95 respondents reported having any personal experience with public meeting disruption; 39 (41 percent of respondents) indicated they had witnessed “planned disruptions by two or more individuals acting in a coordinated fashion” at public forums since January 1, 2009 and the close of the survey on May 5, 2013. However, respondents who had experienced such behavior reported an average of 3.9 meetings that were disrupted by an organized effort. We found no statistical differences in professional experience or gender between those who witnessed disruptions those who had not.

As Figure 2.1 shows, of those respondents who had witnessed disruptions, a slight majority of respondents (53 percent) reported that the level of disruptive behavior has stayed the same while 42 percent thought disruptions are increasing. Only 5 percent of respondents believed that the incidence of disruptive behavior is decreasing. These responses did not vary significantly based on professional experience or gender.

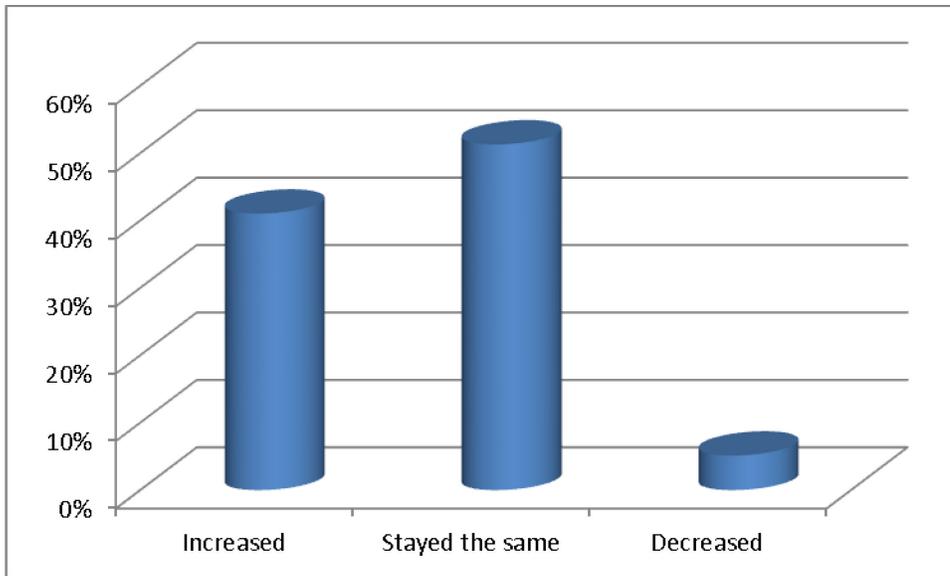


FIGURE 2.1. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO THINK DISRUPTING BEHAVIOR HAS INCREASED, STAYED THE SAME, OR DECREASED (N=38)

CHARACTERIZING DISRUPTIONS

We asked respondents who had witnessed disruptions to characterize the nature of the disruptive behaviors that were present at such meetings by referring to a pre-specified list of behaviors (see Figure 2.2). We found that the most frequently cited behaviors were verbal, including: interrupting or speaking repeatedly out of turn; shouting over others; refusing to stop talking despite repeated requests; using abusive language; and threatening someone verbally. Less frequent were physical behaviors, including: protesting; threatening someone physically; standing on tables or other physical disruption; and blocking entry.

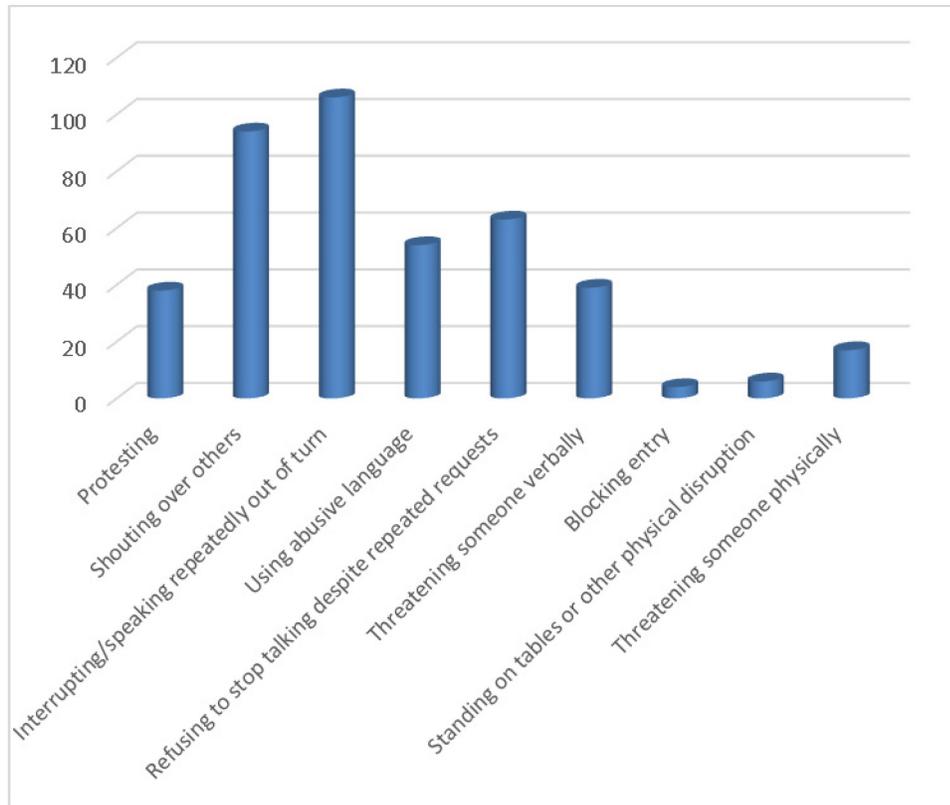


FIGURE 2.2. NUMBER OF FORUMS IN WHICH THE FOLLOWING BEHAVIOR WAS PRESENT (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

EXAMPLES OF DISRUPTIONS

To probe more deeply into these meeting disruptions, we asked the witnesses to focus on one meeting in particular and to answer a series of questions related to that meeting. Thirty-four specific cases were reported on and they ranged across several different policy areas: 29 percent concerned the environment; 15 percent land use; 15 percent transportation; 12 percent energy; 9 percent community planning; 3 percent education; and the rest unspecified as “other.” For the majority (71 percent) of these cases, the witness was acting as the meeting facilitator.

The reported purpose of the meetings varied. Forty-four percent of the meetings were to gather information from the public. Another 44 percent were evenly spread across meetings to educate the public, involve participants in discussing ideas, or reach agreement on

recommendations. Another 21 percent were unspecified. It is possible that this distribution reflects the general distribution of public meetings, with a far greater proportion devoted to gathering public input.

The frequency of the different disruptive behaviors noted in the cases was similar to the distribution previously noted in Figure 2.2, with a somewhat greater frequency of physical behaviors, particularly protesting. For the majority of these case reports (65 percent) the respondents indicated that there was evidence of pre-planning by those who exhibited disruptive behaviors. We asked the respondents for their perception of the primary motivation of those disrupting the meeting (see Figure 2.3). The most frequently reported motivation was an objection to the substantive policy change (44 percent). Other primary motivations indicated were: seeking publicity for their own concerns (21 percent); an objection to the legitimacy of the forum (14 percent); an objection to the legitimacy of the sponsoring governing body (14 percent); a grievance about being excluded or their voices not being heard (5 percent).

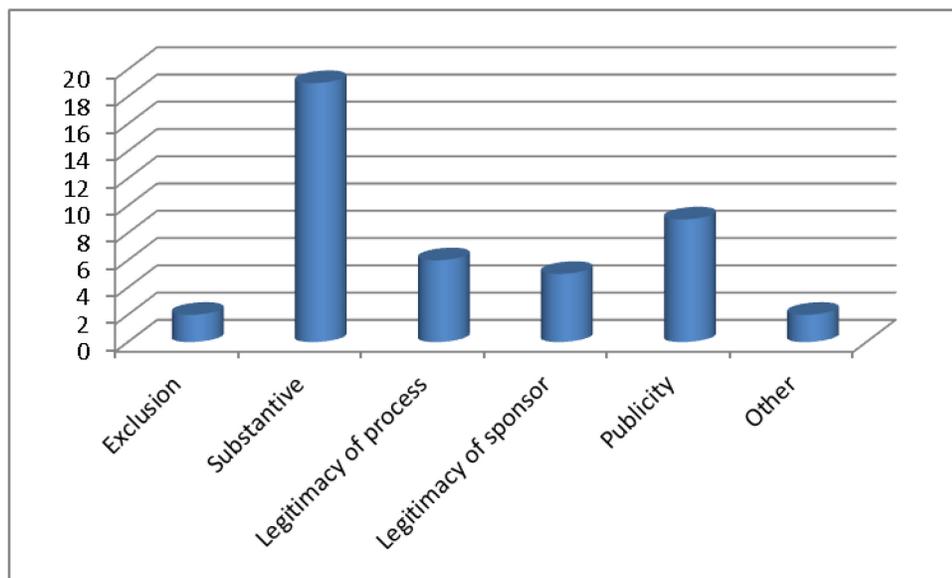


FIGURE 2.3. PERCEIVED MOTIVATIONS FOR GROUP DISRUPTIONS

We reviewed the characterizations of the disrupting groups by responses facilitators provided in their brief case reports and found a broad range of groups that tended to be either interest-driven or ideology-driven. Table 2.2 below reveals that the vast majority of groups (71 percent) presented in the case examples were interest-driven. Of the ideologically driven groups, all were reported as being conservative in nature. These data need to be more carefully confirmed by follow-up interviews on the cases.

TABLE 2.2. CHARACTERIZATION OF DISRUPTIVE GROUPS

Interest-Driven Groups		Ideology-Driven Groups	
Local Citizens Groups	5	Conservative-Leaning Groups (e.g. Tea Party, Anti-Agenda 21)	6
Unions/Industry Workers	4		
Environmental Advocates	2		
Recreational User Groups	3		
Business/Resource Users	1		

The majority of the respondents were completely (26 percent) or generally (52 percent) satisfied with the way in which the meeting disruptions were handled. This response did not vary significantly by level of experience or gender. As Figure 2.4 shows, in most cases, the disrupters eventually joined the forum and/or the meeting agenda was changed and additional forums scheduled.

