Community Learning:
Process, Structure, and Renewal

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ABSTRACT

Community renewal is a dominant theme in American society today. It has been said that

public administration could and should be a leader in the community renewal movement,

yet for the most part the field of public administration fails to "get" community. This

study advances and explores a concept of community learning as part of a broader effort

to better understand what a community perspective means for public administration

theory and practice. The contributions of this study are two-fold. First, a concept of

community learning is drawn from a variety of literature streams that share an ethos of

collaborative pragmatism. Community learning occurs when the knowledge created in

the integrative "community process" is fed-forward and embedded at the level of

community structure. Furthermore, a "learning community" is found where the

community learning process is institutionalized at the level of community structure.

While community learning is a term being used to some degree in the field of community

development, a concept of how communities might learn has yet to be offered. Thus, the

conceptualization offered here seeks to fill this gap in the literature.

This study also explores the community learning concept empirically in the context of an

action research project in Wytheville, Virginia. Here participants worked with a Virginia

Tech research team to better understand their community and develop a unified "vision"

for the community's future. The study revealed that the collective or collaborative

learning of the "community process" can occur over time and also in the form of punctuated group "a-ha" moments. In either case, the learning process is one where new knowledge is created in the form of new or altered shared meaning or new ideas. This learning was fed-forward to the community level to become community learning in three ways: 1) as the learning took place in the community field, meaning the participants of the learning process represented the different institutions that make up community structure; 2) through the integrative medium of local media outlets; and 3) through formal and informal processes of knowledge transfer from the group to community level, where the community level was represented by a citizens committee.

As communities institutionalize learning processes they can be said to be "learning communities." Evidence from the Wytheville study provides insights into how this might happen. The implications for the practice of a "new public service" are explored as well as future areas of research relevant to the community learning approach. The study concludes by suggesting what a community perspective for public administration might mean as community learning is a concept based in this perspective.

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for your love and support and for believing in me through it all.

And

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CHAPTER ONE

COMMUNITY RENEWAL AND THE NEW PUBLIC SERVICE

> What if many of the key concepts in the community paradigm were to become part of the bureaucrats' understanding of how the city ought to be? Could it be that the merit-appointed local civil service could come to value the civil society idea and seek to further that idea in the day-to-day workings of the city? . . . . Would those who see bureaucracy as a primary cause of the lack of community be required to suspend all reason to imagine the merit civil service leading the way to civil society?
>
> H. George Frederickson (1997b)

Community is a big idea in American society today and for good reason. The so-called "postmodern" conditions of social, political, and cultural fragmentation have resulted in a common yearning across political and philosophical divides for *community*. Ironically, society's collective "liberation" from community has resulted in a overemphasis on individualism that, in turn, has spurred on a new movement for community renewal (Bellah et al 1996). We find this theme of community everywhere, in education, in business, in religion, and certainly in government.

This movement for community renewal, connecting with the theory and practice of public administration in the United States, is the intellectual backdrop of this study. Specifically, an alternative paradigm for public administration is emerging out of the theoretical and practical developments that are based in a community sensibility. This perspective is being called "the new public service" (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003). The purpose of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the public service perspective, particularly as it relates to the question of public participation.

Although the field of public administration is increasingly recognizing the need to move toward a "community paradigm" (Nalbandian 1999; see also Frederickson 1996 and 1997), I submit that we still don't "get it."[1] A community paradigm or perspective is very different from the perspectives that have guided and continue to guide the field. This dissertation is based in a community perspective. Though it is written for public administration and seeks better understanding of public administration theory and practice, it is not based in traditional orientations of management, politics, or law. In other words, this is one modest step toward a *community perspective for public administration*. If a public service perspective is to fully develop as an alternative to managerialism (old and new), it must "get" community.

Community learning is a concept rooted in a community perspective, as well as in an ethos of collaborative pragmatism which underlies the burgeoning "public service" perspective. As such, the concept of community learning may help us better understand the role of a "new public service" in the overall community renewal effort, particularly as we think about how to approach public participation. This study develops the concept of community learning, illustrating and exploring it with a field study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the context for this research and is organized as follows. First the community renewal movement is introduced and some of it's important manifestations highlighted. Next, the intersection of public administration and the community renewal movement is discussed, including the perspective of the new public service. It is observed that while there is a lot of talk about citizen or community participation, public

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[1] This phrasing is inspired by Wamsley and Dudley (1998). The inspiration goes beyond phrasing though as the overall argument presented here follows their argument about the need for public administration to understand the differences between "organizations and institutions, management and governance, and customers and citizens" (ibid., 358).

administration does not seem to really have a handle on "community." The concept of

community learning is then introduced and offered as a useful way for thinking about the

role of public administration in community renewal. The chapter concludes with an

overview of the remaining chapters.

The Community Renewal Movement

Numerous observers of politics and society are identifying the emergence of a

nascent movement to revitalize our democracy. Jane Mansbridge reports that over

roughly the last two decades "a new philosophy of organizing . . . a new era of citizen

action and self-government" has taken shape that is distinctive from other, more

adversarial forms of citizen engagement.[2] Whether it is talk of civil society, social capital,

or community building, or action in the form of community policing, visioning, or study

circles, what we are seeing is "the birth of a civic renaissance" that hearkens back to the

progressive era of a century ago. Peter Levine has recently called this strong democratic

impulse the groundwork for a "new progressive movement" (2000).

Whichever label one wishes to use to describe this movement—and there are

many—it is important to note its ascendance and relevance in public affairs today. For

the sake of consistency, this broad "movement" will here be referred to as the community

renewal movement.[3] This term seems to capture a meta-movement inclusive of a wide

variety of movements and ideologies. Despite what are, in some cases, deep

philosophical differences, there is a shared commitment to shoring up civil society at the

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[2] Quotation from remarks on the back cover of *Civic Innovation in America* (Sirianni and Friedland 2001).
[3] Following Gardner (1995), Louv (1996) and others. "Civic renewal" is another popular label (see for example Fullinwider 1999; Sirianni and Friedland 2001; and the National Commission on Civic Renewal 1998). Kesler and O'Conner have recently labeled it simply "the American communities movement" (2001).

social level and civic competence at the individual level. While there are differences in how the broad goals should be achieved, the consensus around the broad goals is remarkable.

The term "community renewal" is chosen very carefully. Other terms, such as "civic renewal" or even "civil society" or "social capital" do not have quite the same connotation as *community* renewal. For example, the word "civic" comes from the Latin *civis*, which means citizen. Common usage of the word implies something to do with citizenship, for example, "civic" education is about learning how to be good citizens. Community means something broader, beyond citizenship, which is individual. Although (unfortunately) the word "community" is often misappropriated and overused— particularly when place falls out of the definition (e.g., cyber communities or communities of practice)—at its core, for most people, it recalls roots in place and the bonds of neighborliness (Kemmis 1990). As individualism has come to dominate our culture, we have moved away from real community (Bellah et al 1996). Thus, while we know a lot now about organizations, associations, and networks, we seem to know less and less about community. There even seems to be confusion in equating these other forms of social organization with community, when, in fact, there are important differences.

The word "renewal" is also critical. Renewal captures the essence of community vitality in the face of globalism. Renewal "harmonizes continuity and change" (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999, 522). But in a broader sense, community renewal captures the sense of a "much grander mission" to revitalize democracy in America. Advocates of a community renewal movement seek to "build relationships across associational networks

and policy arenas and to further cultivate common language and action frames" (Sirianni and Friedland 2001, 234). This grand mission is achieved as people contribute to their communities and rediscover a sense of obligations to them. This movement has important implications for public administration theory and practice.

<div align="center">The Many Faces of Community Renewal</div>

While it is difficult to pinpoint precisely the genesis of today's community renewal movement, it is possible to identify some of the major contributing factors. Among these primary faces of the movement are the "movements" of new communitarian thinking, civil society, civic renewal, and community-based organizing. Obviously there are overlaps among these manifestations of community renewal. However, they are briefly introduced separately here in order to give a sense of the breadth of this meta-movement.

Communitarianism

Representing a combination of pragmatic social theory and civic republican political philosophy, communitarianism has grown out of a critique of rights-based liberalism. Communitarians are a diverse group and include notable scholars from across the political spectrum. Among the more notable communitarian thinkers are Amitai Etzioni, Philip Selznick, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, and Benjamin Barber. The central premise of communitarianism is that

> the culture of individualism, the laissez-faire market society of
> consumerism, and self advancement have been carried too far. A return to
> the basics—civic commitment, social solidarity, public participation, and
> devotion to the common good—is urgently called for. Nothing less than
> human survival is at stake. (Keller 2003, 8)

Communitarians offer robust philosophical arguments for community in its general sense and also advocate policy approaches consistent with that sentiment. However,

<div align="center">5</div>

communitarian thought has had (to date) little to offer in terms of how these ideas can be realized in communities which are "concrete and rooted in place" (Keller 2003, 8). Nevertheless, the communitarian spirit is a crucial contributor to the community renewal movement and informs, at least inspirationally, the real efforts to renew communities.

Civil Society and Social Capital

Another face of renewal comes in the form of the civil society movement. Over the past decade the term civil society has taken center stage in our democratic discourse. Politicians from the left and right frequently talk about shoring up civil society. While there is a lot of variety in what precisely is meant by the term, in general it refers to "activities and associations that are free and voluntary" (Eberly 1998, 20). Some refer to this as the third or civic sector, with private and public as the other two (Bradley 1998). The basic premise is that democracy depends on civil society, that these associations foster trust, cooperation, and other civic competencies that allow democracy to work (Putnam 2000). The literature on social capital corresponds with civil society arguments. The relationships that constitute social capital are represented in the associational activity that take place in the sphere of civil society. Conventional wisdom holds that our civil society, our collective stock of "social capital", is in decline. Putnam's pathbreaking research makes such a case (2000).

One of the problems with the civil society perspective is that it creates artificial barriers between public, private, and voluntary spheres of life. In reality, hardly anything fits clearly in one or the other. Also, such a perspective is inherently biased against government action. Anything that involves the public sector is thought to diminish, de facto, what can be done in the voluntary sector. This bias also turns attention away from

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collaboration between the sectors. Rather than talking about society as a "three-legged stool", we should be thinking in terms of different spheres, with a recognition that the spheres overlap. Nevertheless, the civil society literature is an important contributor to community renewal because it consistently calls for society to push things back to community whereas now so much of social life is stripped away from community and dominated by market forces or large bureaucracies.

Civic Renewal

The answer to a decline in social capital or weakening of our civil society, of course, is to shore it up or renew it. Thus efforts being labeled "civic renewal" are importantly tied to the overall discourse regarding civil society as well as connected to the communitarian arguments. Civic renewal efforts seek to reengage citizens in community affairs as well as add a "civic" dimension to professional practice. Sirianni and Friedland view the civic renewal movement as a social movement manifested in diverse ways such as congregation-based organizing, community development, civic environmentalism, and civic journalism (2001). It is basically an application of civil society arguments, arguing for a renewal of civil society.

The National Commission on Civic Renewal included high profile scholars and politicians from the left and right (1998). It's co-chairs, for example, were Sam Nunn (a prominent Democrat) and William Bennett (a prominent Republican). The report, "A Nation of Spectators" supports the contentions of Putnam and other social capital and civil society theorists, that citizens are by-and-large on the sidelines and need to renew their commitment to "making democracy work." The corollary to what I am calling "community renewal" is clear enough, in fact, the two terms are usually used

synonymously. Yet the term community renewal, with the focus on the community, has a slightly different connotation than civic renewal, which tends to connote individual citizens and their responsibilities.

Community-based Organizing

While community organizing in America is certainly not a new phenomenon, the resurgence in the last few decades in community-based approaches to large-scale issues does seem to be new. Community policing, community health, and sustainable community "movements" are but a few examples that are widespread and exemplify a community-based approach to addressing public issues. It has been suggested recently that these many community-based movements may fit into a broader "American communities movement" (Kesler and O'Connor 2001). If this is the case, then the communities movement is certainly a part of, or a partner with, what is being called here a movement for community renewal. In any case, all of these phenomena are taking place and are growing out of higher-level discussions regarding civil society, communitarianism, and civic renewal.

The point here is not to investigate the differences among these so-called movements, rather, it is to underscore the point that they all represent a major shift in American public discourse. It is a meta-movement of sorts that is manifest across all academic literatures in the social sciences and more importantly, in practice in communities across America.[4] Rather than being a single ideology spreading outward, this movement for community renewal appears to be self-organizing, with no ideological

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[4] Included in this "meta-movement" are movements such as community health, the new urbanism in architecture, civic engagement in higher education, community approaches in social services administration, community policing, civic journalism, civic environmentalism, and sustainable community development, to name only a few (Sirianni and Friedland 2001, 240-41).

(in terms of Left or Right) center. It is rather remarkable, really, that under the banner of community renewal is an extremely diverse group of ideological commitments. At the level of national politics, prominent supporters of communitarianism can be found in both political parties. Philosophically, advocates of civic renewal and participatory democracy are all over the map. Yet beyond those differences there is unity on several important points. The value of democratic deliberation, of restoring a sense of responsibility for one's community, and the importance of local (bottom-up) action as opposed to centralized, top-down models, are at the core of this thinking.

Community Renewal and Public Administration

If there is a blind spot in the literature on community renewal, it is in its general neglect of the role of public administration. Examining the final report of the National Commission on Civic Renewal, titled *A Nation of Spectators*, exposes this blind spot as it is indicative of the state-of-the-art in terms of thinking about community renewal. The commission concludes that there is "troubling evidence of civic decline, but also encouraging signs of a nascent movement for civic renewal across our land." Thus, the movement is not so much about invention, but in finding "ways in which individuals and institutions can build on the foundation laid down by thousands of organizations and millions of Americans" (1998). Examples given of the nascent movement include "local governments . . . fostering innovation and encouraging new networks of community institutions." Yet in outlining the "steps we can take" to improve America's civic condition, the categories are individuals, families, neighborhoods, schools, faith-based institutions, and the media.

Granted, there are some references to government in the report, such as the discussion of neighborhoods which states that "city governments can make important contributions to civic renewal through systematic efforts to empower their citizens" and goes on to cite examples of programs where cities support neighborhood organization. But what is lacking is a full appreciation of the position public administration is in with regard to community renewal. It is almost as if government is characterized as a bit-player, on the sidelines in the effort to renew communities. Yet upon deeper reflection upon the role of administration in communities, it may well be that public administration can, and ought to, "lead the way" to renewal (Frederickson 1997b).

The oft-cited examples of partnerships with schools, neighborhoods, and law enforcement all include local public administrators who are civic-minded and cognizant of the need to facilitate renewal. Yet the literature on community renewal rarely recognizes this point. This may be due to the fact that many advocates of community or civic renewal share a conservative-leaning ideology, and thus, the thought of bureaucrats interfering with the "voluntary sector" may be untenable. But this cannot fully explain the neglect of the role of public administration as civic renewal is just as dominant a theme of the left.

In any case, it is ironic that while the community renewal movement laments public distrust in governing institutions, it fails to consider a legitimate role for those institutions in rebuilding that trust. It is as if they assume citizens coming together by itself will heal America's communities. Experience shows, however, that public administration has a central role to play in renewal. Public administration (particularly local administration) is in an ideal position to facilitate renewal because it is public, has

the resources and expertise that citizen groups alone often lack, and furthermore is local.

Public administrators are citizens of their community too. They are citizens with special

responsibilities to the community (Wamsley 1990; Cooper 1991).

Sirianni and Friedland's excellent review of the "civic renewal" movement

explains that renewal implies a reframing of civic action. They argue that civic renewal

offers a master frame within which many related innovations, such as community health,

civic environmentalism, and the new urbanism fall. This "master frame highlights a

threefold ideal of society as composed of robust civil society, catalytic government, and

embedded markets" (2001, 241). The authors cite John Gardner's rebuke of those who

would praise civic renewal while at the same time lambasting government as "living in an

ideological stupor." No, government must play a role, even as a "catalyst" of civic

renewal and a "partner in multisided collaborative efforts." Civic or community renewal

should cause us to "rethink the role of public administrators as strengthening the

capacities and responsibilities of citizens" (2001, 242-3).

The New Public Service

Thus the community renewal movement is extremely important for the theory and

practice of public administration. In the United States at least, if not the Western world

generally, the enterprise of public administration is increasingly under fire, as observers

of America's civic condition have amply pointed out (NCCR 1998). Indeed, it may well

be true that we live in an "anti-government" era, even at the same time as concern for

citizen involvement is at its zenith (King and Stivers 1998). A line from the National

Commission on Civic Renewal final report is particularly poignant: "Never have we had

so many opportunities for participation, yet rarely have we felt so powerless" (1998).

This phenomenon is due to several reasons, from citizen distrust of government because of scandals, to "bureaucrat bashing" by politicians, to a more widespread distrust of institutions in general. It may also be that the way we *frame community participation* in public administration is missing something—an understanding and appreciation for community.

Interestingly, the community renewal movement can perhaps be viewed as a positive manifestation of the disconnect between citizens and bureaucracy. The overall direction of the movement suggests that the problems of bureaucracy will not be fixed in ignoring or usurping it. Rather, bureaucracy can be a tool of democracy if it is infused with a strong democratic ethos. This is at the heart of the movement's manifestation in the field, that is, in the practice of public administrators. Indeed, a "new public service" paradigm that places citizens first as an alternative to "new public management", which privatizes governance and turn citizens into customers, is said to be emerging in public administration (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003).The "new public service" can be viewed, therefore, as a nascent movement itself, within the field, as a direct corollary—or perhaps part of, or partner with—the movement for community renewal.

Lack of Community Perspective in Public Administration

But the field of public administration seems slow to "get it" (Wamsley and Dudley 1998). While many in the theory community[5] have expressed eloquently the deficiencies of a public administration based on technical rationality on the one hand and the promise of a more pragmatic, communitarian vision of practice on the other, the fact is that in practice citizen participation still tends to be superficial (King, Feltey, and Susel 1998). Furthermore, the ascendance of the "new public management" as the intellectual

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[5] See for example King and Stivers (1998), McSwite (1997), Box (1998), and Wamsley and Wolf (1996).

basis of the field illustrates that we still have a long way to go before public administration, collectively, "gets it" (Wamsley and Dudley 1998). While a recognition of the importance of *citizen* participation is obvious enough with even the slightest perusal of the literature, it is quite clear that the field does not understand *community* very well.