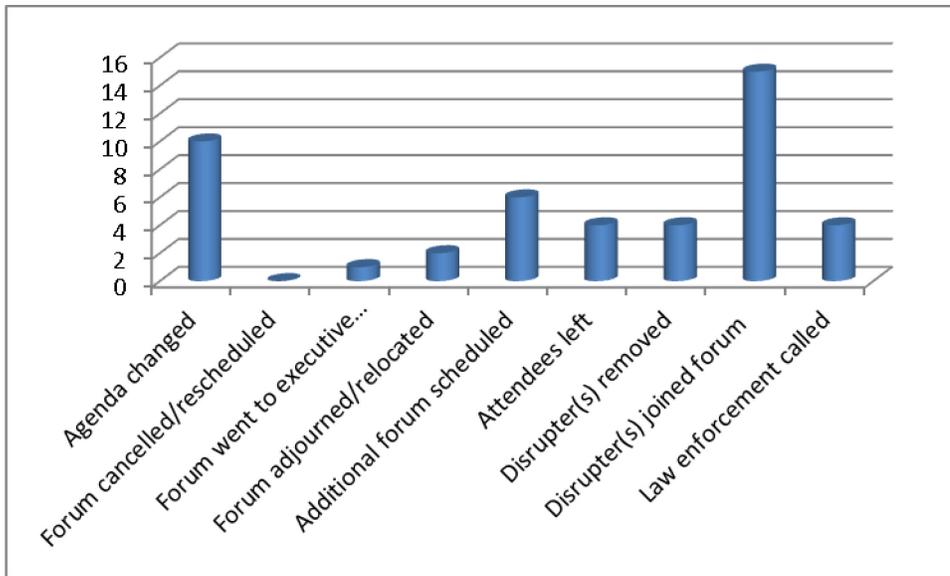


FIGURE 2.4. NUMBER OF DELIBERATIVE FORUMS IN WHICH THE VARIOUS TYPES OF RESPONSES TO DISRUPTIONS OCCURRED

*NOTE: THE OPTION “FORUM CANCELLED OR RESCHEDULED” WAS NOT SELECTED BY ANY SURVEY RESPONDANTS.

When asked about the longer term effects of the disruption, however, the respondents offered a mix of comments, with no particular view prevailing. Some indicated that the disruptions lead to process improvements, for example:

- Actively working to set ground rules and procedures to lessen the impact of disruptions and provide all parties fair and open access to public forums in __ County
- Better, more active public participation policy put in place
- The forum did create a set of criteria that were educational sound and appreciative of social group identities

Others expressed concerns about restrictions placed on future meetings and that the disruptions may have discouraged future participation:

- Future meetings more controlled and restricted.

- Yes. The staff and stakeholders in charge of the ongoing forum tightened up public comment ground rules and made the process more formal, run by Robert's Rules, with very little facilitated dialogue.
- Reluctance of some parties to engage in future meetings
- Hard to say; this is continuing. I believe people are choosing to resign positions, not run for re-election, and refuse appointments.
- Hard to say for certain, may have had chilling effect on willingness to negotiate

Finally, some respondents did not observe any longer term effects of the meeting disruptions:

- Most participants remained committed to the process. Not sure that there was any attrition among participants.
- No. In fact, it helped our process. It showed those participants who were looking for solutions, that the opponents were being unreasonable.

To summarize our findings, we did not find evidence of a sizable increase in disruptions of deliberative forums based on reports from our sample of environmental and public policy facilitators and conflict resolution professionals. Less than half of the respondents had witnessed organized disruptions in public meetings since January 2009 and over half of those witnesses did not think the frequency of disrupted meetings had been increasing over time. We learned that the majority of the reported disruptive behaviors were verbal; very few were physical (e.g., barring the entryway or physical threats) and that disruptors' likely motivation was over substantive disagreements with the direction of the deliberation, not over feelings of exclusion or disenfranchisement. The groups appeared to be largely interest-driven, and those that were ideologically driven were right-leaning.

Eighty-six percent of those who reported on specific examples of disrupted meetings felt generally or completely satisfied with how the meeting was handled and in most of these cases the disrupters ended up joining the meeting and in several cases the agenda was changed. Facilitators' views on any long term impacts of disruptions were mixed; several indicated that they actually increased public participation, while others observed that future meetings reduced public participation by being more tightly managed.

DISCUSSION

When we launched this research, our expectation was to corroborate direct or anecdotal accounts of strategic political incivility at the local level. We anticipated that its incidence would be widespread and that our colleagues would observe an increase in such behavior since 2009 as well as a sizeable concern over the management of these meetings and their potential negative long-term impacts. We did not find this to be the case. What could account for these unexpected findings?

Assuming our findings are representative of the professional facilitation field, it could be that the emphasis on extreme anecdotal incidences in media reports or repeated stories among colleagues aggrandizes the overall frequency of such events. Agenda-setting theory suggests that the issues on which mass media choose to report can significantly impact the public's perception of the salience of those issues (McCombs and Shaw 1972). In other words, media coverage impacts what the public thinks about. Other studies suggest that the public's perception of the risk of an event occurring is affected by the frequency with which the media reports about similar events, even if those events are rare (Coombs and Slovic 1979; Kasperson et al. 1988; Young, Norman, and Humphreys 2008). Thus, taken together, it is plausible that the actual

frequency and severity of disruptions to deliberative discourse are exaggerated by ample media coverage.

Another explanation is that our sample is not sufficiently representative of the professional facilitator population. Our 18 percent response rate is not as robust as we would have liked. That said, we would have expected the reverse effect, that respondents would self-select based on their experience with meeting disruptions and that the sample would in fact be over-representing such incidences. Nonetheless it is important to remember that our sample size and the specialized population it represents is only a small subset of the total number of local public assemblies, the majority of which are not designed or managed by trained facilitators.

Bearing this in mind, our choice of practitioners carries with it inherent selection bias. These professionals are experienced in dealing with conflict and designing meetings to minimize unproductive discord and build consensus. The incidence of disruptions may be low, because the best practice of careful assessments of stakeholders upfront is being followed. Key groups are being identified early on and included in the meeting planning. Facilitators are anticipating frustration or conflict and working proactively to resolve issues before disruptions might occur.

Preliminary evidence from similar surveys of local planners in Virginia and county commissioners in Oregon suggest that there is less satisfaction with how disruptions are being handled and more concern over the long-term implications of these disruptions. More research is needed to explore these differences in greater depth.

We did find that the incidence of right-leaning groups among those ideologically driven appears to be prevalent as reported by the respondents. However, we discovered that most groups were not motivated by ideology; more than 70 percent were advocating for specific substantive

interests. This underscores the nature of controversial public policy issues that implicate a diversity of contending interests and potential impacts, especially at the local level, that extent beyond ideological contestation.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

As researchers and practitioners, we walk a fine line between dual concerns: on the one hand, the presence of strategic political incivility may drive some people away from participating in public discourse; while on the other hand, excessive control and discouragement of free speech may drive others away. Democratic governance depends upon an engaged citizenry. Many common practices of freedom of expression, including public protest and civil disobedience, are essential forms of democratic participation. Advocates of collaborative governance, public policy facilitators, and deliberative democracy practitioners place a high value on inclusion of interested or affected stakeholders in civic discussions and believe that exclusion of any parties seeking to exercise their constitutional rights risks undermining the validity of open democratic deliberation.

The authors caution readers against drawing any sweeping conclusions from this research. We are aware of the limitations of the research to date. We know that circumstances of public assemblies vary by location, time, type of issue, and type of participation, and that facilitators must be able to adapt to those circumstances.

Nonetheless, besides bringing attention to the need to continue to explore the questions that have prompted this initial research, we do suggest that practitioners – local government officials, conveners, and facilitators of the type of public assemblies we address here – should consider the following reflections.

First of all, we have seen no evidence in our data of organized violence. While violence of any sort is deeply disturbing, we do not see any growth in the numbers and severity of incidents occurring at public assemblies, and where such incidents do occur they are the actions of individuals. Furthermore, we have not found in this survey any significant incidence of a disabling decline of civility in professionally facilitated forums at the local level. Organized efforts to disrupt public assemblies, intimidate opponents, and thus undermine the rights of citizens, make up a small minority of such events. And when they do occur, most facilitators report satisfaction with their ability to respond.

Nonetheless, reactions to these contemporary challenges may lead some facilitators as well as local officials to limit opportunities for public expression, effectively silencing certain views out of concerns over potential intimidation or violence and a felt need to assert control over the disrupting activity. Such reactions would not only discredit the intentions and professionalism of the facilitation field, but more critically, could reduce the confidence and commitment of public officials in advancing the use of more open, deliberative public forums. We urge facilitators to normalize expectations of protest, and acknowledge its value and even necessity.

The public facilitation field has faced similar challenges before (Dukes 2001). Indeed, many segments of the population are skeptical that their goals may be compromised by participation in public assemblies, particularly those processes that they may not have experienced before. This skepticism is a healthy concern that ensures that facilitators keep their practice authentic. But during the late 1990s and continuing into the next decade, the facilitation field was confronted with a substantial segment of the environmental advocacy community who believed that facilitation practices placed their goals at a disadvantage.

As is the case sometimes today, they believed that many facilitators were biased; in this case it was a perceived bias against advocacy and confrontation. Some facilitators responded by inviting them to tell their stories and concerns, including a series of sessions titled "Listening to Our Publics" at national and regional events. Those concerns largely eroded as advocates were taken seriously, and behavior adapted where change was needed.

We recommend that facilitators continue to anticipate and carefully listen to the concerns of what some have termed the "New Activists" (Homewood 2011). No matter the circumstance, facilitators need to demonstrate best practices, such as using clear and respectful language, ensuring a clear agenda with opportunities for input; setting clear values and expectations that promote parity of participation; ensuring clarity of process, and implementing strong, clear ground rules that promote fairness, safety and access for all. Whenever possible, facilitators should work in advance with forum sponsors and planners to ensure timely notice of meetings and appropriate efforts to reach diverse communities and groups of stakeholders. Where conflict is expected, forum organizers should consider taking the time for a conflict or situation assessment to be conducted and engaging key parties representing the diverse perspectives on any particular issue.

We also urge facilitators to be much stronger advocates for the work that they do. One of the authors recently led a training for planners and other public officials who have been confronted by these with challenges to their planning and public involvement processes, and even challenges to the (constitutional) structure of the government that they represent. One segment of that training gave an opportunity for participants to articulate the values that underlay their planning and public processes. The participants by and large could not do so.