The reasons for the inability for public administration to "get" community are rather straightforward. One only needs to consider what the dominant perspectives that guide the field are. These perspectives, according to Rosenbloom and Kravchuk (2002) are "managerial, political, and legal." They note that the each approach "stress[es] different values and procedural and structural arrangements . . . views the citizen in a remarkably different way, and . . . adopts a different perspective on how to develop knowledge" (15).

Each of the dominant perspectives on public administration offers a different set of values and assumptions, none of which correspond to the values and assumptions of community. Thus community participation, from a managerial perspective, is something to be managed in terms of the three E's (efficiency, economy, and effectiveness). The participant is viewed as a case or customer. From the view of politics, participation is about citizen participation, usually in the form of interest groups. The participant in this case is an interest, represented by an interest group. Rosenbloom and Kravchuk argue that the political approach makes room for "client-centered", "direct" and even "coproduction" participatory mechanisms (2002, 502-6). However, it is quite clear that the logic of politics (power, interests) is clearly a different language than that of *community*. Finally, from a legal perspective, participation is about one's right to be

heard. In other words, the participant is a rights-bearing citizen. While each of these approaches to public administration is relevant and will always remain so, it is quite clear that none of them have very much room for community, which is troubling if public administration is to play a positive role in community renewal.

The New Public Service

    As mentioned previously, an alternative vision of a "new public service" may be gaining ground (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003). This movement is at least partially based on a community perspective although this aspect lacks specification. As a broader movement toward community renewal advances, perhaps the field of public administration will be compelled to follow suit, discovering a community perspective out of necessity. If this is the case, then public administration must rethink seriously what it means to involve citizens, and it must find a new language for discussing this relationship.

    The current language of citizen participation tends to be utilitarian, from a technocratic perspective, of how to *use* citizen participation in the context of *managing* government organizations. Promoters of a new public management tacitly view participation as one tool among many in the entrepreneurial managers' "toolkit" (Osborne and Plastarik 2000). However, in practice, although most participation remains superficial, we are beginning to see activities that are suggestive of a more organic or holistic relationship between administrators and their communities (Plein, Green, and Williams 1998). The theory and practice of collaborative planning, for example, presents the field of public administration with an alternative conception of citizen participation

that seems much more consistent with the community renewal movement than anything emerging from the new public management (Healey 1997).

The emerging "public service" paradigm (which would include collaborative planning, participatory policy analysis, and other strong democratic innovations in public affairs) is about the *complementary roles that citizens and public officials play in the enterprise of community self governance* (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003). The new public service is a perspective that accepts and even celebrates the idea that the public service is actually in the best position to "lead the way" to civil society (Frederickson 1997b). Yes, public administration can and should have a community orientation, and this community orientation shifts the focus from management to *governance* (Wamsley and Dudley 1998).

If public administration is to truly become more democratic, to become a catalyst for community renewal in ways implied by the new public service, then there needs to be a framework for understanding, and shaping, practice. In other words, there are currently many efforts underway throughout the U.S. and elsewhere that demonstrate a commitment to community renewal.[6] Bureaucrats are doing things differently and in some cases we see dramatic results of community collaboration. What is lacking is a framework for understanding these efforts, for understanding why some succeed and some fail. We also need a guide for practice. What are the goals of community participation or of collaborative endeavors generally? How can processes and structures, and even organizational cultures, be modified to facilitate collaboration and community renewal? The market-based new public management perspective offers little guidance here.

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[6] Many case studies can be found at the "Civic Practices Network" website at www.cpn.org.

What is needed is a perspective or framework that captures the essence of what this community renewal movement means for the practice of public participation. The new public service offers a broad framework, but lacks a clear grounding in community. It is more [at present] a collection of principles that are consistent with strong democracy and active citizenship, and so, by relation, to a notion of building community. What might advance this perspective is a clear, *community-based* lens to make sense of current practice while also providing a guide for future practice. We need to better understand how it is that public administration can be a most important leader in the community renewal movement. This understanding requires a community perspective.

Community Learning

In organizational studies, learning is viewed as a critical contributor to adaptation, change, innovation, and renewal. The vast literature on organizational learning is concerned with how organizations learn. While some of this literature looks at how individuals learn in organizations, the primary focus is on how collective learning occurs in such a way as to be able to say that an organization, as a social collective, learns. "Organizational learning can be conceived of as a principal means of achieving the strategic renewal of the enterprise" (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999, 522). The prescriptive side of this research has spawned numerous recommendations for how organizations can become "learning organizations" (Senge 1990). Organizational learning has become *the* framework for thinking about strategic renewal in organizations.

Quite naturally, we tend to know a lot more about organizations than we do another form of social collective, namely, communities.[7] Thus, while much research is being done to learn more about organizational learning, knowledge of community learning is scant, at best. The argument here is that as organizational learning is a powerful framework for understanding strategic renewal in organizations, so too can community learning be a powerful framework for understanding the renewal of communities. In other words, community learning offers a concept to guide efforts in public administration and related fields in its attempts to contribute to community renewal.

A word should be said at this point about what exactly is meant by "community learning." Community learning can be thought of, that is, the term could be used, in a variety of ways. It could refer to learning *in* community, or rather, a community setting. This notion of creating "learning communities" is a popular topic in the educational literature (Retallick, Cocklin, and Coombe 1999). The term could also refer to learning *about* community, which might occur in a civics class or college course on community sociology, for example. Furthermore, one might speak in terms of learning about *the* community, meaning the community one lives in. This, too, is a concept that is becoming developed in the literature and more widespread in practice. Here the use of community indices are used to help people in communities learn about and become engaged in *their* communities (Gahin and Paterson 2001). However, here the term community learning is used in much the same way the term organizational learning is used, that is, community

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[7] I thank Jim Pelikan for his insights on this matter and the conversations we have had that have enriched my thinking along these lines.

learning refers to *communities, learning*. In other words, the term, as used in this study, is in reference to how a community, as a social collective, may learn.

Obviously there are important differences to consider between organizations and communities. But if an organization, or furthermore, a network of organizations (Knight 2002) can be said to be learning, then it stands to reason that a community, as a local social system, at least has the potential to learn. And if learning is the source of strategic renewal for organizations or networks, then it follows that learning may well be the [primary] source of renewal for communities. When people learn collectively, in organizations or communities, the learning is a creative process of knowledge creation. For organizations this new knowledge is a source of innovation in response to a highly competitive environment. Communities likewise need to tap into the creative, innovative energy of collective learning as their environments are increasingly challenging. The threats facing local communities seem global and almost insurmountable. But there are answers, not waiting to be discovered necessarily, but waiting to be created by the members of the community as they learn together.

This concept of community learning is lacking in the discourse of public administration, and for that matter, the other related fields of public affairs. It is a concept that to this point has not been fully developed, if at all. The other kinds of community learning, however, all in important ways contribute to the idea of communities, learning. Additionally, research and practice at the intersection between adult education and community development has employed the term in similar ways and offers much insight to the concept. But as of yet there is no clear conceptualization of community learning [in

the sense mentioned above]. This is particularly true in public administration and related fields.

This dissertation offers two important contributions, then, regarding community learning. The first is conceptual, that is, this dissertation develops this concept with a public administration audience in mind. The second contribution is empirical, offering an examination of practice. Specifically, this study looks carefully at two main elements of community learning: face to face dialogue in community, and factors that contribute to integrative learning at the community level. A concept of community learning offers practitioners in public administration and related fields a framework or lens for approaching their efforts to contribute to community renewal.

Overview of Chapters

The rest of this study is organized as follows. Chapter Two reviews the many literatures that contribute to the concept of community learning. The "conceptual threads" of community learning consist of insights from community studies and development, the strong democratic discourse in the literatures of public affairs, and the concepts of group and organizational learning as developed in organizational studies. Included in this discussion are current usages of the term, particularly the research that is at the nexus of adult education and community development, as it constitutes the closest thing currently in the literature to a conception of communities, learning. The common thread of all the literatures is an ethos of collaborative pragmatism that is perhaps best articulated in the work of Mary Follett. This perspective paints a dynamic portrait of community as an ongoing creative process of democratic self governance. Through social interaction, and

particularly through dialogue, citizens develop a collective intelligence that represents an integration of individual perspectives, capacities, and interests.

Chapter Three offers a conceptualization of community learning, woven together from the conceptual threads described in Chapter Two. Community learning is quite simply the phenomenon of a given community learning *as a community*. This is related to, but importantly different from, theories of collaborative learning in education where the emphasis is still on individual learning in collaborative settings. Here learning is conceived of not as knowledge transfer from one individual to another, but as a creative process where knowledge, in the form of new understandings, frames of reference, or ideas, is generated in and through a collective learning process, which is the process of community.

Community learning has both structural and process elements. While the main features of deliberative dialogue, integration, and the social construction of knowledge are all based in process (the creative process described by Follett and others), for learning to occur at the community level certain structural elements are critical. Communities are in actuality fields of social interaction, with no fixed boundaries or even memberships. Yet communities do have important structural features that enable community-level learning to occur. These structures include associations and institutions, and most importantly, networks that link associations and institutions across the community. It is through these linkages, and the interactions that occur within them, that we see collective learning in groups make its way to the community level and become institutionalized in such a way as to provide evidence that a community is learning.

Chapter Four moves from the conceptual to the concrete, introducing a community engagement project that is being used to explore the concept of community learning. The "Wytheville Project", as researchers have informally labeled it, involves a multi-year, intensive effort to engage a rural community in deliberative dialogue regarding its future. Hundreds of citizens participated in what was an attempt to facilitate community learning. This chapter describes the process of the project and the rationale behind the research team's "deliberative visioning" program.

The project follows an action research methodology, as the "subjects" of this study were collaborators in the inquiry. From the citizen's point of view the project was "community visioning" while from a research perspective it clearly represents community-based action research. As such, the varied data collection tools of action research were employed, including field notes, interviews, and notes from group meetings. The Wytheville project has proved to be a fertile test-bed for experimentation in community learning. The literally hundreds of hours of direct, collaborative interaction with local citizens provide rich insights into community learning. As befits action research, priority is given to citizen's own accounts, in addition to the observations of the author who was/is a participant observer, as well as leader, of the project.

Following the introduction to the "Wytheville Project" and the methodology used in that research, Chapter Five offers the findings of this work. Specifically, the concept of community learning, as explained in Chapter Three, is used as a lens to interpret the findings. The critical component of dialogue in groups and the collective learning that occurs there is examined in the context of specific deliberative dialogue meetings (forums) held in Wytheville. Evidence is given of collective learning at that level as well

as observations and insights, or lessons learned, that arise from viewing the interaction with a community learning lens. The question of how learning occurs at the community level, or rather, how learning in dialogue is linked to the community level, is also explored. Evidence is given from field notes, observations, interviews, and focus groups with community stakeholders. Again, the experience is also mined for lessons learned in terms of what facilitated and also what inhibited community level learning. The chapter also explores, albeit briefly, the question of how community learning can be sustained, or in other words, how a community becomes a "learning community."

The conclusion in Chapter Six returns to the introduction earlier in this chapter. If public administration is to play a catalytic role in community renewal, then how must it re-imagine itself in order to make that goal effectual? Put another way, if community renewal is important, and public administration can "lead the way" in the process, then how should the field [re]think community participation? Community learning is offered here as a concept that can guide public administration in this effort. Specifically, community learning can be a lens from which to view and understand current practice, and hopefully offer a perspective from which to craft future innovations in terms of the citizen – government relationship. Community learning is a way of viewing the administrator's role in community renewal, particularly in terms of engaging citizens.

Does administrative practice inhibit or facilitate community learning? That ultimately becomes the key question for public administration in the context of community renewal. The final chapter explores the directions such a question takes us. It also looks beyond the local community and asks how a community learning perspective can enrich planning and policy development and implementation at regional, state and

federal levels. The conclusion also revisits the perspectives on public administration and suggests how a community perspective differs from the dominant frames of management, politics, and law. Further questions and areas of research are staked out as this study clearly is a first step in a long project to infuse public administration with a community perspective.

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CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL THREADS OF COMMUNITY LEARNING:

A LITERATURE REVIEW

> The community is a learning entity, an iterative, continuing collective
> that reproduces itself through education. Community is multi-
> institutional, horizontal, and boundary-spanning, comprised of
> individuals, groups, and neighborhoods engaged in deliberation.
> H. George Frederickson (1996)

Community learning represents a synthesis or integration of many different literature threads. It is a multidisciplinary idea that has evolved, and continues to evolve, out of many different literatures and schools of thought. The development of this concept also exemplifies the understanding of learning that is the basis of the concept itself. Here learning is a collective process, what Mary Follett called "integration." Integrative ideas evolve out of the group process, where different ideas and perspectives are synthesized to create something new (1998, 24-32).[1]

This chapter maps out some of the intellectual terrain of community learning. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, there are many diverse strands of literature that directly or indirectly inform the conceptualization of the topic. The following discussion outlines the major threads of literature, grouping them broadly in three main areas: community development and community studies, organizational learning, and public affairs (including political philosophy and the applied fields of public affairs). Within these

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[1] In other words, I cannot talk about community learning as if it were my own "brainchild" because I am not only indebted to all the literature threads that unite in this idea, but also because my understanding of it has been shaped through discussions with colleagues over the years. So community learning is an integration, as well as about integration.
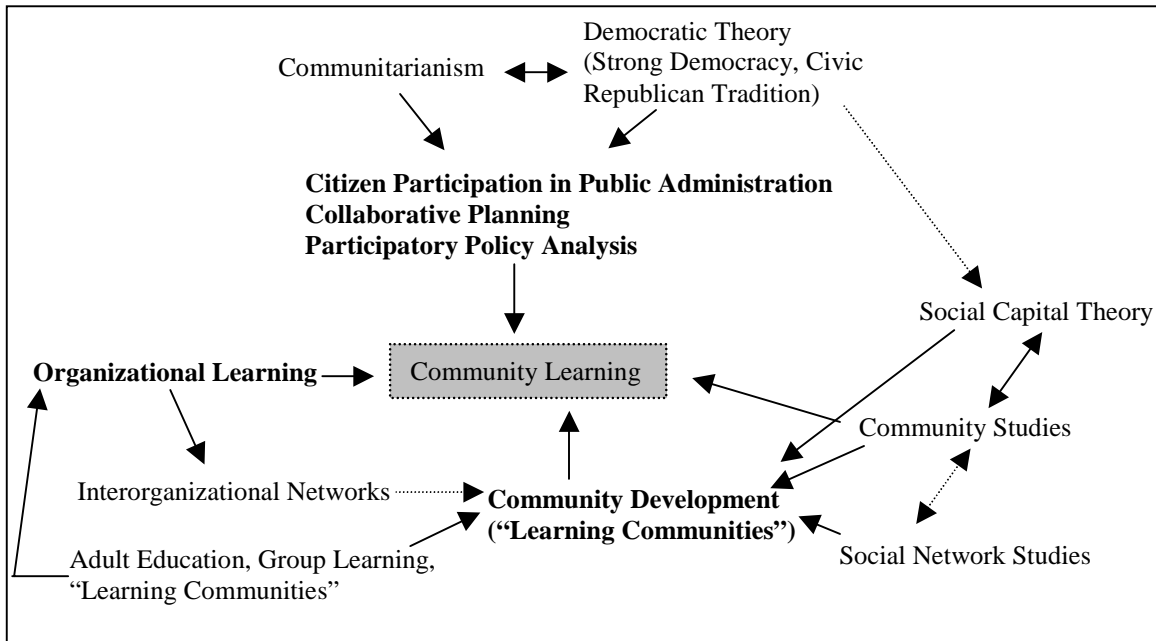
Figure 2.1 – Conceptual Threads of Community Learning

literatures are found the substance of "community" and "learning" that inform a concept

of "community learning."

Included in this review are instances where the terms "community learning" or

"learning community" are currently in-use. Prior to the review of the three major

groupings of literature is a discussion of the ethos of "collaborative pragmatism" which

they all share. This shared perspective that cuts across the different literatures was

articulated particularly well by Mary Follett, therefore, most of the discussion will be

dedicated to her view of "creative democracy." The chapter concludes with a summary of

the conceptual threads that the literatures offer as foundations of community learning.

Throughout the discussion it is evident that each of the literatures suggests an idea of

community learning in the sense discussed here, but never fully arrives there. Put another

way, community learning is an underdeveloped concept at best and therefore, one

contribution of this study is to fill this gap in the literature.

Mary Follett and Collaborative Pragmatism

At its core, a notion of community learning is a description of a social process articulated by Mary Follett, principally in her books *The New State* (1998) and *Creative Experience* (1924). McSwain and White label this perspective "collaborative pragmatism" and argue that it represents an alternative to the rational liberal perspective that operates as a meta-frame for public administration and society generally (McSwite 1997). This label, "collaborative pragmatism", captures the essence of Follett's thought and the broader philosophical tradition of which she is a part. It is this line of thinking that runs through the various literatures reviewed hereafter. This section introduces the ethos of collaborative pragmatism and of Follett specifically.

American Pragmatism

The pragmatic tradition in America refers to a "style of thinking" or set of "interrelated motifs" with its origins in the works of several classical American philosophers, most notably Charles Peirce, William James, George Herbert Mead, and John Dewey (Bernstein 1992, 324). The current excitement about pragmatism represents a revival of sorts of this tradition or line of thought.[2] In common parlance today, pragmatism has come to refer to a simplistic notion of practicality, that what "works" is "right." In scholarly circles the term is often likewise employed in an overly-simplistic way, equating pragmatism to an antifoundational philosophical stance. Both usages, however, lack the nuance and complexity that is the pragmatic tradition, and hence we find that pragmatism is "much maligned and much misunderstood" (Anderson 1990, 2).

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[2] Lewis Menand's brilliant, Pulitzer winning intellectual history, *The Metaphysical Club* (2001) is an engaging introduction to this line of thinking and typifies the revival of interest in pragmatism.

Rather than speaking of "pragmatism" as if it is a fixed body of thought, it makes more sense to refer to a tradition, or better still, a "pragmatic ethos" that characterizes the work of that group of classical American philosophers. Richard Bernstein (1992, 323-40) identifies five interrelated themes that constitute this pragmatic ethos. First, pragmatist thinkers sought to "demolish the idea that there are or can be any absolute beginnings or endings in philosophy." Thus they were to some degree "antifoundationalist", to use today's terminology. Yet the escape from fixed foundations of knowledge did not result in a radical skepticism, but rather, a "thoroughgoing fallibilism," the second theme of the pragmatic ethos. In other words, there is an open recognition of the limits of human reason. Therefore, while we "can never call everything into question at once, nevertheless there is no belief of thesis – no matter how fundamental – that is not open to further interpretation and criticism" (327). The pragmatists presented a positive vision of humankind moving forward, however tentatively and critically, with an open realization of the limits of reason.

The third theme identified by Bernstein is the "social character of the self and the need to nurture a critical community of inquirers" (328). The pragmatic thinkers all uniformly rejected atomistic accounts of human nature. The individual self cannot be thought of independently of community. This notion of the interrelationship between individual and community was not only viewed descriptively, but normatively, such that inquiry is always better in the context of a critical community. Thus pragmatic thinkers, particularly Dewey, were important advocates of participatory democracy.

The fourth theme of the pragmatic ethos deals with the observation that "contingency and chance" are "ineradicable and pervasive features of the universe"

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(Bernstein 1992, 329). This leads to a radical empiricism which places primary value on lived experience as a guide to action. This leads to the fifth and final theme outlined by Bernstein, that of plurality. The pragmatic ethos is shot through with a pluralism that celebrates diversity of perspectives, experiences, orientations, etc. As these different perspectives join in community, tentative or "small-t" truths are created and the community moves forward. Ultimately what the pragmatic ethos offers is a hopeful view of social action in a socially-constructed world without fixed foundations, thus avoiding the bleakness and nihilism of some postmodern antifoundational thinking while at the same time seeking to avoid the mistakes of the past where action was based on supposed infallible Truth, with mostly tragic consequences. The pragmatic ethos therefore is democratic, open, progressive and firmly rooted in organic community.

The pragmatic ethos and its notion of a community of inquirers suggests implicitly, if not explicitly, some notion of community learning. In terms of social action the advice received from pragmatism is to use the diversity of experience of community members for the purpose of learning and moving forward. The ideal of a community of inquirers as set forth by the early pragmatists could be translated into some notion of a learning community, a community that is in a perpetual state of mutual learning for the common good.

<div align="center">Mary Follett's Collaborative Pragmatism</div>

Of all the pragmatic thinkers, few employed the pragmatic ethos to an understanding of politics and administrative practice better than Mary Follett.[3] It is Follett's unique form of pragmatism that [arguably] best makes the connection from

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[3] I refer to "Mary Follett" and not "Mary Parker Follett" (the more common usage) because I recently found out that she referred to herself as "Mary Follett" as did her friends and other associations. The inclusion of "Parker" seems to have been added after her death (Tonn 2003).

pragmatic philosophy to democratic governance. It is hard to understand why Follett has remained so much in the shadows of her more celebrated peers (Dewey, James, Royce, Lippmann). Her writings demonstrate her intellectual acuity as well as her rich and varied hands-on experience in making democracy work.

Follett's later work in business management has recently been rediscovered as she has recently been celebrated as a "prophet of management." Her greatest legacy, however, is as a "prophet of participation" (Morse 2003). Though she is popular, some seven decades after her passing, in the fields of management, social work, and conflict resolution, her major life's work, in terms of published work and in the field, focused squarely on democratic governance, community building, and participation. The companion volumes *The New State* and *Creative Experience* (originally published in 1918 and 1924, respectively) lay out a theory of "creative democracy" that represents a unique manifestation of the pragmatic ethos, or what McSwite refer to as "collaborative pragmatism" (1997; 1998).

Circular Response

The organizing premise of Follett's work lies in her notion of circular response or experience. Human activity is in response "to a changing environment . . . which is changing because of the activity between it and me." Thus, "response is always to a relating . . . . experience on every level may be found to be an interrelating in which the activity of the relating alters the terms of the relating and also the relating itself" (Follett 1924, 73-75). To put it as simply as possible, circular response means that we are making our environment, responding to it, and being "recreated" by it simultaneously, from moment to moment, our whole lives.

This stance toward experience, clearly consonant with the pragmatic ethos, applies to social interaction, emphasizing the interrelatedness of individual and community. Like today's communitarian critics of liberalism, Follett was very critical of the social and political theories of her day which were based on "the conception of the separate individual" (1998, 61). Rejecting the atomistic premise, Follett countered that

> We cannot put the individual on one side and society on the other, we
> must understand the complete interrelation of the two. Each has no value,
> no existence, without the other. (1998, 61-2)

In other words, just as we cannot separate thought and action, environment and response, we cannot separate man and society, for "man is at the same time a social factor and a social product" (1998, 61). We are society and society is us. Again, in her own words:

> . . . the individual is not a unit but a centre of forces (both centripetal and
> centrifugal), and . . . society is not a collection of units but a complex
> radiating and converging, crossing and recrossing energies . . .(1998, 75)

This stands in stark contrast to "the idea of developed individuals first existing and then coming together to form society" (1998, 75). The individual is shaped by society, which in turn is shaped by individuals. The idea of self and others then is an illusion, both being "merely different points of view of one and the same experience" (1998, 79). Thus individuality is found not in being apart from others, but in being *a part of* others (1998, 62).

Integration

The concept of circular response, of the reciprocal relationship between subject and object, of individual and community, leads to another main theme in Follett's work, that of *integration* or interpenetration. Follett understood that human association must include conflict. Individuals will always differ. But when "differing interests meet, they need not *oppose* but only *confront* each other." Interests may be confronted, or dealt with,

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in one of three ways. First, by domination, or victory of one side over the other. Second, by compromise, where neither side gets what it wants, that is, both "give up" something. And finally, by integration, where "both desires have found a place, that neither side has had to sacrifice anything" (Fox and Urwick 1973, 2-3).

Integration is a creative process of unifying differences and is the basis of Follett's conception of democracy and citizenship. Note the word *unifying* and not unity. Follett used words as verbs rather than nouns as often as possible to emphasize *process*. The process whereby integration occurs is group process, where individuals develop a sense of community and learn to "feel and think together" (1998, 45-7). Thus community is not a "thing" but a process (Follett 1919). Follett uses the example of a committee meeting to illustrate how group process works (how integration happens) where a "group idea" is created "which will be better than any one of our ideas alone, moreover which will be better than all of our ideas added together" (1998, 24). We come to the meeting with our own ideas, then the "subtle process of the intermingling of all the different ideas of the group" occurs whereby everyone's ideas affects the others "until the common idea springs into being" (1998, 25). She uses several different phrases to help get this idea across, calling an integrated solution a "composite idea," a "synthesis," the "unifying of opposites," the "collective thought," and the production of "a genuine group will" arriving at a "*we* . . . the singular not the plural pronoun we" (1998, 25-31).

To achieve genuine group process, and find integration, participants must be committed enough *not to* subordinate themselves or their ideas, but at the same time be sure not to force their ideas on others. In other words, we are "eager for what all others have to give" without feeling we have to concede or compromise ourselves (1998, 26-7).

It is not about finding a compromise position or a majority position, it is about synthesis, discovery, and creativity. In the end, the group idea is viewed as one's own idea and seen as better than the "individual" ideas which were brought to the group in the beginning. It is this creative integration which lies at the heart of what Follett calls "true democracy."

One of the criticisms of Follett lies in the observation that integration is clearly not always possible (Fry and Thomas 1996). But Follett did respond to this criticism directly, saying

> Not all differences, however, can be integrated. That we must face fully, but it is certain that there are fewer irreconcilable activities than we at present think, although it often takes ingenuity, a "creative intelligence," to find the integration. (1924, 163)

The ingenuity and "creative intelligence" needed to find integration is admittedly neither quick or easy. It can be as difficult on a local scale as it is internationally, where war "is a kind of rest-cure compared to the task of reconciling our differences." The work of creative integration, "the effort of agreeing is so much more strenuous" than going to battle (1998, 357-8). The effort of unifying difference, of finding integration, a true group will, is the essence of self-government, of democracy, according to Follett. In the introduction to *The New State*, Follett asserts that "we have not yet tried democracy" (1998, 3). And yet she believed we would head in a more democratic direction.

Collaborative Pragmatism

To summarize, the ideas of circular response and integration recognize that while man is "the center and shaper of his universe" he is "created by reciprocal interplay" (Follett 1998, 19). Through [democratic] group process, individual differences can interweave and unite to create a genuine collective will (1998, 48). This leads to a conception of democracy very different than that of the "ballot box." Democracy is not a

product, but a process. It is a method of self-government based on "a genuine union of true individuals," an ongoing process of creative citizenship (1998, 5-8).

It is this notion of collaborative pragmatism, articulated best by Follett but representative of the American pragmatic tradition generally, that is the organizing premise of the concept of community learning. As stated in the introduction, community learning is not so much a new concept but a clarifying concept that brings together several interrelated threads of thought. It is hoped that such a concept will provide a useful frame from which to analyze efforts to engage citizens and also in considering new and different ways to engage them in the future. The current literatures that deal most directly with this subject, and which all are themselves infused to some extent with the ethos of collaborative pragmatism, are grouped within discussions of community, of political philosophy and public affairs, and group and organizational learning. Each of these groupings are now discussed in turn.

Community Studies and Community Development

For many, community is an overused word with impossibly ambiguous meaning. Admittedly, community is employed in so many different ways that there is danger in a word having so many meanings as to become meaningless. Philip Selznick explains that there "appears to be no clear consensus as to its central meaning" and the idea itself is "elusive" and carries much "baggage" (1992, 357). Yet community remains important, deeply important, to social theory, to politics, and most certainly to the enterprise of public administration. Why? For one, as Follett reminds us, we cannot escape community. The idea of the self, separated from society is a fiction. We are never not influenced by community. George Herbert Mead's theory of the "self" underscores the

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ubiquitous nature of community. Fully mature individuals, according to Mead, incorporate the "generalized other", the "attitude of the whole community" in their identities (Coser 1971, 337-39). Thus communities are more than the context of social action, they shape individual identities.

Another reason that community remains such a crucial concept is that current research finds that certain features or manifestations of community profoundly affect the processes of governance (Putnam 2000). As Selznick points out, the difficulty and complexity of the term should not deter our use of the term or quest for understanding. All important ideas (e.g. rationality, morality, freedom, or culture) in society similarly have contested and multiple meanings (2002, 16).

A literature review by George Hillery many years ago found more than 94 definitions of community (1955). Despite the diversity, however, there are basic features that remain relatively consistent across different treatments of community. Larry Lyon observes that "if we defined community as people living within a specific area, sharing common ties, and interacting with one another, we would have a definition that largely agrees with most of the definitions Hillery analyzed" (1989, 5). This generic, baseline definition is the starting point for the following discussion of community. The focus is on community as "concrete and rooted in place" (Keller 2003, 8). We look to this literature and ask, what is it about local or civic communities that informs a concept of community learning? In other words, what is a community, that it may learn? Or rather, what is it about *local* community that makes possible *community* learning?

It is important to distinguish between descriptive and normative treatments of community. Descriptive treatments simply speak to what a community is, that is, what

separates a community from some other kind of social collective. Normative treatments of community speak in terms of what should be, that is, in terms of community as an ideal. In practice many authors go back and forth between normative and descriptive accounts, and in many cases even seem to confuse the two. But it is important to make the distinction, because when speaking of community learning, it is important to first understand what are the descriptive attributes of a local community that are relevant in terms of this level of analysis. Some of the normative elements may be missing, but descriptively the subject is still a "community."

Interactional Theory of Community

The basis of this study's approach to community in descriptive terms is Kenneth Wilkinson's interactional approach. Wilkinson explains that there are three elements of community: a locality, a local society, and a process of locality-oriented collective actions. The process of locality-oriented collective actions is termed a "community field." A locality is defined as "a territory where people live and meet their daily needs together." Local society refers to "a comprehensive network of associations for meeting common needs and expressing common interests." A community field is "a process of interrelated actions through which residents express their common interests in the local society." Wilkinson explains that while other units of social organization may embody one or two of these elements, a community as described here embodies all three. (1999, 2-3).

Social interaction is the key ingredient to community. "Social interaction delineates the territory as the community locale; it provides the associations that comprise the local society; it gives structure and direction to processes of collective action; and it is

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the source of community identity" (Wilkinson 1999, 13). With the emphasis on social interaction, the local community is thought of in terms of a social field rather than a system. In the same vein as Follett (1998; 1924), Wilkinson explains community as a process of interactions rather than a discrete thing. The interactions both shape and are shaped by the local territory. In other words, "contacts among people define the local territory" while at the same time it is the features of the territory that count among important factors shaping the social interaction (Wilkinson 1999, 24). Wilkinson draws upon George Herbert Mead's social psychology in arguing for an interactional approach to community. Mead, of course, is among the key thinkers that constitute the pragmatic tradition discussed above.

Though Wilkinson does not refer to her work at all, as he was probably unaware of it, it is remarkable how consistent his treatment of community is with Follett's. Community is a process, but is centered in the local territory. For Follett, this locality was the neighborhood, for Wilkinson, the rural community. But in both cases the emphasis is clear: community is rooted in face-to-face social interaction. Thus what distinguishes a community from other kinds of social organization is that all three features are present: a locality, a local society, and a process of locality-oriented collective actions.

Of course Wilkinson's conception of community has normative implications. In the community field, collective actions which express "the entire range of common locality-oriented interests" are interconnected by a various actors, associations, and activities, "and to the extent this occurs it promotes and enriches the collective life of a population" (1999, 74). Following Durkeim's explanation that solidarity in the modern world requires moral density, and that moral density is low when material or physical

density is low, it follows that rural areas with their low physical density have trouble supporting community, contrary to conventional wisdom (Wilkinson 1999, 7). It is in the interactional definition of community that answers are found to the normative question of how to build community.

Wilkinson's explanation of community development based on the interactional understanding of community as a social field demonstrates the relationship between the descriptive and normative definitions of community.

> As it is true in any social field, the process of interaction that drives and constitutes the community field is in a continuous process of change and development. Thus, the structure of the community field is never fixed; it exists in the ebb and flow of the process of generalization, which in turn arises and is constantly modified by locality oriented actions and special-interest fields. Development of this process is the central activity in community development. (1999, 91)

In other words, the answer to how to develop community is to look back to the conception of the community field itself. Community develops as the community field develops, which is "a process of interrelated actions through which residents express their common interest in the local society" (1999, 2). This refers to linking, coordinating activities that occur through the acts of individuals, informal networks, and more formal coordinating associations (1999, 90).

More recent thinking and research on community and social capital underscores Wilkinson's community field approach. Specifically, "community networks and the qualitative aspects of these interaction structures and its elements are associated with capacity for local action" (Sharp 2001). In the field of community development the idea of community capacity is very important and focusing on the community field, the social structure of a community, seems to be the most fruitful place to begin. Bridger and Luloff

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(1999) explain that the community field "brings into focus common interests in local aspects of life" through linkages that cut across different sectors of the community. So purposive actions to develop the community field "focus on developing relationships and lines of communication across interest lines." Jeff Sharp (2001) suggests community network analysis as a tool for studying community fields. Specifically he looks at different types of network structures and their effect on the development of the community field. Pyramidal or coalitional structures appear to facilitate the community field while factional and amorphous power structures hinder the development of community. The important finding is the relevance of analyzing interorganizational networks as a tool for community development.

<div align="center">Social Capital</div>

Previous accounts are drawn from the rural sociology literature which is the source of the interactional or community field approach to community and community development. The connections with other important treatments of community are many and center on the common theme of social interaction. Perhaps the most important here is the burgeoning literature on social capital or social infrastructure. Though the term "social capital" has been used in different ways, by and large its current usage is based in the work of Robert Putnam. He explains that social capital "refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (2000, 19).

Social capital takes many forms and does not always necessarily build community. Putnam makes a distinction between bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive) forms of social capital. The exclusive or bonding forms of social capital are

more inward looking such as country clubs or ethnicity-based organizations. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, involves networks that are outward looking and cut across diverse groups. Putnam observes that "bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves" (2000, 22-23). Putnam's notion of bridging social capital is very similar to the social field construct of Wilkinson. Both use the notion of "weak ties" as developed by Granovetter (1973) to explain this notion of social networking. Essentially weak ties are those linkages to more "distant acquaintances who move in different circles" (Putnam 2000, 23). Weak ties bind strong ties such as close circles of friends and family to the larger structure of the community. Thus it is in the weak ties or the relationships that constitute bridging social capital that are a key component to our understanding of the community field.

In a study on social capital published by the World Bank, the importance of these bridging, integrating, cross-cutting ties are highlighted. Deepa Narayan explains that "voluntary cross-cutting networks, associations and related norms based in everyday social interactions lead to the collective good of citizens, whereas networks and associations consisting of primary social groups without cross-cutting ties lead to the betterment of only those groups" (1999, 13).

The discussions on social capital, just as the previous discussion of community, contains both descriptive and normative elements. At the descriptive level, Putnam and others offer ways to measure social capital and provide convincing evidence that the social bonds of social capital are eroding. They also point to the significant positive effects social capital can have on individual and community well-being. This of course

leads to the normative aspect of the social capital literature which calls for seeking ways to develop social capital. Indeed, developing social capital is at the forefront of community development practice (Green and Haines 2002). In Putnam's landmark book, *Bowling Alone* (2000), social capital is linked to, among other things, economic prosperity, health and happiness, and "making democracy work." The prominence of the concept of social capital in discussions of community and community development cannot be overstated.