We are concerned that this could well be the case for the facilitation field as well. The value of “neutrality” is particularly problematic. Few people outside of the facilitation field believe that third parties are 'neutral,' and in fact this claim may lead to distrust (as the claim is seen as false) and even active dislike (as neutrality itself, which may be seen as uncaring, or absence of thoughtfulness, or unwillingness to acknowledge injustice, is not wanted).

Finally, we suggest that facilitation values be rooted, not simply in neutrality, but also more explicitly in democratic practice (Dryzek 2010). For example, facilitators should promote public processes that are inclusive, value access to good information, promote understanding of others' perspectives, encourage creativity, and offer opportunities for learning from and caring for one's neighbors. Facilitated forums that exemplify such democratic values, we and other advocates of deliberative democracy argue, are more likely to create a much better range of options, a more humane range of options, and more legitimacy to such deliberative forums.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory research raises more questions than it answers, but it represents a start at conceptualizing and documenting strategic political incivility as organized disruptions in local assemblies intended for public deliberation. Much more empirical study is needed, so we hope that this paper provokes others to conduct more extensive and in depth investigations. We plan to pursue a similar line of questions with larger national sample of public administrators and planners. It would be important to determine differences in experiences and perceptions of different stakeholder groups as well. More in depth case histories would be of particular importance, as would the study of multiple cases in specific communities or locations. Establishing a larger, more reliable baseline for the nature of deliberative discourse and

organized disruptions with follow-up surveys in future years would also provide a basis for studying patterns in the nature and extent of these experiences over a number of cases and over time.

APPENDIX A. INTRODUCTORY TEXT FOR SURVEY

The underpinning of collaborative governance and deliberative democracy is open, democratic deliberation that is inclusive and maximizes participation across the ideological spectrum. Advocates and practitioners in those fields recognize that other forms of expression, such as public protest and civil disobedience are also essential forms of free expression. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that orchestrated activity by organized groups intended to disrupt or shut down forums for public deliberation is occurring in a variety of settings. Many planners and public policy facilitators are reporting that even the most carefully designed efforts to engage diverse stakeholders in open public deliberation have been vulnerable to organized strategies to disrupt.

We are studying organized attempts to impede, delegitimize and shut down deliberative forums that are explicitly or ostensibly designed to foster discussion. By “deliberative forums” we mean government-sponsored meetings or series of meetings to which the public has been invited to discuss issues, opportunities, problems, or conflicts. Such forums are generally designed to include and engage diverse people with a range of different perspectives on the policy matter at hand. Examples of such forums include roundtables, visioning, community planning exercises, public conversations, community dialogues, hearings, etc.

This project does not presume that disruption of deliberative forums per se is inherently harmful. Rather, we are specifically exploring instances in which planned disruptive activity may threaten the ability of others to engage in public discussion or exercise their own rights of free expression and/or of peaceful assembly and petition. Though we acknowledge the existence of

disruptions caused by individuals acting independently, we are specifically interested in the occurrence of planned disruptions by organized groups.

We are conducting this survey of practitioners to explore the extent to which such activities are occurring, the nature and purposes of the activities, the conditions under which they are occurring, and how forum participants, facilitators, and conveners are reacting to them. The distinction between legitimate protest as public participation and activities that hinder democratic engagement is not clear cut, and so we are intentionally NOT defining the term “disruption” a priori. Rather, we ask that you reflect on your experiences as a practitioner and consider where you might draw that line. Below, you will have the opportunity to provide an example of an instance in which you witnessed an organized effort to disrupt the agenda, schedule, or structure of a deliberative forum.

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CHAPTER THREE: INTRACTABLE CONFLICTS OVER LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN ICLEI – LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

INTRODUCTION

“We’re not going to be good Germans!” This statement was made at a local Tea Party meeting referring to the fact that the meeting participants wouldn’t blindly follow a perceived corrupt government into all kinds of feared atrocities. The meeting and this very powerful statement began a multi-year look into conflict surrounding natural resources and sustainable development projects at the local level. The purpose of this study was to use the theory of intractable conflicts to better understand and manage what we are calling “new activism.” “New activism” and “sustainable development” will be defined shortly, but let us start with intractable conflicts. As outlined by Lewicki et al. (2003), the theory of intractable conflicts defines a conflict as intractable when it is long-standing, eludes resolution, is divisive, has a good deal of intensity, pervades various social levels and institutions, and is highly complex. These components will be discussed further when applied to the local case study below.

Because of the multiple components to these intractable conflicts, resolution does not necessarily mean that the parties will resolve every part of the conflict. Rather, resolution means that the parties start working towards an end goal, addressing central problems, and are working towards mutually acceptable decisions. Parties use different tactics to settle conflicts: finding facts to back up positions, working on joint problem solving, leaving the decision up to authorities, seeking adjudication, lobbying for political action, working with market-based economic solutions, and even resorting to actions of sabotage and violence (Lewicki et al. 2003).

It begs the question as to whether or not sabotage and violence work towards conflict resolution; yet perhaps these tactics create an end to the discussion where there was none before.

Conflicts can range in their level of intractability. More tractable conflicts involve working towards solving problems and seeking common ground. Somewhat intractable conflicts can involve incentives for resolution and do not tend to be threatening to core values and identities. However the most intractable conflicts involve perceived threats to core identities and values.

FRAMING

Differences in core values are shown through frames, which can be a major cause of conflict depending on how frames are used. People use these frames to define what the conflict is about, who is to blame, how the problem should be solved, and who should fix the problem. “Framing involves shaping, focusing, and organizing the world around us” (Lewicki et al 2003, p. 11). Once we construct our knowledge on a subject or issue, frames help us to represent that knowledge and take a stance within the issue. Frames aren’t easily modified, and in fact, they tend to stabilize and transfer to other issues, which increases intensity and adds to the longevity of the conflict (Lewicki et al 2003).

Frames allow participants in the conflict to strategically connect their cause to what’s currently happening in the real world (Benford 1997). Frames identify and label what’s going on, in addition to analyzing information and collective action. They give a sense of what the collective perception in the movement is, as well as processes that mold and change the frames (Oliver and Johnston 2001).

Common frames used to mobilize people include injustice (political and economic), religion, identity, self-help, good vs. evil, and protagonists vs. antagonists (Benford and Snow 2000). In many of these components, an “other” is created outside the frame, making an “us vs. them” mentality. When taken to the extreme, this delineation of insiders and outsiders can lead to or add to the conflict. When parties frame arguments that direct “ought” and “should” towards the other parties involved, it is likely that the conflict will escalate to being more intractable than if not used (Lewicki et al., 2003). Thus frames can help to build our identities, find others with like mentalities, create a sense of who’s with us and who’s against us, drive collective action, and either be a source of conflict or be a major part of the conflict.

NEW ACTIVISTS

“New activists” is a term coined by staff members who work with Virginia Association of Counties to assist local government staff members with local and regional planning (VACO 2011). This term succinctly describes a group of people who generally fall outside the traditional engagement with government and share the following attributes: (1) they are new to public participation in government decision making, (2) they are highly frustrated by the status quo, (3) they tend to be supportive of more radical approaches to policy development, and (4) they are less patient with the slow speed and processes of traditional government action (Homewood 2011).

While the Tea Party is probably the most famous group that fits this definition, they are not the only identifiable new activist group. Other groups include federalists, libertarians, patriots, 912 organizations, Reform Party, environmental advocacy groups, and “those of all persuasions generally upset with government” (VACO 2011). However, new activists need not be associated with any one particular group, “[i]ndeed, ‘none of the above’ seems to be the

favorite electoral choice of many of these new activists” (Homewood 2011). Rising debt, an overreaching federal government, and limitations on property rights are some of the common issues motivating these groups.

Because of their ill-defined structures and grouping, new activist issues can be hard to pin down. At times some of these groups are found to be proponents of one type of project in a particular region; while in a different part of the country, the same group could be highly opposed to the same type of project. However we did find that sustainable development projects, as they relate to property rights, seem to be a hot topic amongst many of these group members.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (UNCED 1987)

Sustainable development is most famously defined by the above quote, which was first written in the United Nation’s “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future” This document and its definition of sustainable development laid the groundwork for the subsequent United Nations plan to enact sustainable development practices. The definition has been so widely reported that it has, in one sense, become the ubiquitous definition of sustainable development, while, in another sense, no one really knows what it means. The elusiveness of the definition leaves it open to many different interpretations, which can be positive and negative. On one hand, groups can create many different kinds of sustainable development projects, including trying to address climate change, working on sustainable forestry practices, education and women’s rights work, and the way local governments plan for growth and development. On the other hand, some people may find the

openness of the definition – and some of the projects themselves – quite threatening.

Additionally, there's more to the UN report and Agenda 21 than just the very short, one-sentence definition. The part to which new activists are particularly opposed is where the United Nations calls for an Agenda 21 to be created in every locality (UNCED 1987).

This plan for local implementation has been interpreted to allow perceived unnecessary oversight and input from international and federal governing structures. Many new activists are fiercely independent and highly concerned about threats from those outside a local area. Agenda 21, and a newly created nonprofit called ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (hereafter called “ICLEI”), became two very threatening presences to two of their three major concerns – overreaching government and limitations on property rights.

Seeing an opportunity for engaging with localities around the world, organizers of ICLEI began with the intention of assisting with the creation of sustainable development projects at the local level. Individual localities can join this group for a nominal yearly fee and have access to information from others working on similar projects, as well as project tracking software to help create goals and projects, track progress, and measure success (ICLEI 2015). This group is closely related to UN's Agenda 21, but they are not a member of the United Nations, nor do they have oversight by the international organization.

However, the close connection to the United Nations and the feared impact to local control and local property rights caused activism to flare in certain areas. Those who work in natural resource issues and local planning had only heard of Agenda 21 as an obscure document that came out of a meeting long ago. Suddenly, Agenda 21 was seen as a rallying cry for local engagement and crusading.

One might have the perspective that planning for responsible growth of our localities and working for the conservation of natural resources would be a good thing. New activists, though, tend to see these things as infiltration from “outsiders” and social engineering. At public meetings, we heard inflammatory language such as: “the devil is at the doorstep” (in reference to the United Nations), “religious philosophy of evolution” (in reference to science taking over decision-making), “regionalism is communism” and “planning is socialism’s trademark” (in reference to the way local governments make decisions that impact their collective populations). Perhaps the starkest language we heard was the fear that local government was going to make “human habitation zones” that would force people to live in certain areas where infrastructure and services would be directed.