Communication and Community

Another important contribution to our understanding of community, and by extension community learning, is made from the field of communication research. Louis Friedland's theory of the "communicatively integrated community" complements the sociological, interactional approaches to community (2001). Drawing on Habermas' theory of communicative action and associated concepts of lifeworld and system, Friedland suggests that communication is the medium of integration that binds different "levels" of community together. He notes that the exploration of the link between community structure and communication began with those scholars associated with the pragmatist tradition, specifically Dewey, Mead, and Cooley.

Table 2.1 - Communicatively Integrated Community (From Friedland 2001, p. 375, reproduced by permission)

Integration Level	Location	Structure	Medium of Integration	Medium of Communication	Form of Symbolic Integration
System	Global, national, regional	Urban ecology, political economy, political structure	Steering media of money and power	System-wide elite media	System-wide legitimacy
Macro	Metropolitan	Interorganizational elite networks	Power and money/ communicative action	Local Media, specialized media, interpersonal networks	Legitimacy of local elites, metro-wide imagined community
Macro-meso	Metropolitan/ Community-wide	Elite-associational networks	Power and money/ communicative action	Local media, interpersonal networks	Metro-wide imagined community, normative obligations
Meso	Community-wide/ Neighborhood	Associational networks	Power and money/ communicative action	Local media, community media, specialized media, community networks	Submetro imagined community, normative obligations, storytelling neighborhood
Meso-micro	Neighborhood	Associational-interpersonal networks	Communicative action	Local media, community media, specialized media, community networks, interpersonal networks	Submetro imagined community, cognitive mapping, normative obligations, storytelling neighborhood
Micro	Neighborhood/ Interpersonal	Interpersonal networks	Communicative action	Local media, community media, specialized media, community networks, interpersonal networks	Submetro imagined community, cognitive mapping, normative obligations, storytelling neighborhood

This important connection to pragmatism, primarily from sociology, stresses that "communities are integrated through structure, ecology, networks, civic solidarity, and symbolic communication" (368). But it is communication that binds the multiple levels together which is the important insight of Friedland. Specifically, communicative action plays a particularly important role in integrating interpersonal networks with community level networks. Table 2.1, reproduced from Friedland, presents the overall structure of the communicatively integrated community.

Normative Community

John W. Gardner, founder of Common Cause and former president of the Independent Sector (who recently passed away) has been one of the most prominent spokesmen for community in America. In his concise and much referenced *Building Community* (1991), he outlines ten "ingredients" for what is called here *normative* community, that is, a healthy or well-functioning community.

1. "Wholeness incorporating diversity," or in other words, a pluralism that still achieves some kind of coherence. What he means by this is that although there is community cohesion, there is still room for diverse groups or subcommunities that retain their own identity within the context of the broader community.

2. "A reasonable basis share values" which means that the community imparts a coherent value system and that there is a "shared framework of meaning" and a "shared vision of what constitutes the common good and the future."

3. "Caring, trust, and teamwork...an atmosphere of cooperation and connectedness."

4. "Effective internal communication" which involves frequent face-to-face communication among members of the community.

5. "Participation" and a "two way flow of influence." In cities, a continuous collaboration between government and other sectors of the local society.

6. "Affirmation."

7. "Links beyond the community." Although the community must have some sense of boundary in order to distinguish itself, it must still be linked regionally, nationally and globally.

8. "Development of young people" meaning that the use of the community are prepared to fulfill a roles in preserving renewing the community in the future.

9. "A forward view," a sense of direction, or vision.

10. "Institutional arrangements for community maintenance." Ideally a high proportion of the population has some role in this maintenance system. Thus, in a community of place this maintenance system includes much more than simply the local government.

Gardner's insights on community obviously includes more than simply communities of place. He argues that communities take many diverse forms today including the traditional geographically bounded community. His work is indicative of the broader communitarian movement and related discussions of civil society.

Communitarian thinking is much broader than the discussion here of place-based community. Communitarians such as Amitai Etzioni (1996) and Philip Selznick (1992, 2002) are concerned with philosophical issues of balancing rights and responsibilities, community values versus individual liberty, and restoring civil society generally. The specific concerns of local communities are included, but not central, in their thinking. Thus Garnder's and other communitarian insights on building community are relevant, but more subtly than the other literature that deals directly with local community. However, when applied to public affairs, communitarian thinking points us in important ways to community learning as will be explained below.

Selznick's richly communitarian and pragmatic sociological account of community deserves particular mention. It offers a description of community, much like the previously mentioned models, that contains both descriptive and normative features. Like the other accounts, the focus is on overlapping, cross-cutting, or "multi-plex" relationships, recognizing that community is a common life where differences meet (1992, 370). Selznick argues that communities retain a balanced mix of seven interrelated

features: 1) historicity; 2) identity; 3) mutuality; 4) plurality; 5) autonomy; 6) participation; and 7) integration (1992, 357-65). These features more or less correspond with the other discussions of community highlighted previously. What Selznick adds, importantly, is a focus on institutions. Whereas the previous treatments tend to focus on interpersonal contacts, Selznick explains that the seven principles identified are brought into balance as communities are "institution-centered." In other words, the community's "cohesion and moral competence derive from the strength and integrity of families, schools, parties, government agencies, voluntary associations, and law" (1992, 370).

Selznick argues that focusing on institutions allows us to turn "attention away from the psychic cohesion so often associated with the idea of community" and instead look at community as "a network of distinct but interdependent institutions." Despite all of the variables that seem to threaten the viability of community as a relevant concept—mobility, fragmentation, technology, for example—institutions persist (1992, 370-1). This is particularly true for communities of place.

Selznick's contribution is crucial. Like Wilkinson and others who focus on social interaction, Selznick reminds us that a core feature of community is that it "encompasses a broad range of activities and interests" or in other words, represents a commonality that includes the whole person, more than "segmental interests or activities." This conception is similar to the community field concept put forth by Wilkinson. Communities are, in Selznick's words, a "framework of shared beliefs, interests, and commitments" that unite a "set of varied groups and activities" so that a segmented group, like a local church for example, can be said to have community-like features but is not comprehensive enough to be the community (1992, 358). Selnick's important contribution, therefore, is the focus

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on institutions. The communicative action that Friedland speaks of and the social interaction that Wilkinson focuses on, takes place within institutional contexts. We can look at the social interaction of community as taking place then at the individual/interpersonal level, but also at the associational/institutional level. Both levels are important to consider and should factor in to our understanding of community learning.

The literature on community is vast and this review has only touched upon a few selected sources. Some network theorists maintain that place is less important now than personal networks (Wellman 1999). However, it is maintained here, along with Wilkinson (1999), Keller (2003), and others, that place still matters and that in the context of community governance, place is essential. Also it is clear that the overarching themes in the community literature are social interaction and place. This social interaction takes place within interpersonal networks as well as associative and other linking mechanisms. Communicative action appears to be the primary medium of integration within communities.

If community learning is to be an important feature of effective community self-governance, then the starting point to understanding how communities learn is understanding what makes a community a community. Communicative action within a community and the networks within the community structure in which it takes place, seem to be the prime features at which we must look.

<p style="text-align:center">Community Development</p>

The field of community development is importantly linked to community sociology (Wilkinson 1999). The assets-based approach to community development in

particular emphasizes the role of social capital and social organization generally as a source of renewal (Green and Haines 2002). The field of community development is also beginning to use terms like "learning communities" and even "community learning" in some instances. For the most part these references represent the intersection of community development and adult education. Group learning is seen to contribute to social capital, and by extension, community development outcomes.

Learning Communities in Australia

In a recent review Kilpatrick, Barrett, and Jones (2003) explain that the idea of "learning communities" is at "the fore of much educational and organizational literature and discussion." There appear to be two primary strands of literature referring to learning communities. The first refers to learning in educational settings where the focus is primarily on learning for the benefit of individuals rather than the collective. The synergetic aspects and "potential to create new knowledge tends not to be acknowledged" (Kilpatrick, Barrett, and Jones 2003, 4). On the other hand, a growing body of scholars, primarily from Europe and Australia, focus on collective learning. Scholars in this thread of research observe that "learning communities . . . not only facilitate the sharing of knowledge, but have the potential to create new knowledge that can be used for the benefit of the community as a whole and/or its individual members" (2003, 3). The authors also note that the European treatments tend to emphasize geographic or place-based communities whereas the Australian research is broader, including other communities "of common interest" as well as communities of place.

It is important to note, however, that all the research has an educational emphasis, that is, learning "facilitated through adult and community education" (Tasmania

Department of Education 2003). The former group emphasizes improved learning (of educational material) via collaborative educational settings whereas this latter approach "focuses on the human element of communities, and the profits that accrue from building on the synergies of individuals in common locations or with common interests as they work towards sharing understandings, skills and knowledge for shared purposes (Kilpatrick, Barrett, and Jones 2003, 2).

Community learning, from the point of view of this learning communities perspective, refers to a process which produces and sustains "community development outcomes" (Falk and Harrison 1998, 614). Therefore, learning communities display indicators of community learning. Put another way, community learning is the process that distinguishes learning communities from others. Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) have made an important link between social capital and "micro social interactions which are conceived of as learning" (89). This is an important intersection between the work of those studying "learning communities" [and by extension community learning] and that of the community development literature cited above "which variously makes connections between social cohesion, civic and economic well-being and the social process which contribute to such beneficial outcomes" (2000, 89). Learning here is viewed as the interactive process which leads to change at multiple levels within community. Social capital becomes both a product and precursor to learning. That is, learning interactions result in accumulations of social capital while at the same time it is that social capital that "oils" the process of learning "through accessing, sharing and creating knowledge, skills and values" (Kilpatrick 2000, 4).

Kilpatrick (2000) looks at community learning from at three levels: micro (individuals in communities); meso ("whole" communities, such as towns), and macro (regions of communities). The importance of networks at the meso (community) level is stressed, again, linking this literature in important ways to the community literature discussed previously. Summarizing the work of Narayan (1999), Granovetter, and others, Kilpatrick explains that "the presence of bridging (or 'weak') ties between groups within a community and between communities, and linking ties with public and private institutions, in addition to bonding ties, has a positive impact on community sustainability" (2000, 4). The role of "brokers" is also underscored, as these individuals or institutions can help make and maintain internal and external ties which facilitate community-level learning. Additionally, "enabling leadership" is often needed to facilitate "formation and maintenance of strong partnerships and networks" (2000, 5).

In a summary of the work of the Center for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA) that has explored community learning and community learning for several years now, Kilpatrick observes that "a community with high levels of social capital will be a learning community" (2000, 5). Fostering community learning, therefore, looks to network building in terms of bonding, bridging, and linking ties. Practical strategies for building a learning community offered by Kilpatrick include "creat[ing] opportunities for interaction" (2000, 5). This is perhaps the most important observation and it coincides importantly with the sociological observations of Wilkinson (1991) and others who emphasize social interaction as the core feature of community. Specifically, providing opportunities for social engagement at events or meetings, as well

as utilizing local media of communication (radio, newspaper, websites) is crucial in developing the social infrastructure for community learning (Kilpatrick 2000).

Community Learning in U.S. Community Development

Here in the United States there has been some limited use of the term "community learning" (outside of purely educational settings). Moore and Brooks (1996; 2000) and their "community learning" approach to community development, like their European and Australian counterparts, also combine adult education, organizational learning, and community development. Their focus, however, is mainly on group learning in communities and the benefit that may have to community development overall. Their primary unit of analysis is the "community-learning organization." Rooted in an "action learning" perspective, Moore and Brooks argue that community groups learn through joint action. "As the group discusses, defines, redefines, seeks solutions, tries out options, and has setbacks and successes, they see themselves and the problem change" (1996, 8). As groups in community learn, they are "establishing the social capital networks and are constantly generating new knowledge" (2000, 12). And further, "the learning community emerges when these elements of social capital have multiple opportunities to interact and dialogue in sharing their ideas and concerns" (2000, 12).

Public Affairs

The next grouping of literature threads is given the broad label "public affairs." This refers to political or public philosophy as well as the applied fields of public affairs: public administration, planning, and public policy. What is happening is a movement at the level of public philosophy that is manifested in the theory and practice of the applied fields. The theoretical developments in these fields, while for the most part running

parallel to each other, all point to or suggest a notion of community learning without completely arriving at the concept.

Communitarianism

Out of the critiques of minimalist liberalism has grown an emerging [alternative] public philosophy that has been called pragmatic liberalism (Anderson 1990), communitarian liberalism (Selznick 2002), republican liberalism (Dagger 1997), or strong democracy (Barber 1984). All of these scholars think in terms of participatory democracy, reminding us that democracy literally means "the people rule" and thus implies a strong ethos of self-governance. This alternative vision of democracy is rooted in the civic republican tradition, which in the U.S. context is traceable to the very beginnings of the republic (Sandel 1996). Liberal democracy, however, has been the dominant philosophy that has most profoundly shaped our institutions, and consequently has led to impoverished notions of citizenship and participation.

Central to this perspective of democratic communitarianism is the idea that liberty depends on sharing in governance, in "deliberating with fellow citizens about the common good." While recognizing the importance of rights, communitarianism seeks to balance those rights with responsibilities. As opposed to the individualistic account of society given by minimalist liberals, this alternative recognizes community and individual as a duality. Democracy, therefore, is about an evolved public or common will that is very different from the win-or-lose politics of liberalism.

Table 2.2 further illustrates some of the important differences between the liberal and communitarian versions of democracy.[4] The bottom half of the table looks at how these perspectives impact public administration theory in particular. Liberalism implies an instrumental role for public administration in the polity whereas a more communitarian view emphasizes the constitutive qualities of institutions. We see this split clearly in the public administration literature, for example, in the difference between "the new public management" and "the new public service" (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003). This split is also seen in our literature between scholars who begin with bureaucracy and see the problems of the field as ones of management while others say public administration should be thinking in terms of governance.

		Liberal	Communitarian
1	Model of political society	Market	Polis
2	Unit of Analysis	Individual	Community
3	Citizenship	Rights	Responsibilities
4	Citizen Role	Passive	Active
5	Citizen metaphor	Customer	Owner
6	Participation	Being Heard	Taking part
7	Administration's role in polity	Instrumental	Constitutive
8	Emphasis of administration	Management	Governance
9	Purpose of public "input"	Law (required); Buy-in	Legitimacy
10	Expertise	Dominant	Complement
11	Democratic Knowledge	Public opinion	Public judgment

Table 2.2 – Contrasting Versions of Democracy

Participation in Public Administration

Curtis Ventriss has argued that a public philosophy of public administration is needed, one that emphasizes a "revitalized concept of the public" (1997). Included in this rich (and communitarian) conception of the public is the notion of *public learning* which "involves increasing the capacity and knowledge of the public by facilitating politically educative interactions between the public and administrators" (1997, 1054). Similarly,

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[4] This table is drawn from a variety of sources, including [1] Stone (1997), [2&3] Selznick (2002), [4] Stivers (1990), [5] Schachter (1997), [7] Cook (1996), [8] Wamsley and Dudley (1998), and [11] Yankelovich (1991).

Stivers' vision of active citizenship involves constructing enabling structural conditions whereby "*citizens and administrators together can transform the agency setting into an authentic polis*: a public space in which human beings with different perspectives join to decide what to do and to act together for the public good" (1990, 96 *[emphasis in original]*).

This communitarian vision of public administration is not just academic. In the practitioner magazine *Public Management*, city manager Frank Benest argues that the new millennium requires changing how we view the relationship between citizens and local governments. Rather than thinking of citizens as passive consumers and local government as a "vending machine", the new metaphor is based on Daniel Kemmis' *Community and the Politics of Place*, that of "barn raising." This concept, argues Benest, promotes citizen responsibility. Rather than asking "what is government going to do for us?" the new focus should be on "what are we going to do" (1996). These are but a few examples of many, many calls in the public administration literature for a partnership relationship between "the public" and "the government."[5]

Planning and Policy Analysis

The point here is to illustrate the strong resurgence of the communitarian (or republican) version of democracy manifesting itself in public affairs scholarship and in practice. This is certainly the case in public administration, where citizen participation has become one of the dominant issues of the field in the last two decades. It is also very much the case in planning and policy analysis, with the emergence of "communicative" or "collaborative" planning and participatory approaches to analysis (Healey 1997; Innes

[5] Other notable examples include King and Stivers (1998), King, Feltey, and Susel (1998), Cooper (1991), Frederickson (1997a; 1997b), Wamsley and Wolf (1996); and Denhardt and Denhardt (2003).

and Booher 1999; deLeon 1997). John Forester's notion of the "deliberative practitioner" is particularly relevant to a notion of community learning. Here planners play "mediating midwifery roles" and must learn to become "astute bridge builders, negotiators, and mediators." Forester argues that deliberative practice facilitates collaborative professional, as well as public, "learning" (1999).

Planning theorists Judith Innes and David Booher connect the "emerging paradigm" of collaborative planning with their notion of consensus building. Consensus building involves face-to-face group communication and can be equated with the idea of communicative rationality as articulated by Habermas (Innes and Booher 1999, 11). The key point is that participants are engaged in open-ended discussion in an effort to build agreement rather than simply make compromises so that a decision can be made. The authors "contend that consensus building is a form of collective intelligence, which works as researchers now think the brain does, through distributed intelligence and the networks that link it together." In their study, observers "watched new concepts and new organization of information emerge among group members" (1999, 22). Obviously this notion of collaborative planning and consensus building is quite consistent with Follett's notion of integration and thus is an important contributor to our developing concept of community learning.

The developing communitarian movement in political philosophy, concurrent with the revival of pragmatism, provides the theoretical backdrop for these interrelated democratic developments in these applied field(s) of public affairs. All seem to agree on certain tenets of communitarian liberalism or democracy: self-government, strong citizen

engagement, balancing rights with responsibilities to community, and *a strong commitment to dialogue or deliberation as a means of identifying the public good*.

The heart of the concept of community learning is a kind of integrative dialogue that incorporates difference into new knowledge. Mary Parker Follett's notion of integration captures the essence of this kind of learning. New common knowledge is created in integration that represents not a majority view or compromise, but a synthesis or true consensus. In *Creative Experience* she suggests that "we need now careful studies of the method of integration" (1924, 177). In many ways understanding community learning is a step toward understanding the "method of integration."

"Community Learning" with Indicators and Performance Measures

Another "movement" of sorts within public administration, has recently emerged using the term community learning. Here the focus is on how physical (or geographic, place-based) communities learn through the use of indicators and benchmarking. The idea is that learning is facilitated through the "repeated use of data and feedback" in a collaborative process that involves governing institutions and citizens. The mutual learning described appears to be in the context of processes which involve community indicators and performance measurement (Gahin and Paterson 2001).

An online forum called the "community learning and governance network" focuses on how community indicators and public service performance measures can contribute to community learning.[6] In fact, the forum is titled in one summary of their efforts so far as an "online forum on performance measurement, governance, and sustainability." This research is in its very early stages but is important because the implication is that practitioners are thinking of how communities might learn as social

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[6] http://www.epsteinandfass.com/community/html/commhome.html

collectives (Epstein and Paterson 2001). The focus on communities of place and links to governance make it relevant to this project and it seems reasonable that in the future these projects might fruitfully collaborate with one another.

<div align="center">Other References to Community Learning in the Public Sector</div>

Yet another related use of the term (actually, a closely related term) is an emerging notion of "civic learning" used at the Kettering Foundation. While the term civic learning most often refers to civics education and/or service learning, where the focus is on developing civic competencies, Kettering Foundation researchers have also used it in a context similar to this discussion of community learning. Randall Nielson, in a discussion of evaluating "public work" explains that "civic learning is the process through which the public interrogation of experience leads to ongoing adjustment of the collective vision" (1998). Clearly the meaning here goes beyond individuals developing civic competencies. Adjustments of a *civic community's* "collective vision" implies a community-level phenomenon based in interaction.

Kettering Foundation President David Mathews similarly uses the term in richly suggestive fashion when he refers to "civic learning that is essential to a community's success in adapting to changing circumstances" (2002, 48). However, these usages of the term, while suggestive, are far from well developed. But it does seem clear that this notion of civic learning is similar to the notion of community learning developed here. The conceptual development here, therefore, will serve to augment the work of the Kettering Foundation in their understanding of civic learning, just as it will complement and expand on the work of those concerned with "learning communities."

These diverse literatures that fit under the broad umbrella of "public affairs" all suggest a notion of community learning. From public philosophy to the participatory "applications" in public administration, planning, and policy analysis, we see a movement toward thinking how a strong notion of civic participation enriches professional practice. This stream obviously overlaps the "community" stream discussed previously in many places. Both streams share a common commitment to dialogue and social interaction as the basis for action. Thus, they both point to community learning and provide a strong base for the development of the concept.

Group and Organizational Learning

The third literature stream that points directly to community learning comes from a less likely source in comparison to the other two since most of the researchers are to be found in schools of business management. Nevertheless, the enormous literature on *organizational learning* has much to offer here. At the heart of organizational (or network) learning is an idea of collective learning, that is, groups of people, even organizations, can "learn." In other words, in an organizational (or interorganizational) context, learning can occur that is more than the sum of individual learning. This notion corresponds directly to Follett's notions of collective ideas or "wills."

Organizational Learning

There is no unified "theory" of organizational learning, however. There is a lot of theorizing, and a lot of prescriptive work on creating "learning organizations," but by and large theory building in this area is rather fragmented. One of the primary problems has been, and continues to be, "that little convergence or consensus on what is meant by the term, or its basic nature, has emerged" (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999). This is due in

some part to differences in levels and units of analysis (individual, group, and organization). In terms of community learning, we are definitely speaking of community-level learning; learning that is more than the sum of the learning that takes place in individuals or groups within the community. However, the relevance of group and individual learning should not be ignored, and indeed, a rich model of organizational, interorganizational, or community learning ought to consider the linkages between levels.

Crossan, Lane, and White's recent articulation of a "4I" model of learning in organizations is instructive (1999). The 4I model considers learning processes at all three levels and demonstrates in particular how group dialogue stimulates individual and collective learning, processes they label "interpreting" and "integrating." Integrating bridges the group and organizational levels in a feed-forward process. Shared understandings at the group level can then be institutionalized at the organizational level in terms of "systems, structures, procedures, and strategy" (1999, 525).

The "4I" model is also dynamic, highlighting feedback processes in addition to the aforementioned feed forward idea. As learning is institutionalized at the organizational level, it affects how people think, act, and intuit. It also affects the interpreting and integrating that occurs in groups, which feeds forward in terms of institutionalization. Thus learning is a "dynamic flow" and attention has to be paid to the tensions inherent in a process where feeding back and feeding forward can conflict with one another.

<center>Dialogue</center>

At the core of organizational learning is dialogue. Dialogue is defined by Isaacs as "a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that

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compose everyday experience" (1999b, 233). Dialogue promotes collective thinking (or learning) and communication. Isaacs uses a metaphor of dialogue as being a container that holds the "collective assumptions, shared intentions, and beliefs of a group" (ibid., 245). The container goes through a cycle of instability (deliberation), inquiry, then creativity in the evolution of a dialogue. Collective learning, therefore, is viewed as a creative process not unlike the vision of "creative democracy" outlined by Follett and other pragmatic/communitarian advocates of strong democracy. Through dialogue, difference is synthesized, or integrated, into something collective and new. This new knowledge can be viewed as what others have described as "common ground for action" (Mathews and McAfee 2000).

<div align="center">Group Learning</div>

Organizational learning is a highly interdisciplinary area of study and has thus attracted a wide array of scholars. One of the key components of organizational learning is group learning, an area that has received a lot of attention among psychologists and educators. Modern research on group learning is strikingly similar to Follett's discussions of group process, though references to her are rarely found. Kasl and Marsick (1997), for example, define group learning as being indicated when "all members perceive themselves as having contributed to a group outcome, and all members of the group can individually describe what the group as a system knows." They view groups as "knowing systems" where members experience "collaborative thinking and experimentation." This kind of learning is "generative" where groups in fact begin to "think deeply together."

Johnson and Johnson's (2000) extended treatment of group theory similarly highlights the creativity of what they call "cooperative learning" in groups. Again, this example from group theory, from which organizational learning theories are derived, clearly demonstrates the pragmatic ethos and Follett's notion of group process in particular. For example, this statement from Johnson and Johnson clearly echoes Follett's description of the group process: "the purpose of controversy is to create a synthesis of the best reasoning and conclusions from all the various alternatives" (2000, 363). One of the important contributions of group theory is the link that is made between individual cognition and what would be considered the group's "shared cognition" (Levine, Resnick, and Higgins 1993). Johnson and Johnson describe the process as "members adapt[ing] their cognitive perspective and reasoning through understanding and accommodating the perspective and reasoning of others and derive a new, reconceptualized, and reorganized conclusion" that is novel and "qualitatively better" than individual perspectives taken separately (2000, 362-3).

Group learning connects with a large literature in education about "learning communities" and "collaborative learning." The notion of learning communities is commonplace in educational settings as departments, colleges, and other academic units focus on becoming a learning community (Retallick, Cocklin, and Coombe 1999). The underlying phenomenon of interest is community, or—the term used most often—collaborative, learning. Although mostly linked to educational outcomes, the kind of learning emphasized in this literature is precisely what we are interested in here in terms of the community level. Essentially, collaborative learning is about "jointly constructed knowledge" that is "other than the sum of individual members' knowledge" (Peters and

Armstrong 1998). Collaborative learning is particularly salient in the field of adult

education, which (not coincidentally) is where inroads have been made into community

development. Thus the previously discussed community learning literature is linked to a

very large literature in education regarding collaborative (or community) learning. The

leap that is made is from a distinct "educational" setting to a community one. For the

purposes of this literature review it is sufficient to note that "people laboring together to

construct knowledge"—a notion very much indebted to Dewey, Follett, and others in the

pragmatic tradition—is prevalent in the educational literature and thus is relevant to the

discussion of community learning here.

<p style="text-align:center">Knowledge Management</p>

Another important piece of the organizational learning picture is found in the

literature on knowledge management. This literature tends to focus on IT network

structures and their role in disseminating knowledge in communities of practice.

Knowledge management "harness[es] the intellectual and social capital of individuals in

order to improve organizational learning capabilities" and thus enhance innovation. Swan

et al (1999) make a persuasive argument, clearly consistent with the literatures previously

discussed here, that it is face-to-face interaction in communities that is most important.

They prefer a "community networking model" which understands "knowledge as also

embedded in, and constructed from and through social relationships and interactions"

(1999, 272). According to this view, they argue, "knowledge (unlike information) cannot

simply be processed; rather it must be continuously re-created and re-constituted through

dynamic, interactive and social networking activity." The community network model

described by Swan, et al "highlights the importance of relationships, shared

understandings and attitudes" to the process of knowledge formation and innovation in interorganizational contexts. Therefore "cross-functional and inter-organizational, inter-disciplinary and inter-organizational teams" become the key to "effective use of knowledge for innovation" (1999, 273). While the focus of the article is on organizational innovation, the applications to community renewal and innovation are apparent enough.

Interorganizational Network Learning

Organizational learning appears to be a very important contributor to an understanding of community learning. Like the other streams of literature mentioned above, organizational learning points to community learning without ever addressing it directly. In fact, a literature on network, or interorganizational, learning is emerging which provides an even more direct analogue to community learning (Knight 2002). Networks are , after all, communities of practice not unlike local communities. Rather than using the network metaphor to describe an organizational form, however, in the case of community we understand that the community field is, in practice, a network of networks. That is, localities, as networks of interaction, and thus community learning, may not be very far from network learning in conceptual terms.

There are, of course, very important differences between organizations and communities. For one, communities are unbounded whereas organizations and even networks of organizations have clearer boundaries. Furthermore while communities ideally have a common will they certainly do not have the strategic properties of formal organizations. Nevertheless, both organizations and communities represent social collectives with many similar properties such as the existence of groups, interpersonal networks, and other patterns and structures of social interaction. Thus, the group and

organizational learning literature applies in very important ways, providing an analogue to our understanding of community learning.

Toward Community Learning

This chapter has assembled some of the conceptual threads that inform community learning. The many literatures span a wide range of fields of research and practice, from political theory to adult education, from community to organizational research. What these literatures have in common, in one way or another, is an ethos of collaborative pragmatism. They all hearken back, either implicitly or explicitly, to the social process described by Follett and her contemporaries. They all focus on the importance of social interaction and the social construction of knowledge. They all are richly democratic and generally eschew a technocratic worldview, placing primary emphasis on experience and intersubjectivity created through communicative [inter]action. Perhaps most important, they all consider the importance of the creative experience of citizen dialogue and deliberation and how this communicative action can contribute to community renewal.

Each of the literatures provide an important piece of the concept, but none of them make it all the way. The emerging literature on learning communities (and community learning), particularly the research coming from the regional Australia research group, comes closest to the community learning concept that is the focus of this work. Where it seems to fall short is in its apparently narrower focus on adult education and therefore its lack of connecting the community learning process to community governance. The connection it makes with social capital, and by extension, community development, is instructive and highly relevant, but there remains a blindspot to the

important realities of the role of governing institutions in the community and the importance of collective action. These links simply have not been made (yet).

The other literatures similarly bring us to the concept of community learning without going all the way. Some, like Moore and Brooks (1996; 2000) make important connections with organizational learning and clearly understand that community learning is more than learning in community. However, in the end, a fully developed concept of learning *at the community level* is not presented. The community learning described by Moore and Brooks occurs within community groups or organizations.

Similarly, the organizational learning literature has much to offer, particularly as extensions to interorganizational (or network) learning are made. Yet this literature, with its focus on organization and innovation in the private sphere, fail to make the leap over to community, which is a different form of social collective. On the other hand, interactional approaches to community imply or hint at some notion of *communities*, learning. But again, as of yet the phenomenon of collective learning in this context has not been approached directly. Finally, the literature in public affairs – in planning, policy, and administration – all emphasize deliberation, collective learning (though that term is not used often), and notions of common ground, public judgment, consensus, and so forth, without ever moving all the way to community-level learning.

So the description of the conceptual threads highlights different aspects of community learning while at the same time exposes a gap in the literature generally regarding the phenomenon here termed "community learning." The next chapter weaves together these different threads into a rich concept of community learning. The key idea, simple yet profound, is that democracy is a "creative experience" of citizens forging a

common ground and that it is this creative process of collective learning that is the key to

community renewal.

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CHAPTER THREE

A CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY LEARNING

A democratic community is one in which the common will is being
gradually created by the civic activity of its citizens.

Mary Follett (1919)

An Underdeveloped Concept

The previous chapter reviewed several strands of literature and offered them as

building blocks of a concept of community learning. An ethos of collaborative

pragmatism, exemplified in the work of Mary Follett, runs through the various literatures,

uniting them around a notion of community learning. While the terms "community

learning" and "learning communities" are currently in use in various contexts –

particularly adult education and community development – the last chapter underscores

the point that at this time the concept of community learning, in the sense of

communities, learning, is not sufficiently developed. The building blocks are there. There

are numerous cases of theory and practice that point to community learning, but each

fails to arrive at a clearly formulated concept.

In most cases where the terms community and learning are used together, it is

used to denote the idea of learning in community. And where the implication is learning

at the community-level, the word community often refers to a group (that is, not a

community of place). When community does mean place, the usage tends to be "learning

communities" and subsequently the actual meaning of community learning is ignored in

favor of highlighting attributes of learning communities (versus, apparently, communities

that do not learn). The point here is that a clear conceptualization of community learning, in the sense of learning at the level of community, is missing in the literature. This chapter offers, therefore, a first-cut, ideal-type conceptualization of community learning. Just as a developing concept of organizational learning serves as a powerful guide for those concerned with organization renewal, a concept of community learning has promise for becoming a powerful guide for public administrators, planners, community organizers, and others whose concern is [or should be] *community renewal*.

The basic notion of community learning can be found in the collaborative pragmatism of Mary Follett as discussed in the previous chapter. The pragmatic idea of knowledge created through dialogue is joined with the communitarian view of individuals as responsible citizens, embedded in communities which imbue and give expression to shared values. Thus community learning occurs in this context where citizens interact through different "modes of association" as Follett called them and create new ideas and meanings. It is through the communicative [inter]action that occurs in these relations that new knowledge is created, and thus learning occurs. This mutual learning, a creative force, can be a tremendous asset to communities if it can occur and be utilized at that level. Thus, as learning is integrated at the community level a phenomenon we call community learning is said to occur. Community learning is a key variable in understanding community capacity and is viewed normatively as a process through which communities achieve strategic renewal and success.

In this chapter the contributed "threads" of the concept are woven together as an ideal-type conceptualization of community learning. An ideal type is a conceptual tool or construct used in the analysis of social phenomena. It represents a composite picture of

the phenomenon of interest rather than an exact description of any single case. Max Weber developed the notion of the ideal type as a conceptual tool and applied it famously in his study of bureaucracy. This concept is offered as a lens from which to view current or past efforts to involve citizens and also from which to consider future programs, policies, or interventions. More generally it is a framework from which to approach the broader questions of community governance and development.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, the basic meanings of "community" and "learning" are revisited because these words can be (and are) used in many different ways. These terms must be clear, and it is found that the definitions of community and learning lead directly to defining the composite term: community learning. The next section spells out the concept of community learning in terms of structure and process. Considering the mutual reinforcing dynamics of structure and process, which can be seen as two sides of the same coin, provides an understanding of how interpersonal interactions can lead to community-level learning. After discussing the process and structure components of community learning, the institutionalization of knowledge and of practice is addressed. Here the conceptualization demands that the meaning, and links between, community learning *and* learning communities be approached simultaneously. Throughout the discussion a series of postulates are introduced, that taken together constitute the fundamental elements or principles upon which the concept of community learning is based. These postulates are the basis of the concept and therefore point to how the concept may be used as an analytical tool for understanding, and shaping, community practice.

Community and Learning

Before understanding what is meant by "community learning" the usage of terms "community" and "learning" must be clarified. The concept of community learning grows out of one's understanding of these terms. That is, the concept rather simply and intuitively flows out of the joining of the two terms when approached from the vantage point of collaborative pragmatism. In this case, Ken Wilkinson's interactional theory of community and theories of collaborative learning from adult education and organizational studies form the core of our understanding of these terms.

The Interactional Theory of Community

Wilkinson's treatment of community is particularly relevant for the purposes of this study for several reasons. First, the interactional theory of community begins with place, or as Wilkinson explains, "locality." Despite arguments that point to mobility, communications technology, and globalization as factors that erode the salience of local territory as a basis for community, the fact remains "that most people . . . live and move and have most of their being in everyday life in local settlements" (Wilkinson 1999, 19). As Suzanne Keller points out, "with few exceptions, community always denotes a there." Place is the most persistent, and perhaps most taken-for-granted, variable built into our use of the word community (Keller 2003, 6).[1]

Furthermore, from the perspective of public administration, planning, or policy, it is the local community, a *placed* community, that is the locus of concern and action. Although political scientists may use terms such as "policy communities", the more

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[1] Although, admittedly, the term is beginning to be used in much broader ways, even to the point of using the term "virtual community" in relation to cyberspace. This is inappropriate though, if community is to mean anything. Virtual communities or other so-called communities are more "substitutes and approximations" of community, but not the real thing (Keller 2003, 291-8).

appropriate term would be policy networks or subsystems (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). To the local government practitioner, for example, community means "the" community; the meaning is straightforward. In large urban settings, of course, the community may be thought of in terms of neighborhood, and in rural settings community may well go beyond the borders of the politically delineated territory. But nevertheless, in the context of governance, community unequivocally implies place. This is similarly true at other levels of government (regional, state, federal). Policies and programs impact communities of place, and ultimately the practitioner is in a community setting (or in a broader setting working with multiple communities). Practitioners certainly do interact with non-place-based groups or associations, but ultimately the context is placed community. Thus, community must imply local territory for it to be meaningful and distinguished from other forms of collectivity (see Keller 2003).