THE CASE: ICLEI MEMBERSHIP IN ROANOKE

Roanoke County joined ICLEI in 2007 by a unanimous vote of the board of supervisors. After joining ICLEI, the county created the Roanoke County Community Leaders Environmental Action Roundtable (RC-CLEAR) Climate Action Committee. This citizen-led organization was tasked to develop the County’s Energy Conservation Plan, which would attempt to address issues associated with climate change by following guidelines set forth by ICLEI. Membership in ICLEI provided the locality a network of peers with which to engage, as well as a database for recording and tracking various aspects of the locality’s carbon footprint, among other benefits (ICLEI 2015). RC-CLEAR was made up of 10 citizens – 2 representatives from each district in the county – who were appointed by their respective board of supervisor. When they were created, they became the only citizen-led action group in the county.

By 2009, RC-CLEAR had put together the county's first ICLEI Milestone Report, which detailed how the county had successfully met the first two ICLEI-required milestones (measure and set goals), and put forth plans as to how they would meet the final three milestones (community plan, implementation, review process.) Following their plan, RC-CLEAR provided local homes and businesses with educational information about energy conservation, performed energy audits, and started participating in environment and/or energy related events. By 2014, the first three of the five milestones were complete.

In 2011, Roanoke County started to see opposition to the county's engagement with ICLEI, as well as opposition to Agenda 21. Those who were in opposition to the project started coming to local meetings and speaking during the open citizen comment period. Additionally, these new activists submitted Freedom of Information Act requests regarding RC-CLEAR activities.

It is difficult to say with certainty that national trends echoed what was happening in Roanoke County, but there are enough similarities to give pause. Over the course of the three years between 2011 and 2014, Roanoke County Board of Supervisors held three different votes around whether or not to stay a member of ICLEI. The 2013 local elections brought a new mix of membership to the board that turned out to feel strongly that Roanoke should not be involved in ICLEI. The next year, the line item in the county's budget that carried ICLEI membership dues was removed, and the county effectively withdrew from the organization. RC-CLEAR was then disbanded.

National participation in ICLEI has seemingly followed a similar pattern to Roanoke County’s experience¹. Overall participation was on a steady growth pattern from its birth in 1990, yet seemed to have hit a stumbling point around the same time as Roanoke County. According to annual reports found on their website, membership in the organization from local governments within the United States steadily increased until 2010, then fell until their current numbers, last checked in November 2014.

TABLE 3.1: TOTAL U.S. MEMBERSHIP IN ICLEI BY YEAR

Year	Membership count
2005	164
2006	225
2007	350
2008	526
2009	600
2010	670
2011	No data found
2012	No data found
2013	503
2014	450

This story isn’t unique to Roanoke, but things did seem to get particularly heated in the area. While searching media databases for hits on this topic during this time period, Roanoke

¹ The data presented here is what we know to the best of our ability. No responses were given in email and phone requests for interviews with ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability staff members. Data given in annual reports changed throughout the years from lists of participants to statements about overall numbers of participants. The numbers for 2013 come from a cached screenshot of the ICLEI website that was then posted on a website from those who are in opposition to ICLEI work.

came out on top of the pack. Of the 231 returned results in 142 publications, the Roanoke Times had the most hits with 24 results. The next closest newspaper was the Venice Gondolier Sun in Florida with nine results. Totaling up results from newspapers around the United States, Virginia had the most with 26, followed by California and New York with 21, Florida 19, and Massachusetts 13. A search of just “ICLEI” in these same media databases returned 111 results from the Roanoke Times; the next closest was Carroll County Times in Westminster, MD with 30 hits.

ICLEI IN ROANOKE AS AN INTRACTABLE CONFLICT

We did see support for the components of intractable conflicts in this case. The conflict was long-standing and eluded resolution in that the county started to see pushback in 2011, then finally removed themselves from the organization three years later after several heated public meetings. Divisiveness and polarization around value differences were shown in the way people described their opinions about ICLEI, Agenda 21, and climate change issues. Opinions about these topics ranged from needing to address climate change immediately, to disbelief that climate change was happening at all. Different science and data sets were used to back up these opinions, and various experts spoke on behalf of both sides.

The conflict proved to be highly emotional. Fear based arguments were used on both sides, with some discussions focusing on threats to children and future generations. People started ridiculing one another in traditional media, as well as social media. Some participants yelled while others wept during public meetings, while others involved reported getting calls at home and being harassed out in public. The issue was also pervasive, permeated other institutions, and was highly complex. A variety of perspectives and participants were included

across social levels. Representatives from many different organizations and institutions joined in the discussion – environmental groups, local citizens, scientists, government leaders, and media. Discussions were not just held in local government public meetings; they were also held in advocacy meetings, at kitchen tables, online, and in the newspaper. Authority at all levels was questioned – from the United Nations all the way down to the local government leaders.

Framing became an important part of this conflict and was used to quickly express perspectives, as well as attract like-minded individuals to the various sides. We heard arguments based on religious perspectives, fairness and injustice (how governments were unfairly distributing the impacts of their decisions), and identifying the “other” in who was the source of the problem. Counterframes were adopted in order to quickly respond to perceived threats from these “others.” Perhaps the strongest frame we saw, though, came in the form of identity. Many people spoke about their love of Roanoke and what that meant to them as a person. This connection to the area certainly plays out in different ways for different people; however, the overall theme came through quite clearly in language from people on all sides of the issue.

DISCUSSION

The original intent of this study was to use the theory of intractable conflicts to better understand and manage new activism. The first part of addressing any conflict and seeking resolution is to always look for ways to better understand the various perspectives in the conflict. To that end and to the best of our ability, this study was successful. We do feel that we gained a grasp of the interests and values of some of the various parties involved. However, because of the highly complex nature of this issue, no clear cut path for resolution was discovered. The parties involved never seemed to begin to work together to sort through the issues and find

common ground. Instead Roanoke County removed itself from affiliation with ICLEI and, by removing the line item from the budget, seemingly gave in to the new activists who so strongly opposed participation in the group.

We did see a potential, however, to harness the energy surrounding identity framing and love of the Roanoke area and come to a more amicable resolution. Yet perhaps this is an ongoing discussion outside of this particular conflict. Identity of an area is built by the collective of individuals who live there, and Roanoke's overall identity was certainly molded by these discussions. Would it be nice for Roanoke to be known for something other than a highly divisive conflict over a seemingly obscure document? Perhaps. Yet when it comes down to the fundamentals of democracy, an engaged populace is intended for the system. Ideally there may not be such a clear split between winners and losers, but Roanoke now has an opportunity to determine if this is the way it wants to continue building its identity in the future.

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CHAPTER FOUR: INTRACTABLE CONFLICTS OVER LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RESULTING FROM “NEW ACTIVISM”: A CASE STUDY OF OPPOSITION TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE OF WIND ENERGY

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to examine and suggest strategies for resolution of the rising number of explosive conflicts involving “new activist” objections to local government sustainable development efforts through the lens of the theory of intractable conflicts (Lewicki et al 2003). “New activists” is a term coined by staff members who work with Virginia Association of Counties to assist local government staff members with local and regional planning (VACO 2011). It succinctly describes people who share the following attributes: (1) they are new to public participation in government decision making, (2) they are highly frustrated by the status quo, (3) they tend to be supportive of more radical approaches to policy development, and (4) they are impatient with the slow speed and processes of traditional government action (Homewood 2011).

While the Tea Party is probably the most famous group that fits this definition, it is not the only identifiable new activist group. Other entities include federalists, libertarians, patriots, 912 organizations, Reform Party, environmental advocacy groups, and “those of all persuasions generally upset with government” (VACO 2011). However, these individuals need not be associated with any one particular group, “[i]ndeed, ‘none of the above’ seems to be the favorite electoral choice of many of these new activists” (Homewood 2011). Rising debt, an overreaching

federal government, and limitations on property rights are some of the issues motivating these groups.

Of particular interest to us are the new activists targeting local government activities associated with sustainable development, including membership in ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability (Kaufman and Zernike 2012), regional planning (Halstead 2013), smart growth (Fox 2009), water and air quality (Shaw 2011), and pretty much anything to do with climate change (McCright and Dunlap 2003). Some of these activists' campaigns have become heated and disruptive. Public meetings have been stopped (Halstead 2013). Shaw (2011) reports an "entrenched civic habit of protesting." Brown (2011) reports new activists urging and educating others about how to disrupt local meetings: "Don't think we don't know how to win. We do." Use "confrontational, deliberately inflammatory style." "Get angry and stay angry." As we discuss below, amplified emotion is one component of what makes a conflict intractable.

The purpose of this article is twofold: 1) to use the theory of intractable conflicts to examine a specific new activism-led conflict over a local wind energy ordinance in southwest Virginia, and 2) to suggest strategies for resolving these types of conflicts, or at least making them more tractable.

Lewicki et al. (2003) have defined a conflict as intractable when it is long-standing, eludes resolution, is divisive, has a good deal of intensity, pervades various social levels and institutions, and is highly complex. Conflicts range in their level of intractability: more tractable conflicts allow problem solving and common ground seeking; somewhat intractable conflicts are non-threatening to core values and identities and allow incentives for resolution; while the most intractable conflicts threaten core identities and values. Perceptions of these conflicts change

over time and the parties involved may or may not see opportunities for resolution at the same time.

Resolution of an intractable conflict does not necessarily mean that the parties will eliminate all conflict. Rather, it means that the parties have begun working toward solutions, start addressing central problems, and are working towards mutually acceptable decisions. Parties use different tactics to settle conflicts: finding facts to back up positions, working on joint problem solving, leaving the decision up to authorities, seeking adjudication, lobbying for political action, working with market-based economic solutions, and even resorting to actions of sabotage and violence (Lewicki et al. 2003). The attributes of intractable conflicts (long-standing, eludes resolution, divisive, intense, pervasive, and complex) are defined here and used later in the manuscript to examine a case study of new activism conflict.

LONG-STANDING AND ELUDING RESOLUTION

According to Lewicki et al. (2003) all intractable conflicts have the same two things in common: they are long-standing and they elude resolution. By long-standing, a conflict persists beyond a one-time discussion or struggle. Such disagreements “have an extensive past, a turbulent present, and a murky future” (p. 38). Often these conflicts may seem like they’re resolved, but episodes may flare again and again depending on the political climate – thus they elude resolution.

As discussed above, conflict “resolution” need not mean that the parties eliminate all conflict. Parties may start working towards resolution, yet the same information or issue often is revisited again and again without a concerted effort by either side actively to seek ways to resolve their conflict. Following a “conflict spiral,” parties enter various stages of resolution at

different times and/or cycle back and forth between stages. These stages are discussion, polarization, segregation, and destruction. The discussion stages shares information, the polarization stage emerges because of different values, identities, or ideologies, the segregation stage begins when participants separate into like-minded groups because of these differences, and the destruction stage results when the listening and discussion needed for resolution become impossible (Lewicki et al. 2003).

DIVISIVENESS

Divisiveness occurs when people create an “us vs. them” mentality based on groups into which they segregate (Lewicki et al. 2003). Ideological differences are connected to beliefs, values, and identity (Haidt 2012). Thus, people feel personally attacked in intractable conflicts—it is not just that opponents want different outcomes and policies – they are perceived as attacking core morals, values, and identities. The more entrenched people are in their values and norms, the less likely they are to engage in discussions that feel intimidating, and the more likely that anger and other emotions arise when these value systems are threatened (Haidt 2012).

In many divisive situations, an “other” is created outside the frame, resulting in an “us vs. them” mentality. People use these dichotomies to make “others” of one another, to bind themselves with those that think like them, and to identify quickly those from whom they need to “protect” themselves (Stivers 2008). This delineation of insiders and outsiders can accentuate the polarization of the conflict. When multiple parties approach the table with this perspective, we can say this would potentially be an intractable conflict.

INTENSITY – ROLE OF EMOTIONS

Divisiveness often leads to a rise in emotions and intense situations. Emotions are used to recruit support and gain loyalty as well as to “nurture anger towards outsiders” (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000, ps 76-77). Propaganda – circulars, posters, broadcasts, displays – can be used as a way to define the emotions people are “supposed” to experience in response to a conflict (Perry 2002). Actors in the conflict can intentionally stir emotions (Gould 2004). They may want the opposition to see how much anger, excitement, and grieving there is in the group (Perry 2002). An intractable conflict can create emotions; while, conversely, emotions can be used to drive the movement (deVolo 2006). Communities and cultures have implicit rules about emotions and when they are appropriate for the given situation (Gould 2004).

PERVASIVENESS

Pervasiveness means that a conflict permeates many different institutions, social settings, and personal spaces outside the space where the conflict originates. There is usually a high number of stakeholders, especially if the conflict impacts a community (Lewicki et al. 2003). Sustainable development projects may include government actors, nonprofit service groups, local citizens, political activist groups, businesses, and academic institutions, among other groups.

COMPLEXITY

Intractable conflicts are often quite complex. They involve a large number of issues and participants, cross social levels, are disorganized, facts are uncertain, roles may not be clearly defined, and authorities may be questioned. Sustainable development has been called a “new environmental conflict” that is a “complex and continuous struggle over the definition and the meaning of the environmental problem itself” (Hajer 1995, pgs. 14-15). Because sustainable

development approaches to policy and programming are so new and involves so many different actors, we often see intractable conflicts arise concerning how to create policies.

Hajer (1995) has suggested that sustainable development is “a struggle between various unconventional political coalitions... in the sense that the actors have not necessarily met” but that they organize themselves around particular stories (pgs. 12-13). Most community planning efforts attempt to bind people together into a shared story (Throgmorton 2003). We discuss various actors’ stories through a lens of framing, as discussed below.

FRAMING

According to Lewicki et al (2003), “Framing involves shaping, focusing, and organizing the world around us” (p. 11). The way parties use frames is a major cause of conflict. People use frames to define what the conflict is about, who is to blame, how the problem should be solved, and who should fix it. Once we construct our knowledge on a subject or issue, frames help us to represent that understanding and take a stance within the issue (Oliver and Johnston 2001). Frames aren’t easily modified, and in fact, they tend to stabilize and transfer to other issues, which increases intensity and adds to the longevity of the issue (Lewicki et al 2003).

Frames encourage people to pick a side and thus further an “us vs. them” mentality. When parties frame arguments that direct “ought” and “should” towards the other parties involved, it is likely that the conflict will escalate to being more intractable than if not used (Lewicki et al., 2003).

Frames are also a powerful tool when starting or joining a social movement and can be used to easily express beliefs and values to potential supporters. “Collective action frames... simplif[y] and condens[e] aspects of the ‘world out there,’ but in ways that are ‘intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists’” (Benford and Snow 2000,

p. 614). Common frames used to mobilize people include injustice (political and economic), religion, identity, urging others to action (Benford and Snow 2000), role of victim, problem identification and attribution, counterframe and response (Lewicki et al 2003). We use these common frames from social movement discussions to add to the components of intractable conflict to examine the case here.

METHODS

The theory of intractable conflicts will be used to describe and unpack a conflict concerning local wind ordinances and construction of wind turbines in the Roanoke, Virginia area. We do this through a qualitative case study method (Yin 1994). The case study will illustrate how and why decisions were made, the results of these choices, and how these were implemented. Being that this case has come to a resolution through the legal system, we will conclude with a discussion of alternative ways in which the conflict could have been resolved.

We will compare and contrast two sets of actors: “new activists” and sustainability planning advocates responding to objections about wind energy. Sustainability planning advocates included staff from such groups as the Virginia Association of Counties, regional planning district commission, land trusts, local food planning organizations, professional facilitation groups, and friends of watershed groups. New activist group members include Roanoke County citizens who objected to development of local wind energy. The “new activist” title applies to this case study because the various groups opposing the development of wind energy in Roanoke County who would not normally be thought of to be on the “same side” of the discussion and encompasses some of the overall similarities between the groups.

We used multiple data sources in order to try to fully grasp the extent of the concerns in this issue. We conducted in-depth interviews with new activist members, local and regional government officials and public planners, and environmental advocates. We identified candidates for interviews through a purposive sample of participants in the issue using a snowball technique of asking interviewees to identify others we should talk to and stopping when no new names were mentioned. We also attended and took notes at board of supervisor meetings, planning department meetings, and public hearings. We collected media reports, Roanoke County government documents, meeting minutes, guidance documents, sustainable development project plans, websites of community groups and other vocal participants, and outreach of material from stakeholders.

We performed discourse analysis on the data using axial coding to find core concepts in the data (Babbie 2010). To perform the discourse analysis, a first set of codes was developed from the theory of intractable conflict reviewed above; subsequent codes were developed after going through the data to identify text and situations associated with each code (see Table 4.1). Constant comparison was performed while coding each piece of data. Where the focus may have been on coding one interview, thoughts that arose would inform some of the coding of previous data, which would be revisited. In addition, when questions arose, we reviewed the literature to clarify the thinking about coding. After we applied the initial set of codes, we looked for themes that were present in the two theoretical foundations to determine findings.

We conducted interviews with one Tea Party member, two citizen activists, and a local planner. Additionally, we performed participant observation at two board of supervisor meetings, one public hearing, one board of supervisor work session, and two planning commission work sessions. All of these meetings were open to the public. Included in the discourse analysis were

websites for local Tea Party chapters, advocates for protection of Bent Mountain, health advocates, and renewable energy advocates. Additional information came from the wind energy company, Roanoke County codes and ordinances, as well as the Roanoke County Circuit Court.

TABLE 4.1: SET OF CODES DEVELOPED FROM THEORY OF INTRACTABLE CONFLICT

- Long-standing
- Eluding resolution
 - Commitment to resolution
- Divisiveness
 - Polarized
 - Value differences
- Intensity
 - Emotional
- Pervasiveness
 - Permeating other institutions
- Complexity
 - Large number of issues and participants
 - Cross social levels
 - (Dis)organized
 - Clearly defined roles
 - Clear authorities
- Framing (topics discussed in the conflict)
 - Injustice
 - Sympathy/vulnerability – role of the victim
 - Religion
 - Identity
 - Problem identification and attribution
 - Counterframe and response
 - Urging others to action

RESULTS

These results first describe the case study and then examine its components in light of intractable conflict.

THE CASE: WIND ENERGY ORDINANCE

In June 2009, Roanoke County began to collect information on wind energy at multiple scales: small scale (appropriate for a home), large scale (appropriate for a company or factory), and industrial scale (appropriate for a geographic region). An ordinance for large and industrial scale wind turbines evolved over 24 work sessions and meetings of the Roanoke County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. It was adopted on September 13, 2011. The process began in 2009 in response to citizen requests for small-scale turbines on individual properties. In addition, a wind energy company, Invenergy, LLC, released a plan to investigate Poor Mountain² as a site for 15 industrial-scale turbines on March 2, 2010. No specific ordinance was yet in place to handle that request.

Said one Roanoke County official: “We currently have in our ordinance a broad topic that would probably cover it – it’s called ‘Major Utility Services.’ But it’s so broad – it can be anything from a wastewater treatment plant to electric transmission lines to something like this would fit in there somewhere in between, too. ...Invenergy could come in today. There’s nothing that stops them from coming in today, because they have that broad Major Utility Service category. But this [new ordinance] is a little bit more tailored to [wind systems], and has a little

² Poor Mountain is a smaller mountain on top of Bent Mountain. Both names are used in this paper, almost interchangeably, because of the nature of data from respondents.

bit more about the process, and has a little bit more about what information needs to be submitted with the application.”

With the understanding that Roanoke County was interested in amending their ordinances and that Invenegy potentially was interested in siting turbines on the top of Poor Mountain, a local group of citizens began to engage their community in May of 2010 with the goal of protecting Poor Mountain from development. These community members began attending local government meetings and reaching out to neighbors and other community groups. Just a short while later, members of the Roanoke Tea Party, a group of “new activists,” began to take notice of the issue and joined with the process. The group of residents described themselves as a “group of environmentalists who support renewable energy, but have concerns about industrial-scale energy proposed for Poor Mountain.” When they found themselves on the same side of the issue as the Roanoke Tea Party, one participant acknowledged: “We make strange bedfellows.”