Community Field Theory and Social Interaction

Wilkinson's interactional theory of community is also particularly important in that the "holistic structure of interacting units" is the community as described in terms of a social field rather than a system. The difference between field and system, though subtle, is quite significant, particularly as it addresses twenty-first century realities. "System," Wilkinson explains, "reifies the community as an organic whole, but field simply describes the community as a process of human interaction" (1999, 32). The community field concept focuses attention on "a dynamic process that creates and alters community structure" (32). Systems emphasize the "effects of structure on social processes" whereas field theory is concerned with how social processes are constantly changing structure. Systems, whether "open" or "closed" have rather fixed boundaries

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whereas the boundaries of the community field are fluid. In fact, the community field is actually just one in a number of fields of interaction within a given place. What distinguishes it, however, from others, is that it is an *integrating force*. The community field "creat[es] and maintain[s] linkages among fields that otherwise are directed toward more limited interests", uniting them in common locality-relevant interests (Wilkinson 1999, 32-33). In conceptualizing the community as a social field Wilkinson incorporates the literatures on social capital, network theory, and strong and weak ties, into a coherent theory of community that is descriptively rich as well as normatively cogent.

In summary, Wilkinson's theory of community, as a field of social interaction rooted in place, is the basis of the concept of community learning described here. This perspective emphasizes the "dynamic, emergent aspects of community life" and makes the case that the interactional community "persists as a distinctive, centering element of local social life in America" (Wilkinson 1999, 30-31). The interactional theory of community, therefore, is made up of three components. First, community is a place, a territory or locality, demarcated by networks of social relations. This place is where people meet their daily needs together. Community also includes a local society, or "organization of social institutions and associations in the social life of a local population" (1999, 24). Community "covers and integrates all aspects of a common life", distinguishing it from association or organization. The local society is an "integrated unit" of interrelated parts; it is the structure of community, the network of networks that together forms the wholeness of community (1999, 24).

The third, and most important, element of the interactional theory of community is a process of interrelated actions that is the "community field." The notion of the

community field emphases the structure building process of locality-directed collective action. Wilkinson explains that community "hangs together" through the emergence of a community field "where people live together and interact on matters concerning their common interest in the locality" (1999, 34). The local social interaction of the community field gives rise to *Gemeinschaft* as articulated by Toennies, the collective identity and bond that we think of when we speak of a "sense of community."

This third component of community implies that there are varying degrees of community to be found. Thus, the interactional theory of community is both descriptive and normative; it points the way to what constitutes "community development" or "community building." A place may be a community as it descriptively follows the first two components, but may be weak in terms of the third component. It is still descriptively a "community" but might be considered not as strong or stable as another community that has denser activity in the "community field."

Taken together, these three elements (locality, local society, and community field) form an interactional theory of community, one which simultaneously emphasizes structure and process (and the relation between the two) and is firmly rooted in place. This understanding of community forms the core of this conceptualization of community learning.

Collaborative Learning: Learning as Collective Knowledge Creation

The discussion now turns to what is meant exactly by the term "learning." Naturally education researchers have given a lot of thought to what we mean by learning. Peters and Armstrong (1998) explain that there are three primary types of teaching and learning. Type One is "teaching by transmission, learning by reception." Knowledge is

transferred from teacher to student through unidirectional communication. Type Two includes "learning by sharing" which is to say that there is some two-way communication, but like Type One, the learning is individual through what we can think of as knowledge transfer (one transmits, another receives). Type Three, however, moves to group-level learning, where knowledge is jointly or collaboratively constructed, primarily in a process of dialogue. While individuals learn in Type Three, the phenomenon of group or collaborative learning occurs here where the "primary aim of . . . interaction is the construction of new knowledge" (1998, 78-9). Peters and Armstrong explain that "collaboration means that people labor together in order to construct something that did not exist before the collaboration, something that does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of individual collaborators." They describe the result of collaborative learning as "1 + 1 = 3" (1998, 75). This formulation is used elsewhere in descriptions of "synergy" or in the usage of the metaphor of jazz improvisation to explain group creativity and innovation (Weick 1998).

Group Learning Theory

David Kolb defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984, 38). This process, even at the individual level, is social (Levine, Resnick, and Higgins 1993). When we move beyond the individual level to the group, therefore, we see learning as a collaborative or mutual activity where the collective experience of a group, as well as each individual's experience outside the group, is transformed into new knowledge through the integrative medium of dialogue. One of the main tenets of the collaborative learning perspective is that "a significant component of learning arises from our interactions or the dialogue we

have with others, and therefore that the thinking of a community of learners is distributed through networks of conversations" (Allen, Kilvington, and Horn 2002, 9). Thus it is not only individuals in the group that learn (acquire new knowledge), but the group, as a collective entity, also learns. Kasl and Marsick (1997) explain that group learning occurs when "all members perceive themselves as having contributed to a group outcome, and all members of the group can individually describe what the group as a system knows."

This idea of collaborative group learning has deep intellectual roots in pragmatism. Follett's description of the group process and creation of "the collective idea" – what she called the process of integration – is an excellent description of what is today called "collaborative learning" (1998, 24-32). Follett uses the example of a committee meeting to explain how ideas can be collective. We come to the meeting with our own ideas, our own mix of experience and perspective, then the "subtle process of the intermingling of all the different ideas of the group" occurs whereby everyone's ideas affects the others "until the common idea springs into being" (1998, 25). Thus the "common idea" is commonly created and held rather than individually constructed.

This is a rather simplistic description for a process that on one level is simple, but on another is complex almost beyond the mind's ability to grasp. One can think of a student committee meeting to decide on a topic for a department roundtable. Each comes to the table with some preconceived ideas, and as they share their ideas they might mutually decide on a topic that was not one that anyone had thought of before but that at the end of the meeting all are happy with, indeed, happier than if one of their preconceived ideas had been selected. This group idea is collective; it is the group's jointly and was created collaboratively. So on one level this seems simple enough. The

preconceived ideas were mixed together and synthesized to form a new idea. But it is much more complex than this. The process includes not just preconceived ideas, but preconscious ones as well. The collaborative process includes social dynamics, each individual's experience with similar situations, and a myriad of other factors that go on *ad infintum*. We simplify by saying that each comes to the group with their own experience, which contributes the group experience, which is transformed into new group knowledge. But it is important to realize that the actual process is one of infinite relatings and phenomenally complex.[2]

Organizational Learning

This concept of collaborative learning extends well beyond the field of education. As mentioned earlier, the enormous literature on organizational learning draws from this same perspective. The idea that learning can occur at the organizational level is well established in the organizational literature. Earlier debates about whether organizational learning was any more than simply the sum of individual learning have mostly subsided to the point that now there is a growing literature on interorganizational learning (Easterby-Smith, Crossan, and Nicolini 2000). Organizational researchers note that the social constructionist perspective has presented an important challenge to theories which locate learning "in the heads of individuals or in organizational systems, and structures." The social constructionist assumption is that "learning occurs, and knowledge is created, mainly through conversations and interactions *between* people" so that learners are conceived as "social beings who construct their understanding and learn from social interaction within specific socio-cultural and material settings" (Easterby-Smith, Crossan,

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[2] There are some interesting connections to be made here with the "new sciences" of complexity and chaos, but these will have to be made later.

and Nicolini 2000, 787). This collaborative learning process at the organizational level is viewed as "the principal means of achieving the strategic renewal of the enterprise" (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999, 522).

Other Applications

The idea of collaborative learning is also beginning to be utilized in the fields of planning, environmental management, and community development. John Forester links participatory action research projects to learning where "community members and researchers alike may collaborate to generate research questions, approaches, and new understandings" (1999, 123). In deliberative practice, argues Forester, a potential for "public" or "mutual" learning exists which can have powerful, transformative effects on individuals and communities (1999). The emerging paradigm of "collaborative planning" likewise emphasizes the potential of collective learning processes (Innes and Booher 1999).

Daniels and Walker (1996) apply the notion of collaborative learning to environmental management, offering it as an important innovation in "public participation theory and practice" (71). Also, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the idea of collaborative learning undergirds notions of developing "learning communities" in the context of community development. Here the focus is on developing "community groups that learn" (Moore and Brooks 2000, 5). Similar to organizational learning, these applications of collaborative learning in planning, policy, and development, share a social constructionist perspective toward knowledge and learning. They all emphasize the power and potential of group collaboration "as a means of creating and sharing new knowledge" (Kilpatrick, Barrett, and Jones 2003, 1).

The kind of learning relevant to a concept of community learning, therefore, is that of *collaborative learning*. Here learning is a collective process in which knowledge is created and distributed within and through networks of social interaction. The link to the interactional concept of community is clear in this definition. If we view communities as networks of social interaction, which emphasizes the mutually supporting elements of process and structure, we see that it is through the structure and process of community as defined here that learning occurs.

The Process and Structure of Community Learning

The preceding discussions of community and learning point to a concept of community learning that considers both the process and structure of community. Follett's writings tend to emphasize process. The word process refers to series of actions or operations so arranged to bring about a result.[3] When Follett spoke of the creative, or group, or integrative, or democratic process, she was referring to what was described above as collaborative learning. In other words, integration is a collaborative learning process. With this in mind, Follett argued that "community is a process", meaning the collaborative, integrative process that occurs in human relationships (1919). Thus, another way to describe collaborative learning is to call it the community process, or process of community.

Community has also been discussed here in terms of structure. Structure refers to "the interrelation or arrangement of parts in a complex entity."[4] In this case, "community structure" is the *social structure of a local society*. In Wilkinson's interactional theory of community, we find that one of the defining characteristics of community is the structure

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[3] *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* (2000)
[4] ibid.

of social relations. This is the social architecture of the community, the ties between people, groups, associations, organizations, and institutions. This structure has been referred to as the "web of community" (Lane and Dorfman 1997). The structure and process of community are naturally interrelated as the structure provides "space" for the process and the process is what builds the structure. The process and structure of community are therefore two sides of the same coin, inextricably linked and always influencing each other. Community learning, then, is about more than a collaborative learning process, and more than just "social capital." This section discusses the process and structure elements of community learning in detail, as this is the foundation of community learning.
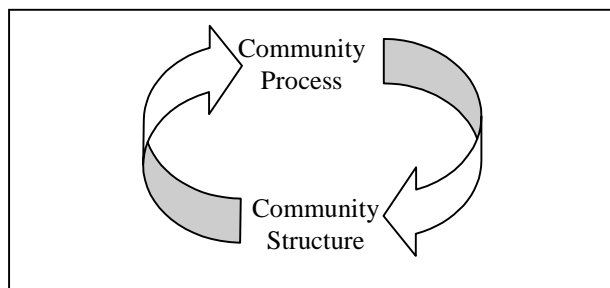
Figure 3.1 – Community Learning Dynamic

The Community Process

The community process as described here is one whereby citizens create new knowledge and transform collective understandings through communicative action. It is the process of collaborative learning. This includes groups of two people interacting up to larger groups that engage in dialogue in some way. Follett's usual term for this process was "integration." The integrative process of community unites differences, synthesizing them into something new in such a way that individual integrity is maintained, while at the same time enlarged through joining in something greater than one's self.

Three of the postulates in this work which support the concept of community building deal with this integrative community process. The first argues states that new knowledge in the form of shared meanings and ideas is created in the community process. The second postulate states that structured processes of dialogue and deliberation facilitate this community process. The third postulate states that the community process helps build or develop the relationships of community structure.

Describing the Community Process

Our modern usage of the word "dialogue" seems to be an attempt to describe practice which gives rise to the creative, integrative process of community that is the focal point of this dissertation. In the organizational learning literature dialogue is considered by many to be the medium of collective learning. For example, in their discussion of organizational learning, Crossan, Lane, and White (1999) explain that ongoing dialogue and shared practice "among members of the community" develops "shared understanding or collective mind" (528). The evolution of language, according to the authors, is key in that this is how established meaning is conveyed and how new meaning evolves. "Through dialogue the group can evolve new and deeper shared understandings" or meanings (529).

William Isaacs argues that "the discipline of dialogue is central to organizational learning because it holds promise as a means for promoting collective thinking and communication." Collective thinking is critical to organizations today which "face a degree of complexity that requires intelligence beyond that of any individual" (1999b, 236-7). The theory of dialogue builds on the notion of social fields,

> that shared tacit thought among a group comprises a field of "meaning"
> and that such fields are the underlying constituent of human experience.

As these fields are altered in a variety of subtle ways, their influence on peoples' behavior changes too. In many cases, the social fields in which people live are unstable and incoherent. That is, there are many different "tacit programs" in motion, in conflict, leading people to hold images of the world that they experience as literally true and obvious. The images that one person holds might be very different from the images held by his or her neighbors. (1999b, 241)

The different perspectives lead to friction and defensive routines when the differences are confronted. Dialogue seeks to overcome the friction and instability and incoherence of [in this case] the community field by focusing "people's attention on collective thought and shared assumptions, and the living social processes that sustain them" (1999b, 242). Isaacs explains that although dialogue is an old idea, "it is not practiced all that frequently." People tend to not talk in depth and fail to truly seek "new possibilities, new options." Our collective "miscommunication . . . condemns us to look elsewhere for the creative intensity that lies dormant within and between us." It is through this communicative intensity, the process of dialogue, that we find the best hope for revitalizing, or renewing, "our institutions, our relationships, and ourselves" (1999a, 14).

The literature on dialogue helps us better understand what the somewhat mystical "community process" entails. The heart of dialogue is radically simple, it is talk. Dialogue is a conversation with two or more people. But it is a particular kind of talk, "a way of thinking and reflecting together . . . a living experience of inquiry *within* and *between* people" (1999a, 9). As Deborah Tannen deftly explains in *The Argument Culture*, "criticism, attack, or opposition are the predominant if not the only ways of responding to people or ideas" in our society (1998, 7). On the other hand, dialogue, Isaacs explains, is "a very different way of talking." It is a "conversation with a center, not sides" which takes "the energy of our differences and channel[s] it toward something

that has never been created before." Isaacs continues, "[dialogue] lifts us out of polarization into a greater common sense, and is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups and people" (Isaacs 1999a, 19). Surprisingly, Isaacs seems to be unaware of Follett's writings of almost a century ago. His language about dialogue as "a conversation in which people think together in relationship" are precisely the points Follett made in her explication of integration and group process (see Follett 1998; 1924).

Thus, the theoretical literature on dialogue, as well as theories of group learning discussed earlier in this chapter, capture the essence of the community process. As people engage one another in authentic dialogue, new knowledge is created. This new knowledge may take the form of new or changed shared understanding, or integrative ideas that can be said to be the product of the group. The first postulate of community learning, therefore, is that the community process creates new, collective knowledge in the form of shared understandings or collective ideas.

> **Postulate I**: The community process creates new, collective knowledge in the form of shared meanings or collective ideas.

Structured Processes of Communicative Interaction

What modern scholars and practitioners have offered in terms of the integration, collaborative learning, or the "community process" is a more thorough explanation of the process itself, thus demystifying it a bit. While the notion of integration and being in relationship is well articulated by Follett, the details of *how we actually achieve it* are rather fuzzy. Thankfully the revival of interest in dialogue and democratic deliberation are rapidly advancing our collective knowledge in this area. A number of guides for how

to structure and facilitate dialogue are in circulation by such organizations as the Public Conversations Project, the Dialogue to Action Initiative, and the Study Circles Resources Center.[5] Additionally, there are important theoretical works on dialogue, such as Bohm's *On Dialogue* (1997) and Isaacs' *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (1999a).

Given the various treatments of dialogue and models for applying it in community settings, it is difficult to explicate definitively its component parts. However, there seems to be some consensus around its general features. Dialogue is a collective search for understanding rather than "agreements" or "solutions." A "good dialogue" affords participants the opportunity to "listen and be listened to . . . ; speak and be spoken to in a respectful manner; develop or deepen mutual understanding; and learn about the perspectives of others and reflect on one's own views" (Public Conversations Project 2003, 3). Participants in dialogue agree to ground rules of communication that emphasize civility and suspending judgment, at least temporarily, so that people can talk with, rather than at, each other.

The finer points of dialogue are often best articulated in a comparison with a form of talk that most everyone is familiar with – debate. Debate is about winning and losing and being entrenched in one's position. Dialogue is about seeking common understanding and actually looking for the strength of seemingly "opposing" positions. Debate most often remains within existing patterns of discourse and rarely, if ever, produces new knowledge. Dialogue, on the other hand, emphasizes the creative aspects of conversation and seeks new knowledge and understandings. Many other contrasts are made, but for our purposes here, we can see that dialogue is a certain kind of public talk that is civil, open, based on experience, and seeks integration (though not necessarily agreement).

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[5] See www.publicconversations.org and http://thataway.org/dialogue/ and www.studycircles.org

Another form of structured interaction related to dialogue is deliberation. In fact, some times the terms are used interchangeably (in the sense of "deliberative democracy" and "democratic dialogue" and so forth). But there are important distinctions to be made. Deliberation means to work through, to weigh publicly, an issue. The end of deliberation is some kind of democratic choice that is importantly distinguished from majority-rule, zero-sum decisions. In other words, it is a choice based on a common ground that everyone can live with and move forward with. Mathews and McAfee describe this process as finding "common ground for action" (2000). Deliberation is a method of collective reasoning where citizens "work through" conflict in order to arrive at a "public judgment" which represents a synthesis of different perspectives and thus, as Follett would term it, an integration. Thus, like dialogue, deliberation is about creating new knowledge, *public* knowledge, "things we can know only when we engage one another" (Mathews and McAffee 2000, 15).