Members of these groups wrote letters to the editor, attended civic meetings to educate fellow citizens, participated in Earth Day events, and attended local government meetings to express their discontent with the process and the potential projects. As we learned through interviews with local government leaders, the ordinance change was an attempt to properly respond to citizen needs and growing interest in alternative sources of energy. In the eyes of the new activists, the ordinance was a path towards “devalu[ing] rural land,” “pushing the population back into the city,” prioritizing one particular area of the county over another, protecting the “economic growth of a few individuals who know how to manipulate the market,” and not giving citizens input the process and decision-making.

Feeling as though he didn't have much of a voice at the local level, one activist tried to get on a subcommittee that would help decide the path forward for wind energy in the Commonwealth of Virginia. However, the committee decided to include this person as an "interested party" to receive email updates and was not perceived to have someone "that represents the citizens in this area. They're all lobbyists or people that are directly involved with promoting industrial wind energy... Somebody needs to be on the committee who's not directly related – either financially or ideally [sic] – to the wind industry". The conflict surrounding wind energy was seen at multiple scales – local and statewide – which further frustrated the new activists.

On the day the ordinance was adopted, the new activist group filed a lawsuit in Roanoke County Circuit Court arguing that, "they will be burdened by the noise, unsightliness, health issues, and wildlife problems associated with the wind turbines" (Karr v. BOS 2011). Additionally, the now plaintiffs argued that the setback distance outlined in the ordinance wasn't far enough back and that the statute did not outline specifics for how to handle decibel levels, light flickering from the turbine blades, lighting that might interfere with FAA requirements, or disruption to emergency service communications, among other concerns. The plaintiffs also argued that siting wind turbines would amount to the "unconstitutional taking of their private property for a public use, without just compensation" (Karr v. BOS 2011).

The "end" of this situation came when Roanoke County filed a Demurrer and Motion Craving Oyer in the circuit court on January 23, 2012, effectively stating that there were no grounds for the lawsuit. A judge agreed with the county and dismissed the lawsuit on June 19, 2013.

In the years since, communication concerning the conflict has died down. Invenergy has taken the Poor Mountain project off of its website; advocates of mountain protection have not posted blog posts or Facebook posts; Roanoke County has an informational page dedicated to the ordinances; media reports have died down. In a sense, this four-year conflict has gone dormant but has not been resolved. If another wind energy company should scout the area for sites for turbines, Roanoke County now has an ordinance to handle the prospect, but the conflict might quickly boil up again.

THE CASE EXAMINED USING INTRACTABLE CONFLICT THEORY

There is support for the theoretical components of intractable conflicts reviewed above.

LONG-STANDING, ELUDING RESOLUTION

Intractable conflicts tend to be long-standing and elude resolution. Dispute episodes continue to occur as an issue ebbs and flows through cultural and political space, and efforts to move towards resolution fail. The main events associated with the wind energy ordinance lasted about four years and eluded resolution. The public process failed and the conflict was ultimately settled in the courts. It is probable that a new dispute will emerge when someone applies to erect wind turbines. An elected Supervisor involved in the case summed it up this way after the ordinance had been voted on and passed: “Tonight’s vote on the wind ordinance is not a stamp of approval for any particular petition. As of today, the Board has none. When you leave here, we have repeatedly stated, the Board has not by our action tonight approved any petition, for Bent Mountain, Ft. Lewis Mountain, Catawba, it does not matter where. If and when one comes to this Board, that is when the games starts all over again” (Roanoke County Board of Supervisor meeting minutes 2011).

DIVISIVENESS: POLARIZATION, VALUE DIFFERENCES:

Intractable conflicts are highly polarized, often around value differences. The more connected to a group someone feels, the more they become intense and emotional when the group members perceive they don't have a say in the discussion, as seemed to be happening in this case study. As one interviewee stated, "It's been pretty frustrating, because... how can we work together? Well how *can* we work together when we're not ever included? Because either they don't trust us, or they're afraid of us..."

At one public meeting, 30 people spoke against wind energy, while 32 spoke for wind energy; a remarkable turnout and show of concern for an otherwise technical and mundane topic. At this particular meeting, when those from one side would get up and speak, members of the "other" side would giggle, shake their head, or snort in derision. There did seem little sincere effort to understand the others' viewpoint, and instead the preferred tactic is to attack the opponent's credibility.

"We live in a world where we seem to have to refute opposing opinions' credibility. And that's *nasty*. It's a technique that's being used. ... [An opponent] hoped it wouldn't turn into a name-calling contest. And then on Facebook, I started posting questions and getting called names [by this person]. In effect, if we put it into that kind of framework, it's immediately trying to establish power over the other. To crush the competition."

Additionally, numerous instances emerged where people felt or were referred to as the other or them versus us. For example: One participant, upon becoming frustrated with the process, sought to distinguish themselves from the group: "I feel like a misfit. I feel like a misfit! That's great! Because that means I'm not one of them, you know? And I don't mean to be getting ridiculous about this, but that's the truth."

INTENSITY: EMOTIONAL

The more emotions are involved in a conflict, the more intense – and intractable – the disagreement is likely to become. We have evidence that this conflict evoked strong emotions.

Emotion was evidenced by high attendance at local meetings. Typical attendance at a board of supervisor meeting is perhaps a dozen citizens, whereas at meetings on this topic, local citizens often filled the room. At one local public hearing, we counted 62 speakers, and there were many more people in the auditorium and in an overflow room upstairs, an exceedingly high attendance for a local board of supervisor meeting.

Informants describe how friends and family members advised them to control emotions. “That’s what’s been so hard for us because we are very passionate about these issues, and... we just spoke to a group of Quakers... I have a close friend who’s a Quaker ... and she said, now ____, you’ve got to tone it down. You can’t go in there and expect to hose us down. ... And I said, “well we are passionate about this. This is our land. This is our mountain. You know, we’re not going to put anybody to sleep with what we’ve found and what we feel strongly about. But I’ll be sure that we don’t get contentious. And we didn’t. We’re very good.” (laughs)

Additionally, the elected official who represented the Bent Mountain area became so upset that he walked out of the September 13, 2011 board meeting before they voted to adopt the ordinance. “Supervisor Elswick stated he was gone; there is no reason for him to stay. The remaining Board members are pretty much deciding what needs to be done. Thank you very much and left the meeting. Chairman Church then recessed for ten minutes” (Roanoke County Board of Supervisor meeting minutes 2011). It seems that this supervisor felt that the needs of his constituents were not being heard or weighed in the conversation.

PERVASIVENESS: PERMEATING OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Intractable conflicts do not always stay within the institution in which they begin. These kinds of conflict make their way into the media, homes, churches, and workplaces, as was the case with this situation. In addition to attending local government meetings, the Bent Mountain protection advocates discussed these issues with civic groups, religious groups, local advocacy groups, family members, and members of the general public at Earth Day events. The Roanoke Tea Party has a radio show, and its members discussed it there.

COMPLEXITY: LARGE NUMBER OF ISSUES/PARTICIPANTS, CROSS SOCIAL LEVELS, (DIS)ORGANIZED, ROLES NOT CLEARLY DEFINED, LACK OF CLEAR AUTHORITIES

A diverse set of stakeholders was involved, including lawyers, electrical engineers, architects, airport staff, mechanical engineers, physicians, family members, homemakers, residents, and local government staff and officials. Each stakeholder used a different set of values, facts, and agendas to interpret the issues, increasing complexity.

The less organized the groups are that are associated with an issue, the more intractable the conflict becomes. Organization of the parties depends on whether or not they are “clearly bounded” (Lewicki et al. 2003), meaning that there is a structure to the group with defined membership. The Roanoke Tea Party does seem to have leadership structure, but they do not like to be identified with other Tea Party groups. In fact, when the Tea Party movement began in Roanoke, an ideological split occurred and two main groups formed. So as one of their main tenets would suggest, even individual Tea Party groups pursue their own individual identities and do not subscribe to everything associated with the major movement. Additionally, the Bent Mountain protection advocates did create a group called Blue Ridge Mountain Defenders,

independent of the Tea Party groups. It had a blog and a Facebook page, but membership structure was loosely defined and included those who wanted to participate.

On the other side of the issue, advocates for the wind ordinance were similarly unorganized-- no one seemed to be a leader or organizing proponents. For the most part, those who engaged in this issue seemed to be a loose collective of individuals who were interested in the issue for one reason or another and who self-identified with whatever group closely resembled their identity or ideology, including public health and the environment.

There were only a few efforts to coordinate among groups on the same side of the issue. The Roanoke Tea Party reached out to the Bent Mountain group of citizen activists to engage in discussion about sustainable development, seemingly in an effort to combine forces. Additionally, environmental organizations coordinated some with healthcare organizations to promote wind energy.

The complexity of the problem was further enhanced by claims and counter claims about facts and science of public health, energy shortages, government subsidies, climate change, and the like.

FRAMING

We pulled probable frames from the theory of intractable conflicts as well as social movement theories: injustice, role of victim, religion, identity, problem identification and attribution, counterframes, and urging others to action. We discuss each in turn.

Injustice

The anti-wind ordinance Bent Mountain protection advocates seemed to feel that they – and the mountain – were unjustly being taken advantage of by the county and the wind energy

company. We heard several times from the new activists that they did not feel that their voices were adequately heard and that they had no power to influence the discussion regarding the ordinance and decision by the board. Conversely, we heard that local planning officials felt that their decision-making should focus on the county as a whole, rather than on a particular subset of the area, and thus they also were concerned about justice in that they felt they needed to represent the concerns of more than a special interest.

As found on a new activist website: “The posturing by the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors was shameful, and in all truth, treacherous. Those elected officials did not err on the side of caution as they should have. They ignored the input of Roanoke County residents and put in place an ordinance that cows to stakeholders who, for the most part, don’t even live in our county and are pushing an agenda.” (<http://www.viriniagreenmenace.com/?p=310>)

Role of victim

If a group believes it is not given a say in a discussion, its members may become “self-declared victims” (Lewicki et al. 2003, p. 43). Much of the initial argument against the county’s new ordinance had to do with the fact that neither the members of the planning commission nor the board of supervisors visited the Bent Mountain region to speak directly with the citizens there or see the area where the proposed windmills would go. The citizens of that area felt that their only say in the discussion was during board meetings, when they were restricted to the three-minute time period. The response from planning members and board members was that the ordinance was supposed to be for the entire county, but new advocates maintained that the only part of the county appropriate for turbines is the Bent Mountain area.

Religion

Tea Party arguments often invoked “God-given rights” guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. A powerful religious frame invoked by some of the new advocates involves reference to a higher power creating the opportunity and responsibility for living on and taking care of Bent Mountain.

“... I can remember sitting over there one afternoon, and I was kind of looking across the creek at the house, and I think it was kind of a cloudy, misty day, and just prayed to God – whoever that is – myself – whoever – everyone – to help me figure out how to make this work. Help me figure out how to get a start here. Help me do this. I won’t own the land. I’ll be a steward of the land. I can’t own this dirt. I can’t own this rock. It’s impossible. I’m a steward of it. I take care of it and preserve it for my kids. You know? And that’s – that’s what I came here for.”

Identity

Identity involves a person’s demographics, geographic location, role in life or career, their interests, and the institutions to which they belong (Lewicki et al 2003). Some new advocates discussed their identities being connected to Bent Mountain in particular, while others talked about being connected to “rural” heritage more generally. We witnessed many meeting speakers discuss their love of the rural heritage and culture of the area as something they would like to protect.

Opponents of the wind ordinance identified with particular groups and titles: a NIMBY, an environmentalist, a physician, a scientist, and/or a Tea Party member. “In this wind race, obviously I’m a NIMBY. And I’m not ashamed of that. What I’m ashamed of is, it took that to

make me look and ask questions. Because, you know, for years, I've supported smart growth and sustainability and the greening of America. You know, absolutely! How can anybody be against that kind of stuff?"

We had several examples of identification with various roles in life or careers – especially as it related to the discussion at hand. For example, physicians spoke on both sides of the issue about health related aspects of wind turbines. Additionally, engineers and professors would invoke their professional identities discuss the science and research associated with the issue as they knew it in their roles.

Problem identification and attribution

Conflicts get framed according to “what” and “who.” What is the issue, who is the cause of the issue, and who is responsible for “fixing” it (Lewicki et al. 2003)? Evidence of problem identification is found in the foci of group arguments. The Bent Mountain Preservation group saw the “problem” as protection of Bent Mountain, the connection to the land, and the importance of natural resources to the area; Tea Party members saw the problem as property rights; government officials saw the problem as the need for a policy to suit wind energy needs for the entire county; environmental and health advocates saw the problem as clean energy sources that are not harmful to human health.

Attribution of who is causing the problem by new activists tended to focus on federal and other outsider pressure interfering with local concerns.

“Now we don't like that the wind farms are funded with the government money. I mean there's a cottage industry... Invenenergy is getting a lot of money ... indirectly through tax breaks to do this... based on Federal tax breaks, which we don't like. So there's a lot of issues we have

with the wind energy industry in general but we don't like corporate welfare period. We want to cut all that out.”

New activists also blamed local government officials, industrial wind industry insiders, and federal subsidy programs as sources of the problem. “On this day, September 13, 2011, the treachery of the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors was fully exposed to the residents of not only this County, but to all Virginians. At issue was a zoning ordinance regarding industrial wind turbines, or wind farms.” (<http://www.viriniagreenmenace.com/?p=310>)

Counterframes

Counterframes are often presented as alternatives to the current course of action and/or the predominant discourse emerging from the conflict (Lewicki et al. 2003). Most counterframes in this case were presented in terms of alternatives to wind energy. Topics discussed were alternative, more efficient sources for clean energy, as well as encouraging energy efficiency before jumping onto expensive, ineffective technology that was deemed inappropriate for the area. Another suggestion was point-of-use electricity generation to bring an “orientation back to local sustainability.”

Urging others to action

When activists begin to fight against a particular course of action, we often see an attempt to gather support from the rest of the community (Benford and Snow 2000). New activists were strategic about gaining support. Public speaking engagements to civic groups, brochures, websites and blogs, radio shows, PowerPoint presentations, and participation in public hearings are all examples of how these parties sought to encourage support from the greater public.

DISCUSSION

The first purpose of this paper was to use the theory of intractable conflicts to examine new activist-led conflict. The results, above, suggest that attributes of intractable conflict (Table 4.1) were evidenced in this case. The conflict continued for roughly four years and attempts at resolution were never successful, such that the conflict “ended” in a lawsuit and withdrawal of the proposed development, but may erupt with another proposal. The conflict was divisive, intense, pervaded social and political institutions, and was highly complex. In addition, the issue was exceedingly complex and participants were largely unorganized and loosely collected without a defined structure. Finally, frames used by the various parties often drove, and perhaps heightened, these components of intractability.

Most of this discussion section focuses on the second purpose of this manuscript: to suggest strategies for making new-activism conflicts more tractable. The new activists’ sense of being a victim and that an injustice was occurring might have been mitigated had local officials more effectively and directly reached out to affected parties. Local officials could have acknowledged the special conditions about Bent Mountain that make it more of a target for industrial wind turbines than other locations affected by the ordinance. Such an acknowledgement might have reduced the sense that new activists were unfairly singled out and that their special qualities were ignored.

Likewise, targeted meetings between local officials and citizens from the area might have helped to de-escalate some of the intensity and emotion from some of the new activists. As it was, the Bent Mountain group seemed to feel that they were being targeted without much say in the situation.

The differences in values that resulted in divisiveness and polarization may have been navigated more successfully through an awareness and discussion of values. To do this, there needs to be an understanding that there are many different values associated with sustainable development issues (Hull 2006), those values should be brought forth during the decision-making process, and the trade-offs associated with them discussed openly. Rather than complete dismissal of the “other” side, and the resulting polarization that resulted, both sides could have sought to find similarities in values rather than accentuate the differences.

Differences in key values drove much of the public discussion. The Tea Party prioritized limited government, property rights, and discontinuing local work with companies who receive subsidies to large corporations. Environmental protection was not something they dismissed, but rather was a lesser priority. For other new activists, environmental protection was very high on their list; however, certain kinds of protection were more important or efficient than other kinds. For example, the protection of natural resources on Bent Mountain took priority over the promotion of this type of renewable energy. In contrast, county staff and officials most valued addressing the needs of citizenry and ensuring that interest in wind energy could be properly handled in an efficient and structured manner. Little effort was made to find common ground among these conflicting values, with arguments for energy security, regional economic development, and quality of life, values shown to cut across communities divided over energy planning issues (HUD Community Energy Planning).

Lewicki et al (2003) have suggested that introducing a social control frame may be one way to reframe issues and reduce conflict. The social control frame gives parties control over the end-goal for the community by including them in more of the decision-making process. Introducing a social control frame shifts the emphasis from the needs of the individual to the

needs of the community. Including citizenry in discussions over the end-goal amends the process to one that is more inclusive. Rather than just giving citizens traditional ways of input, citizen representatives could be included in the development of the ordinance.

By re-framing the conflict to focus on the “we” of the issue, participants would seek beyond common ground and reach for higher ground: “a ground for engagement in public issues on terms such as fairness, integrity, openness, compassion, and responsibility” (Dukes 2006, p. 2). To achieve this higher ground (1) citizens would need to thoughtfully engage in efforts to resolve the conflict, (2) local leaders would need to allow for a more responsive and inclusive participatory process, and (3) the conflict itself would need to be seen as a cooperative opportunity for community growth (Dukes 2006). Again, we encourage a shift in thinking from one of “I” to one of “we,” in addition to a change in the decision-making process that is more inclusive of those parties who will be affected by the decision.

There also might be a way to re-frame resolution of this conflict by focusing on the removal of negative perceptions associated with wind energy believed to be inevitable by the opposition. Perceived costs of wind energy, such as health issues, bird and bat mortality, and reduction of water quality from construction, would need to be reduced little by little until those in opposition could focus on other aspects of their values that may be more aligned with other parties. However, this idea suggests that local officials had the power to remove all of these social and environmental costs, and it is their job to play the delicate balance of trying to equalize costs to all constituents. This also suggests that those in opposition would have backed down had some of their grievances been better addressed.

One final possible way to re-frame resolution of this conflict would be to focus on local solutions. One of the most common themes throughout discussions was a love for the Roanoke Valley, and that the locality should make decisions free from external (federal, international) influences. This might seem overwhelming, as there are a myriad of ways to engage in local environmental issues. However unification around a common problem can be one way to address framing differences.

Sustainable development science is, by its nature, very complex. Add to this complexity a diverse and changing set of actors working together in unconventional ways, and the complexity of these projects increases. New activists are seeking ways to address problems beyond traditional paths and do not seem to mind approaching various issues with fluid partnerships. Their ideologies and identities may still be solid, but these new activists do seem willing to work with those outside of their traditional boundaries. The crossing of traditional boundaries may help to educate actors of various viewpoints, which could aid in reframing of issues. Thus, there may be ways to use the inherent complexity of the issue to promote collaboration and reframing.

Overcoming divisiveness and otherness presents a major challenge for cases of local government regulation. Trends are such that governments are seen to be untrustworthy, and they are the common enemy of new activists (Homewood 2011). The new activists saw the local government officials as not being ‘one of them.’ Government actors need to find ways to portray themselves as neighbors and fellow citizens of Roanoke County, not as untrusted adversaries (Barber 2013). However, in this case, much of the discussion from the opposition had to do with local leaders caving to outside pressure and not adequately prioritizing the needs of the citizenry.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development projects do seem to receive a heavy amount of attention from new activists, especially if these activists are connected to the Tea Party (Trapenberg Frick 2014). Local sustainable development projects can be seen as antithetical to some of the new activists' ideologies: overarching debt, encroachment of federal government on local government power, and private property rights (Homewood 2011). Protection of natural resources can be seen as an infringement on private property rights, a waste of money or a restriction on capitalism, and caving to federal and international pressure surrounding issues that are seen to not really be issues.

So how can we use the theory of intractable conflicts to better handle new activism? New activism characteristics and approaches seem to align perfectly with the components of intractable conflicts. It may be likely that conflicts may be expected with dealing with new activists, so it is important to understand where these participants are coming from and what they hold to be valuable. Often the first step in working towards conflict resolution is to encourage participants to "put yourself in their shoes," and not to "deduce their intentions from your fears" (Fisher and Ury 1991, pgs 23-25). We can too often jump to conclusions about the intentions of other participants when we only understand the situation from our point of view. However, when we try to understand where the other parties are coming from and try to frame the conflict from their perspective, new ways of understanding the situation can open themselves to us. We can then engage in conversation with others and begin attempts at mutual understanding and cooperative efforts towards problem solving. In perhaps its highest sense, we take this path this in an effort to "create, nurture, and sustain a life-affirming and democratic public domain" (Dukes 2006, pg. 8).