Ultimately, then, the different "models" of dialogue and deliberation can be viewed as complementary tools in the community learning toolbox. They both represent types of public talk which stimulate collaborative learning. Deliberation tends to be issue centered and seeks new knowledge in terms of naming problems and prescribing solutions. Dialogue is less issue centered and more about seeking understanding in general. Dialogue is more long term and relationship-based. Isaacs (1999a) argues that deliberation is actually a step in the dialogue process, where as an individual participant you weigh or judge what you like and don't like of others' opinions. Dialogue then asks that we at that point make a decision to suspend that judgment and remain open, which opens the door to "reflective dialogue" which gets at deeper questions, such as

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differences in assumptions. As the process is maintained, the dialogue becomes a "generative" dialogue which enables "a collective flow" or process of collective learning (1999a, 37-41).

Perhaps it is less important to make hard distinctions between "generative dialogue" and "public deliberation" and refer generally to the community process referred to here as "deliberative dialogue" which combines the openness and civility of dialogue with the notion of collective reasoning in deliberation (McCoy and Scully 2002). Where distinctions can and should be made is in specific methodologies, such as the Kettering Foundation's program of issue framing and deliberative forums or the Study Circles model, or the Community Dialogue of Cleveland's Ward 18, to use a more local example.[6] Different "tools" may be required in different contexts.

Dialogue emphasizes new knowledge in terms of mutual understanding whereas deliberation is more about what to do next, it is choice work. Dialogue seeks understanding whereas deliberation seeks consensus. Deliberative dialogue includes elements of both. What unites the different "tools" of community learning though, is the emphasis on the integrative community process, a process of collaborative learning. Dialogue, deliberation, or deliberative dialogue all create settings for collectively creating new knowledge. In other words, the structured processes of dialogue and deliberation facilitate the community process. This is the second postulate of the community learning concept.

> **Postulate II**: Structured processes of dialogue and deliberation facilitate the community process.

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[6] See www.nifi.org, www.studycircles.org, and www.geocities.com/ward18dialogue/, respectively.

Communicative Action

It should be clear at this point that the emphasis of the community process is communication. In other words, the community process is about a certain type of public talk. Although we tend to emphasize formal interventions, this communicative action does not have to take the form of a study circle or dialogue retreat. In fact, the basic requirements of this kind of talk may be found at the coffee house or kitchen table. Furthermore, Friedland points out the importance of local media as a medium of communicative action (2001). While not conforming exactly to the prescriptions of face-to-face dialogue, experience indicates that communicative action via local media can be a powerful integrating force in community. Thus newspapers, television, radio, or the internet at least potentially can provide a medium of exchange that fosters collaborative learning. But is the community process *exclusively* the realm of communicative action?

As an ideal-type conceptualization, the community process highlights and draws special attention to the role of dialogue and deliberation, and by extension, communicative action generally, as the primary source of integration, of collaborative learning, in a community. However, this is not to say that other categories of social interaction are not relevant. Specifically, community-oriented collective action should be considered as an integrating process. The community field, as explicated by Wilkinson, is "a process of interrelated actions through which residents express their common interest in the local society" (1999, 2). Intuitively it seems reasonable to expect some collective learning to occur in processes of collective action. It seems evident, however, that the learning qualities of shared practice fall back on the social interaction and communicative

aspects of it. There may be exceptional cases of something such as the integrative process

occurring as collective action without much or any face-to-face dialogue (e.g., a

collective response to a community crisis, such as a flood or power outage). The

assumption here, however, is that the most important feature of concern is the

communicative action, specifically deliberative dialogue. The community process

produces new collective knowledge and, except in exceptional cases as suggested above,

it is through the medium of communication that this knowledge is created and distributed.

Products of the Community Process

The community process is about collaborative learning, generating new

knowledge in the form of shared meanings and ideas. Follett argued that this process can

be thought of as the "community process" (1919). In making this argument, Follett

pointed to another important "product" of the collaborative (or integrative) process, that

of the relationships that constitute community. Here community means a sense of

community, *Gemeinschaft*, a common identity or bond. Following modern social capital

theory, it might be said that a product of this kind of process is social capital, the

"connections among individuals . . . and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that

arise from them" (Putnam 2000, 19).

In other words, the communicative engagement produces more than just new

ideas and "common cognitions." It produces intersubjective understandings that

[re]create the "generalized other" of community. As people create common

understanding, they come to see others in a new light in a way that builds and nurtures

the bonds of community. This connection demonstrates an important, inherent link

between community process and structure. This link is the substance of the third postulate

of community learning, that the community process creates, maintains, or strengthens the relationships which constitute the social structure of community (Dorfman and Lane 1997).

> **Postulate III**: the community process creates, maintains, or strengthens the relationships which constitute the social structure of community.

Community Structure

Having discussed the process component of community learning, we now turn to the issue of structure. Planning theorist John Friedmann, in a discussion of the social learning tradition, explains that "actor and learner are assumed to be one and the same. It is the action group that learns from its own practice. Whether organization, community, or movement also learns will depend on the nature of intergroup relations and the formal structure of authority" (1987, 185). In other words, collaborative learning can be relatively easily observed in small groups, work teams, study circles, etc. But whether or not the learning entity is a larger collectivity, such as an organization, network, or community, depends upon structural considerations. Social structure is a critical piece of the community learning puzzle. Focusing solely on the creative process of dialogue fails to explain how a *community* might learn. The literature on local social structure, social capital, and community networks, sheds a great deal of light on this issue.

Social Capital and Civic Structure

Two streams of social capital theory and research provide foundations for thinking about the social organization of local communities. The first is individual based, viewing social capital as social networks which expand personal resources. The second "frames the connections and relationship among people as a community-level attribute"

(Morton 2003, 102). Morton refers to "a civic structure of place that is created by

multiple networks and institutions that support community problem solving" (102).

> Civic structure is defined by the multiple, dynamic relations among many
> networks and characterized by norms of cooperation and community
> benefit. It is widely shared community norms of cooperation and mutual
> benefit (i.e., high civic structure) that give places the capacity to meet the
> collective needs of small town citizens. (Morton 2003, 103)

Civic structure begins with the notion of "public" social capital as contrasted with

"private" social capital. Private social capital refers to relationships among individuals

that accrue primarily individualized benefits. These are close ties or networks that have

elsewhere been called "bonding" social capital (Putnam 2000) or "strong ties"

(Granovetter 1973). Public social capital is about those relationships "whose benefits

accrue to the community", at least potentially (Morton 2003, 104). These networks refer

to the "weak ties" explained by Granovetter (1973) or what Putnam refers to as

"bridging" social capital (2000). Morton (2003) explains further that public social capital

> is the transition point from micro to macro scale, from personal networks
> to community-wide networks. When these connections occur in a "public"
> group setting but benefits are restricted to members of the group, social
> capital retains its micro personal resource meaning. However, when
> benefits accrue beyond individuals and their personal groups to the larger
> community, a macro scale of relationships evolves. It is the action/inaction
> of multiple citizens and groups that create community norms of trust and a
> macro structure characterized by some degree of high to low expectations
> of community benefit. (104)

Morton uses the term "civic structure" to denote "the webs of relationships and norms of

mutual benefit at community and regional levels [which] are a structural concept distinct

from individual circles of relations" (104). The term is used to distinguish itself from

social capital which most often denotes the simple existence of civic associations or other

community networks. Here the structural concept of interest are the webs of relationships

which accrue benefits at the community level.

Civic structure, then, is a community-level variable used to describe the extent to which the "complex social relations within and across different institutions have overarching norms of community benefit." As networks evolve in communities, different "multiple structured groups" emerge which each have its own actions and goals, which may or may not "include public-level effects" (Morton 2003, 104-5). Thus, "a community with high civic structure has multiple groups that negotiate and compromise with each other to construct social, economic, and political institutions that meet their collective needs." (Morton 2003, 105). Morton's explanation of the connection between community structure and community well-being hints at the idea of community learning without developing it. She explains that "high levels of interaction and communication across community groups and sectors expand the resources of the community by integrating different population perspectives and skills in the search for solutions to community problems" (105).

Community Field Theory

The notion of civic structure, as it refers to the structure of social relations within a community which produce community-level benefit, is very similar to Wilkinson's "community field" construct. Communities can be thought of as comprising a variety of social fields. A field is an "unbounded whole with a constantly changing structure" (Wilkinson 1999, 32). A social field is "a process of interaction directed toward a specific outcome" (Sharp 2001, 404). It is comprised of individuals, associations, and organizations (Bridger and Luloff 1999, 384). Examples could include health care or education within a community. A community field, on the other hand, is "a special kind of field directed at more general purposes" (Sharp 2001, 404). Unlike the specialized

interests of a social field, the interests of the community field are "generalized and intrinsic" (Wilkinson 1999, 33). Wilkinson explains that

> The community field cuts across organized groups and across other interaction fields in a local population. It abstracts and combines the locality-relevant aspects of the special interest fields, and integrates the other fields into a generalized whole. It does this by creating and maintaining linkages among fields that otherwise are directed toward more limited interests. As this community field arises out of the various special interest fields in a locality, it in turn influences those special interest fields and asserts the community interest in the various spheres of local social activity. (1999, 33)

Luloff and Bridger (1999) explain that the community field provides the "communicative linkages" necessary for linking together various social fields around "common interests in local aspects of local life" (384). And "as the linkages that comprise the community field proliferate, they lead to a more inclusive decision-making process" (384). From the interactional perspective outlined by Wilkinson (1999), community development is the process of building the community field, that is, "developing relationships and lines of communications across interest lines" (Bridger and Luloff 1999, 384).

Networks, Active Relations, and Community Structure

Lane and Dorfman's (1997) description of community networks follows the same line of argument as the previous discussions of "civic structure" and "community field" in terms of community structure. They use a metaphor of a spider web to describe community structure. Community, as "a network of connections and interrelationships among individuals, institutions, and groups of individuals and institutions" are like a spider's web,

> . . . a structured, functional, maze of connections and interrelated fibers . . . based on a model; however, no two webs are identical. The model does not determine the form, it simply preserves function. The success of the spider's web, and ultimately the spider, is contingent on its ability to constantly adapt to changes in the environment. (2)

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Lane and Dorfman make an explicit link between community structure and community renewal. Specifically, they point to "the strength of the linkages in the social network" as the "defining aspect of a strong community" (3). Lane and Dorfman's sense of the strength of linkages is not so much about making "weak" ties "strong" but about increasing the density of the weak ties within a community.

Within social networks, across the linkages, "community members interrelate and create a sense of community" (Dorfman and Lane 1997, 3). This sense of community correlates with Morton's civic structure concept where civic structure represents "the extent to which these complex social relations within and across different institutions have overarching norms of community benefit" (Morton 2003, 105). Lane and Dorfman (1997) explain that this "social infrastructure" of connections, interrelationships, and networks need to facilitate relationships that "cross role boundaries" in order for community-level benefits to be realized. Typically in a community, individuals in different institutional roles rarely come together as a community, for the community. Relationships which exist across institutions tend to be "passive." A passive connection between a school and a local employer exists when "interaction between participants is limited by the roles they play." Thus a teacher interacts with a parent as a worker, but not with the parent's workplace as a community institution. The authors explain that "passive relationships do not allow a community to adapt in response to external and internal changes" (4). What needs to occur, according to the authors, is a shift toward "active" relations, where, for example, we would see significant interaction between the "school institution and the business institution" (5).

The active relationships, as described by Dorfman and Lane (1997), build the community structure (or civic structure or community field). In other words, the density of linkages, or quality of community structure, is related to the amount and quality of active relationships. For the purposes of describing community learning, the term "community structure" is used, following Sharp (2001), to describe this structure of social relations — the quality of weak, bridging ties, within a community that accrue community-level benefit, or in other words, build a sense of community and foster community action. Following the metaphor of the spider web, it is across this web of community relations that learning occurs and is distributed.

Observers of this "public" social capital (or community structure) note that it is these community linkages, the weak, bridging ties, which facilitate information exchange, and further, "embeddedness of state in society or organizations in community" (Warner 1999, 378). It is the structure of the community which makes a process of "community learning" possible, while at the same time it is the community process (which occurs in dialogue and other forms of communicative action) which helps builds community structure. The fourth postulate of the community learning concept, therefore, argues that a model of community as the structure of interinstitutional relations focuses the attention of researchers and community participants on the linkages across community institutions and social fields.

> **Postulate IV**: A model of community as the structure of interinstitutional relations focuses the attention of researchers and community participants on the linkages across community institutions and social fields.

Clarifying the Relation Between Process and Structure

In drawing together the process and structure components of community learning, we see that in between process and structure must be some kind of feed-forward mechanism whereby collaborative learning becomes community learning. In other words, for collaborative learning to become *community* learning, the knowledge created in the learning process must reach the level of community structure. Community learning is learning at the level of the community structure. If the dialogue remains within the narrower interests of a local social field and fails to make impacts across community structure, it has fallen short of "community learning." It is when the knowledge is institutionalized across the community's structure that community learning has occurred.

This means that participants in a dialogue may not necessarily be the whole community, or even key representatives from each social field, so long as the action is locality-oriented, or concerned with the community as a whole. Yet at some point the makeup of participants is relevant as well, so we must also consider who is taking part in the community process. Does the process include people from different fields? Is the process a setting for "active" relationships? If the integrative community process — the process of creating new knowledge and new understandings — fails to occur at the level of the community field, then it is short of community-level learning. This is because it falls short of being able to be institutionalized at the level of community. In other words, one cannot assume that the existence of the "community process" automatically translates into community-level learning. There must be some way of embedding the new knowledge, the integrations, at the level of community either through the make-up of participants or the nature of the discourse (community-field oriented or more parochial).

Community learning, therefore is about a feed-forward process from the group level to the community level. Postulate V, therefore, states that community learning occurs as knowledge created through the community process is fed-forward to the level of the community structure or field. A community has learned when this collective knowledge is institutionalized across the community structure, or rather, embedded across the web of community institutions.

> **Postulate V**: Community learning occurs as knowledge created through the community process is fed-forward to the level of the community structure or field. A community has learned when this collective knowledge is institutionalized across the community structure, or rather, is embedded across the web of community institutions.

On the other hand, when considering community structure, what Wilkinson (1999) explains is the community field, one cannot simply assume community learning is taking place. Different actors from different social fields may well be linked and engage in interaction that constitutes a community field, yet that does not guarantee that they are engaged in an integrative process of collaborative (community) learning. Here the question is whether space will be made for the community process. In other words, if the structural elements are there, what is being done to benefit from the "collective intelligence" (Selznick 2002)? A community with high levels of community or civic structure likely has created such space to some degree since it is the community process that helps build the structure. Yet there may be high levels of interaction with relatively low levels of truly integrative dialogue.

Here institutionalization is considered a second way. Where the first question looks at how new knowledge becomes institutionalized in the community, that is,

embedded in its institutional framework or structure, the second question looks to

opportunities to institutionalize the community process itself. Is the process of dialogue

becoming a community institution? Is this how people identify and solve problems? This

could mean that a formal institution (or place for dialogue) is created – a citizen's

council, dialogue roundtable, etc. – or perhaps the practice becomes a norm for

community institutions, or both. When the space is made for collaborative interaction and

dialogue, then one can say that the community is taking advantage of collective

intelligence. Figure 3.2 summarizes the reciprocal relationship between process and

structure that is the basis of the community learning concept.
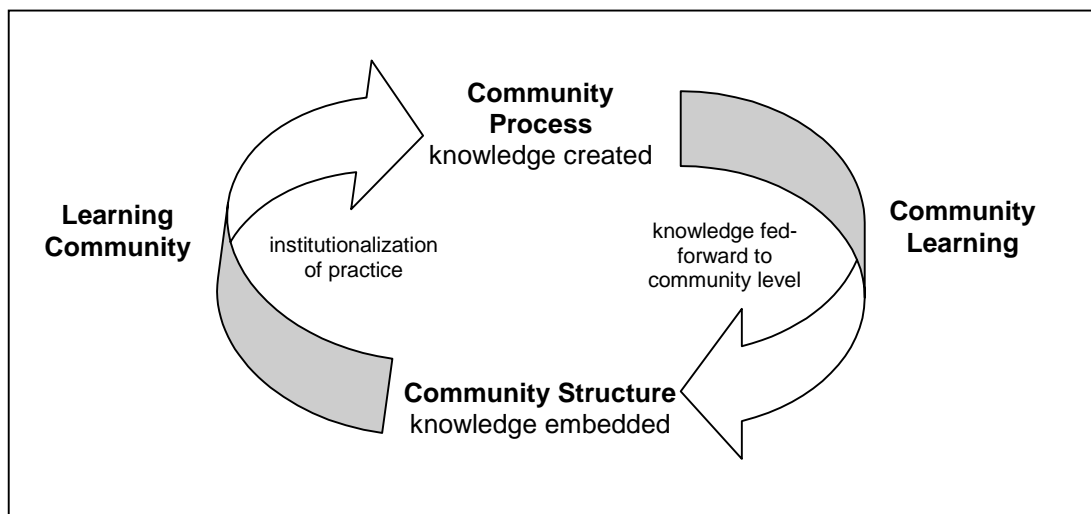
Figure 3.2 - Conceptualization of Community Learning

Institutionalization of Learning

Up to this point, community learning has been outlined in terms of the process

that creates collective knowledge and the structure of community which enables and

diffuses knowledge at the level of community. Implicit in this definition of community is

an understanding that communities are "network[s] of distinct but interdependent

institutions" (Selznick 1992, 370). The term "institution" has been employed in a variety

of ways and in a variety of disciplines.[7] As used here, institutionalization refers to "the emergence of orderly, stable, *socially integrating* patterns out of unstable, loosely organized, or narrowly technical activities" (Selznick 1992, 232 *[emphasis in original]*). Thus institutions can be groups or social practices such a the Catholic church or the ritual of communion (232). Selznick explains that "a social form becomes institutionalized as, through growth and adaptation, it takes on a distinctive character or function, becomes a receptacle of vested interests, or is charged with meaning as a vehicle of personal satisfaction or aspiration" (1992, 233). Organizations can become institutions, and in local communities the distinction between the two is necessarily blurred.