Democracy calls for input and engagement from the citizenry, which seems to be something in which the new activists are interested. Reframing and amending processes requires this engagement and understanding of various perspectives. On the other side, government leaders understand that they must be facilitators of conflicting public needs. Both “sides” of this wind ordinance conflict were interested in engagement and input, but it seems that both sides missed the first step of trying to see the issues from the others’ viewpoints. Unfortunately, willingness for engagement may not resolve the issues and may even inflame the conflict. As mentioned above, resolution of conflict means an engaged citizenry, a participatory governance process, as well as a willingness to come together to sort out ideas. This approach to conflict resolution is made even more important when conflicts are intractable.

Participants must be willing to try to actively work towards real solutions and resolution. People cannot just show up and talk or scream. They need to listen and earnestly seek opportunities for moving forward. While it is admirable that new activists are beginning to stand up for themselves and participate in the process, they cannot expect that they are the most important and only their needs can be met. Conversely, government officials need to recognize and find ways to respect and encourage meaningful input from these new activists, in addition to other participants. When the winds of change blow, we should not fight against the storm; instead, we must find a way to work together towards the creation of a common, calmer resolution.

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CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

It may be that Habermas' ideals of rational deliberation towards conflict resolution are just that: ideals. However, they may still be good standards towards which to strive. In these articles, we spoke about protecting the freedom of speech, attempting to understand where others are coming from, participating in efforts towards resolution, and local democratic engagement. The exercise of these things may not always be civil, but it remains within our rights, and often duties, of being an American citizen to exercise them. And so, at the end of this research, what we may be left with is this question: is it better to limit citizen engagement in local decision making if it is disruptive or makes people uncomfortable? Or is it better to have that engagement? We conclude that having citizen engagement is better than not having it, which leads us to perhaps the second lingering question: where is the line between acceptable and unacceptable engagement? Certainly, violence is not acceptable. We also say that enacting one's First Amendment rights to shout over others and shut down another's free speech also is not acceptable. While physical violence is uncommon, disrupting the free speech of others is occurring. But this line is fuzzier; how can we know when someone is so intimidated by another that they choose not to participate? Or they choose to defer to the strongly expressed opinions of others' for fear of social repercussions? Communication and citizen engagement, like every social situation, is full of subtle nuances. We may never quite understand what makes a person participate the way they do.

We can, however, try to understand the motivations of those who are participating. Common themes kept ringing through: individuality, religion, identity, connection to family and heritage, and pushing back against outside threats, among others. People we spoke with and listened to in public meetings have strong feelings towards their home, be it their personal

property, their locality, or their country. This sense of identity and connection to home could be one area in which participants could work together to create common ground and a path for moving forward through the conflict.

Everyone involved in a conflict has the responsibility to engage in a way to actively seek resolution; however, best practices may be specific to individuals in different roles. Public servants have a particularly difficult challenge in that they are tasked to be “everything to everyone,” by trying to listen to and incorporate all of the various viewpoints of citizens into decision-making. When confronted with situations such as discussed here, we suggest that some public engagement tactics work better than others. We discussed listening with an ear towards trying to best understand the others’ point of view. This type of listening should be equally applied to all viewpoints, as tiring as it may seem. We encourage public officials to check their biases at the door and try to maintain an open mind and open ear to those with whom they engage about issues. As discussed previously, we all tend to have initial gut reactions to situations; however, through a bit of self-awareness and thoughtful reflection, we can reason our way through these biases. This is especially important for those who have the power to make decisions that affect hundreds, if not thousands or even millions, of people.

Additionally, we recommend that public officials do their best to understand the cultural and personal history of their constituents. This kind of understanding also speaks to an empathic approach to listening and trying to best understand others’ points of view. Cultural and personal histories speak volumes about why and how someone will engage with a particular topic. During our interviews, we heard stories of personal or familial experiences as they related to government and governance. It was not so long ago that land was taken through eminent domain for the Blue Ridge Parkway in Roanoke County and surrounding areas. The impact of this experience lingers

through generations, and emotions do not easily die. This type of understanding may help public officials to understand better why a citizen is engaging in a conflict in a particular way – why there may be a lack of trust or a certain level of fear.

Additionally, we recommend that public officials should cautiously use their positions of power to set the stage for productive engagement. Will they allow for public deliberation beyond a three-minute speech at the podium in public meetings? Will citizens be allowed to sit at the table during decision-making discussions? Will there be other ways for public input beyond the traditional means of writing letters and attending public meetings? And if so, how will public input be digested and incorporated into decisions? The way public officials answer these questions will affect the way citizens engage in an issue and whether or not they will truly feel a part of the democratic process.

We believe that one of the most positive and respectful ways of engagement with constituents is to meet them at their homes or in their neighborhoods, to see first-hand what is important to their publics. One of the biggest complaints made by the new activists we interviewed was that the local government leaders refused to visit Bent Mountain to learn more about the area. Perhaps the local officials felt that the Bent Mountain representative could speak enough for his section of the citizenry; however, in this instance, that level of representation was not enough. We recommend that local officials learn about a particular area, visit it in person, and to try to best understand the culture and history of the region. It is important to honestly and respectfully show that there is an understanding of how the decision will impact that area and what that means to the citizens who live there.

We feel that it is important for local leaders to remember that the spoken and unspoken rules of democratic engagement are not universally known, nor are they innate. Therefore, we believe it is the responsibility of local leaders to try to best ensure that constituents can have input into the situation in the way that they know how. It can be intimidating to get up in front of a crowd and say what you need to say in three minutes. It also can be intimidating to speak to a local leader in a more casual setting. Government officials should do what they can to minimize feelings of anxiety by showing their humanity, kindness, attention, and respect – no matter the person. They should set the stage for a comfortable space for a thoughtful exchange between citizen and government leader.

Similar to public officials, we encourage citizens to enter conversations and potential conflict with an empathic approach to try to understand others' points of views. As we discussed, sustainable development projects are complex and involve a large number of people in various roles and positions in life. As citizens, we may not feel the same way as our neighbor, and yet we need to continue to live and function in a neighborly way. If others' opinions can be approached in a respectful manner, with an attempt to best understand why a person feels the way they do, conversations can be more constructive. Common ground between groups may be found, which may help when engaging with government leaders.

We also encourage citizens to move beyond their initial reactions to issues and reflect on the reasons behind their immediate concerns. This requires engagement and involvement with an issue, rather than listening to media pundits and other “talking heads” and allowing them to define opinions. Failure to fully engage the issues is the opposite of the the intentions of the founding fathers. Seeking and co-opting others' opinions rather than doing the work to figure out our own relinquishes the freedom we have for our own education and expression.

We have discussed the role of emotions in conflict and how these emotions can be driven by outside influences. We acknowledge that, yes, there are times to get upset and emotional. However we believe that thought leaders seeking additional numbers for their cause intentionally provoke many of these emotions. We find this to be manipulative and potentially an over exaggeration of the true threat of the issue. We encourage citizens to ask themselves if their fear of a situation is truly their own fear, or if another powerful person seeking support for their side feeds that fear.

All citizens should be thoughtful, intentional, and willing to work hard with neighbors and government leaders through tense issues. This kind of engagement takes more time and patience than many people would like to give; however, the resolution on the other side can be much more solid and satisfying than if the conflict never really resolves and instead, as in our cases, is brushed under the rug. These kinds of endings mean that no one involved is happy in the end, emotions are still raw, and distrust and fear still exist.

As for how this work applies to democracy, we encourage systems of public engagement and decision-making that are inclusive of all interested parties. We fully understand the limitations associated with trying fully to gather information from everyone involved; this takes much more time and energy than three minutes at a podium in an established meeting at a local government building. However, as stated above, we believe that more discussion and actively seeking resolution with community members is a better way to resolve issues. Histories can be understood, trust can be built, and neighbors can feel as though they have a stake in their community.

Three minutes at a podium and written letters added to a stack of thousands of other written letters do not promote actual engagement between government officials and citizens. We encourage attention to a deeper understanding and practice of democracy – one where people educate themselves about issues and discuss complexities with one another – where decisions can be made and re-made and re-made as new information and experiences rise to the top. Perhaps we suffer from an issue of scale in America, and maybe this approach to democracy isn't feasible at a federal level. We do, however, think this absolutely is possible at the local level, which is where impact from decisions can be truly felt.

The issue of scale in democracy – where we choose to focus and make recommendations – is one we struggle to resolve. Many of the complaints we heard were directed at federal and international entities but expressed at the local level. We feel that issues can be addressed between local neighbors, albeit even with great difficulty, but what happens when your neighbor is 3,000 miles away? Because our focus was conflict resolution at the local level, we do not suggest ways to deal with issues nationally and between countries. We acknowledge this gap in our understanding through the research presented here and suggest that this may be an area of additional inquiry.

Theories associated with fear in participant action were not fully explored and applied, and this also seems worthy of additional research. Many of the stories we heard suggest speakers feared of losing one's property, rights, freedoms, or cultural heritage. We also heard stories of fear of external threats from outside competition, the federal government, or the United Nations. This fear drives emotions, making conflicts more intractable, and is a component used to build the frames we use to talk about issues. Some of this fear may be fueled through outside sources, such as friends and the media. But some of this fear may come from personal stories. We heard

stories associated with eminent domain, lack of government support, and feeling a loss of attention or consideration from those who had power over them.

Resolution of conflict is difficult; time, energy, and political winds of change often stall processes. But conflict is probably built into progress. We have been fighting and arguing since Biblical times about which goals to pursue, what defines progress, and how or whether to develop. Decisions of this type inevitably produce winners and losers; hence the conflict. However, as a former Roanoke County Administrator once said, “even if conflict is innate in us and we are consistently faced with struggles, we don’t stop fighting for positive change in this world. Positive change may look different for different people, but it is worth the fight.” After the years of work associated with this dissertation watching people argue and struggle, we still believe there are some things worth fighting for: a space for the democratic process to be protected and performed, a higher position for natural resources in decision making, the power to speak for those people and things who cannot speak for themselves, and more patience and compassion for one another. For these things, we will continue the good fight.