Communities are made up of a complex web of institutions, from schools, churches, and governments, to traditions and other local rituals. While not all associations and organizations in the community are institutions, many are, as they have become "infused with value" and part of the very identity of the community. In highlighting civic structure and the linkages within a community which it comprises, it makes sense to pay particular attention to the governing institutions within a community. In rural communities one often looks to schools, local governments, the Chamber of Commerce, the Farm Bureau, and so on, as core governing institutions. In urban settings it may be a neighborhood organization, a community development corporation, or again, schools.

If one were to map the knowledge created in the process of community learning, it would follow a similar path as we understand organizational learning to occur. Crossan, Lane, and White's multi-level framework for organizational learning explains how learning occurs first individually as we process experience, then in groups, as ideas and perspectives meet and are integrated, and finally, at the organizational level where

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[7] See Scott's *Institutions and Organizations* (2001) for an excellent overview on the subject.

learning becomes embedded in "the systems, structures, strategy, routines, prescribed practices of the organization, and in investments in information systems and infrastructure" (1999, 529). In other words, collective learning becomes institutionalized in the organization. It is this institutionalization of new knowledge which sets organizational learning apart from group or individual learning.

As mentioned before, however, communities are not organizations. Whereas an organization has logical repositories, both formal and informal, for institutionalized learning (strategy, routines, procedures), it is not so clear with community. Here we consider community as a field of social interaction, without fixed boundaries and certainly without the authority structure of organization. Where it makes perfect sense to talk about the strategic management of organizations, we cannot carry that over to community. However, communities do have what we could call "institutional features" which can nevertheless be impacted. If we think of the community as a web of institutions, we then look to impacts that span that web as constituting community-level learning. In the organizational context, institutionalization "is the process of embedding learning that has occurred by individuals and groups into the organization, and it includes systems, structures, procedures, and strategy" (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999, 525). Likewise, institutionalization of learning at the community level means that the integrative learning that occurs through communicative action becomes embedded in the structure of community. This may include shared understandings across that structure, new community norms, practices, rituals (i.e., new community institutions), or formal community-level policy, or new associations or organizations. The key point here is that the new knowledge created in the community process becomes embedded at the level of

the community field, or rather, within the community structure. Prior to that we can speak of group learning, perhaps even organizational or network learning, but not *community* learning.

Finally, I mentioned previously that institutionalization is used in two ways. The first corresponding to the question of whether or not the integrative process impacts or occurs at the level of the community field. The second question to consider, then, is at the level of the community field, will space be made for the integrative process? Are there "forums for interaction" which are sufficiently participatory to "enable the communication essential for public democratic discourse" (Warner 1999, 379)? The question here is whether the process itself is (or will be) institutionalized at the community level. Is an integrative process or processes a community institution itself, either as a distinct practice embodied in an organization of some sort or as a practice that is embedded within all the important governing institutions of the community?

It is hard to conceive of community learning, at least ongoing community learning, occurring without such institutionalized practice. This institutionalized practice, true public space for the community process, would be the core distinguishing characteristic of a so-called "learning community" (that is, a community that learns). Communities which may have relatively high levels of civic structure may still fail to become "learning communities" if they fail to take advantage of the collective intelligence which emerges from the integrative process. Thus, ongoing learning requires some form of institutionalization of practice, as well as a repository for knowledge created.

The questions which link process to structure and vice-versa raises an important issue regarding whether or not community structure can be built. Social capital theorists have argued that proximity is required so that overlap of spheres (school, work, and so forth) can occur. Horizontal, bridging, "weak" ties are facilitated as people interact and meet their needs together. However, many (most) communities face disintegration as forums for interaction are no longer natural and regular. But these forums can be "intentionally created and designed" to enhance the development of the community field, of civic structure (Warner 1999, 379). Thus, at the community-level, particularly when we look at what would be considered the institutions of governance in a community, there is a real choice regarding whether public space will be made, whether forums of interaction where the integrative community process may occur, will be developed and nurtured, or not. From this perspective, yes, public social capital or civic (community) structure can be built and public and "intermediary" institutions are in a particularly good position to build such institutions.

To summarize to this point, a representation of the community learning concept is sketched in figure two above. We see the process of community creating new, collective knowledge. As that process includes so-called "active relationships" (meaning actors from different social fields in the community meeting in the community process) and as the content of that process is "located" in the community field, the new knowledge can then be embedded at the community level and thus community learning can be said to occur. At the community level, when, within the structure of community, "space" is made for the community process, the community can be called a learning community. In other words, a "learning community" has a well-developed community structure that has

institutionalized the practice of community learning, thus facilitating a sustained

community process. Such communities are said to be taking advantage of the "collective

intelligence." They have created ongoing "forums for interaction", or space for the

community process at the level of the community structure or field. This is the form of

institutionalization of practice that is the last postulate of community learning.

Postulate VI: A "learning community" has a well-developed community structure that has institutionalized the practice of community learning, thus facilitating a sustained community process. Such communities are said to be taking advantage of the "collective intelligence." They have created ongoing "forums for interaction", or space for the community process at the level of the community structure or field.

Friedland's multi-level model of the "communicatively integrated community"

adds a final point of clarification to the conceptualization here (see Table 2.1 in chapter

2). The learning process (the community process) occurs at the "micro" level of groups,

interpersonal networks, and so forth. Community learning indicates integration of that

knowledge at the "meso" level of the community, represented by its social structure. One

might go beyond this meso-level and consider how integration can occur at higher levels,

such as regions. This different kind of federalism is entirely consistent with Follett's

collaborative pragmatism (see Follett 1998).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a concept of community learning which takes into

consideration both the structural and process elements. It is a concept to be distinguished

from civic learning, which implies learning how to become good citizens. It is

distinguished from notions of individual learning within community settings, or even

individuals or groups learning about community. Community learning, as conceived of here, is precisely what the term implies, a community, learning.

This concept focuses attention dually upon the importance of the integrative process of dialogue and the supportive social structure of community. It also draws attention to the fact that processes of dialogue don't automatically produce community-level learning and that the presence of civic structure likewise does not guarantee that collaborative learning will occur among local actors. Choices must be made to create space for the integrative process as well as to see that the integrative process extends the level of the community field. These decision points indicate that community learning includes two kinds of institutionalization: first, the institutionalization of new knowledge at the structural level of community, and second, the institutionalization of the integrative process in the community.

The concept of community learning extends the arguments regarding the relationship between social capital and community renewal. It suggests that while social capital is necessary, it is not sufficient in and of itself to lead to renewal. A learning component is necessary as the collective intelligence of the community, combined with the mobilizing potential of civic structure, enable renewal and change. A focus on learning also draws attention to the mostly neglected component of process. Social capital theorists emphasize structure mostly to the neglect of process. Likewise, "process" theorists tend to ignore structure. Thus, community learning offers a conceptual bridge, linking the otherwise parallel discussions of social structure and democratic process.

The concept of community learning also points directly to practice. It suggests to public administrators and community activists alike that the work of building community is more than just bringing people together. It is thinking beyond the level of association or network to thinking about the community as a network of networks. It points to the linkages between networks and suggests that efforts to build and strengthen linkages directly impacts the community's ability to learn. Most rural communities lack tight, integrative structure at the community level. Wilkinson points (1999) out that this is partially due to distance as rural communities are spread out. Yet similar problems are likely to persist in urban communities as well. Notable exceptions would be neighborhoods that have well-functioning, trusting partnerships with cities. Such neighborhoods create governing bodies that in a sense, constitute a formal network that links all the subnetworks in the community. Such neighborhoods are powerful examples of learning and development[8] and may well be the most fruitful area to study community learning.

Community learning is advanced here as a source of community renewal. In the following chapters, this ideal-type construct is examined in the context of a project designed to promote community learning. The "Wytheville Project", as it has come to be known, is an experiment in citizen engagement. As such it presents the opportunity to study the primary of components of the community learning concept and perhaps also derive some lessons learned. The next chapter introduces the Wytheville Project and explains the methodological perspective of action research which guided the project and produced rich data from which to learn more about community learning.

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[8] See Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) and Thomson (2001) for example.

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CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION RESEARCH IN WYTHEVILLE:

CREATING A CONTEXT FOR COMMUNITY LEARNING

> The community is that special place where theory and the "real" world
> come together. . . . no field holds greater promise for those with a
> reformist bent. You can't save the world, but you can improve a
> community!
>
> Larry Lyon (1987)

This chapter discusses the methodological underpinnings of the empirical portion of this dissertation. As an action research project, the work in Wytheville focused on engaging participants in a process of collaborative inquiry that produced locality-relevant outcomes *as well as* empirical insights into the question of how a community can learn. The citizen-participants were able to accomplish certain objectives through their work in the project. At the same time, as a participant-observer, I am able to draw from the experience and the rich data produced throughout, from a more analytical perspective, considering what the implications of this work might be with regard to the broader questions of community learning.

The first section of this chapter discusses the methodological assumptions of community-based action research and the research process in terms of data collection. The next section, which comprises the majority of the chapter, details the way the "study" (the project) was carried out. This introduction or overview of the "Wytheville Project" serves two purposes. On the one hand, the description of the project in some detail explains the process and "methods" used for the study, including who was involved, how

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they were involved, and how information was collected and analyzed. On the other hand, this description allows the "story" of the Wytheville Project to be told in a way that provides a context for the more detailed descriptions discussed in the next chapter, where the project is used as a field study for exploring analytically the concept of community learning as described in Chapter Three.

Community-based Action Research

Action research refers to a "family of research methodologies which aim to pursue action and research outcomes at the same time" (Allen 2001, 12). The variety of approaches that fall under the label of "action research" share a commitment to analytical rigor that is reflective or interpretive, a collaborative relationship with people who are traditionally thought of as the "subjects" of research, and an emphasis on practical outcomes relevant to the lives of the participants (Stringer 1999, xviii). Ernest Stringer argues that *community-based* action research adds to these commitments a fourth goal of building community itself. That is, community-based action research

> is designed to encourage an approach to research that potentially has both practical and theoretical outcomes but that does so in ways that provide conditions for continuing action – the formation of a sense of community. (Stringer 1999, xviii)

Thus, community-based action research (hereafter shortened as action research) contains elements of field research in its traditional sense, where rich, micro-level data helps illuminate broader theoretical questions. At the same time, this research approach contains elements of intervention for social change, using the process and the knowledge produced in that process to improve the community in which it is being applied. Action research has an openly ideological basis that is a "democratic, empowering, and

humanizing" approach to research; an approach that befits the aims of community

outreach (Stringer 1999, 9).

While there are many treatments of action research available, Ernest Stringer's

elucidation of *community-based* action research (1999) is most useful as a

methodological guide for the type of community outreach represented in the Wytheville

Project. Stringer's formulation begins with the assumption that the stakeholders of any

community-based project "should be engaged in the processes of investigation." The

researcher in this case takes on more of a facilitative role, working with stakeholders in a

process of collecting and analyzing data, theorizing, developing plans for action, and

evaluation (1999, 10-11). The acquisition and production of knowledge in this context

"proceeds as a collective process" where "stakeholders build a consensual vision of their

life-world" (1999, 11). This approach focuses on "methods and techniques of inquiry that

take into account people's history, culture, interactional practices, and emotional lives"

(1999, 17).

<div align="center">Look – Think – Act</div>

Action research generally follows a routine that is presented as a spiral or cyclical

process rather than a linear, step-by-step pattern. Stringer describes this routine in terms

of three basic phases: *look, think, and act*. After an initial period where the researcher or

research team develops a preliminary understanding of the community, stakeholders are

convened and engaged in the look-think-act process. The "look" step is about describing

the situation or context, or "building a picture" of how things are. Information about the

community is gathered by interviewing stakeholders, participating and observing

activities in community settings, and compiling other relevant community data (such as

demographic or economic indices). With this data in hand a "descriptive account" is created that helps participants increase understanding, clarity, and insight on their community. One of the common methods for this stage is developing a "community profile" (Stringer 1999, 76-9).

After developing a descriptive account of "what is", the process then turns to the "think" stage, where participants interpret and analyze the data they have gathered, "extending their understanding of *what* is happening and *how* it is happening." At this stage the group develops "jointly constructed reports" that interpret or frame the issues under investigation (Stringer 1999, 89). Group processes are used to facilitate a consensus whereby a common vision is created and priorities for action identified.

The processes of "looking" (observing), and "thinking" (analyzing), lead to the third phase of the action research spiral: action. At this stage, participants identify "practical solutions" to the problems that were the focus of the research project. The "act" phase includes planning, implementing, and evaluating (Stringer 1999, 115-34). Naturally, evaluating action leads to more analysis, adjustment, and future action. Action research is a complex process, however, and in practice action research rarely is as step-by-step as it appears in writing. Stringer acknowledges this fact, stating that

> people will find themselves working backward through the routines, repeating processes, revising procedures, rethinking interpretations, leapfrogging steps or stages, and sometimes making radical changes in direction. (1999, 19)

Such is the case with community-based research. It is clearly more messy and nonlinear than traditional social science research. This does not mean it lacks legitimacy or rigor, however. While action research certainly has its limitations, it is a legitimate form of inquiry with justifiable rigor.

Data Collection

The Wytheville Project includes a variety of contexts and different techniques of data capture including interviews, a community profile, and archival materials. Forty-eight interviews were conducted early on in the project. It was determined that recording the interviews would likely inhibit participants' openness and candor, therefore, the semi-structured interviews were captured with copious notes taken during each interview. The notes were subsequently typed up and uploaded into the NUD*IST qualitative analysis package. The interviews were coded along main themes in order to facilitate recall and analysis.

Additionally, dozens of relevant community indicators were compiled and formatted into the "community scan" or profile document found in Appendix A. A county-wide survey administered in1997 was also analyzed and the main findings incorporated into the initial presentation of the community scan at the project kickoff. Newspaper articles, newsletters, and other relevant documents were also collected.

A critical source of data, in fact, the most important source, came from dozens of meetings that occurred throughout the project. The dialogue from these meetings was "captured" through field notes, at least by the author, and often from other colleagues as well. After most meetings, the research team would "compare notes" and cross-check their observations. Whatever significant observations came from these sessions were written down in the author's field notes. Additionally, formal meeting notes were always recorded on flip charts. This data is important because there was a constant emphasis on capturing on those records what *the group* was saying, in their own words. Oftentimes the recorder would ask the group whether the way in which the thoughts were captured

accurately reflected what was being said (and meant). Importantly, at the end of meetings, particularly the community forums, the group would be asked to articulate what *the group* had determined together, so that it could be captured in the meeting record.

All of the forum notes and other meeting notes were typed up and catalogued for future reference. The many hundred email communications, phone conversations, and other communications relevant to the project were kept. Additionally, a short questionnaire was administered to participants at each community forum. The data from these questionnaires was kept in an Excel spreadsheet for recall and analysis. These many data points served to inform the action research process, as it evolved, but also serve as an empirical basis from which to explore the concept of community learning.

<center>Methodological Rigor</center>

In any discussion of methodology questions of rigor must be addressed. However, the traditional criteria for determining the rigor of experimental research – objectivity, reliability, validity, and generalizability – do not fit the action research approach very well. Stringer, following Lincoln and Guba, suggests that for action research credibility, transferability, and dependability are the more appropriate or relevant gauges of methodological rigor (1999, 176). Throughout the research process in Wytheville, careful attention to these elements of rigor were maintained.

In terms of *credibility*, the "prolonged engagement" of the research team helped establish a much deeper understanding of the community and the perspectives of the participants. The many hours of work in the field helped members of the research team gain insight that simply could not have been achieved if the contact was infrequent and

detached. Throughout the project there was also a focus on *triangulating* sources of information. In the initial stage of the project, "setting the stage", interview observations were compared with results from a county-wide survey collected in 1997, with community profile detail, and finally, with the feedback of citizen committee members. During community forums at least two separate records were kept, the meeting notes recorded in front of the group based on their input as well as field notes by at least one (often two) member(s) of the research team. As the principal researcher on the project, I personally have field notes from every forum and am able to cross-check impressions with the official meeting notes and any notes from others on the research team, as well as data from a post-forum questionnaire. Additionally, after several forums the research team would meet for a short "debriefing" to compare observations and note particularly important insights.

Stringer explains that *transferability* is about "describing the means for applying the research findings to other contexts" (1999, 176). This applies to this study in two different ways. First, the findings of the Wytheville Project in terms of the community vision and the forum discussion booklet are transferable in that they represent thick descriptions of a local reality. Other communities may find that they relate to many of the same issues and thus find the process, or even some of the content, transferable to their own situations. This form of transferability is not the intent of the project, however. What ultimately should be transferable is the concept of community learning itself which has been articulated in a generic way so that it may transfer to other settings. The lessons learned (discussed in the next chapter) are, again, transferable insofar as other communities relate to the descriptions and situations described in Wytheville. Obviously

the ultimate transferability of the concept will be determined by multiple comparative studies exploring the postulates of community learning and the findings outlined in the next chapter.

Dependability or confirmability of the data collected throughout this project is achieved mainly through the action research process itself. The data collected and interpreted by members of the research team were constantly fed-back to the committee in meetings so that the participants could verify the accuracy of what was being presented. This is how the booklet and the vision statement were drafted. A follow-up focus group with key informants was another example of this feedback process. The participants were able to asses the author's interpretation of events and provide feedback as to the veracity of those interpretations.

Limitations

Given the nature of the Wytheville Project, there are clearly important limitations to the research. The most relevant limitation is the fact that interviews, field notes, meeting notes, and focus groups all relied on hand written recording of events and are thus subject to the ability of the observer to accurately capture as much relevant content as possible. It also raises the issue that the recordings were "filtered" through the lens of the researchers. It was determined that video or audio recording project meetings would be detrimental to the goal of having "safe" space for dialogue, and thus the decision to rely on "old-fashioned" data collection techniques. This limitation was corrected for to the extent reasonable by the process of feeding-back those observations to the committee. The community participants served as an important check to the interpretations of the research team who internally checked their observations through debriefing sessions.

The other primary limitation of this study has to do with the nature of the action research process itself. From the perspective of deductive social science the notion of the researcher as active participant is questionable. But again, this research is not experimental research. It is exploratory and interpretative and not meant to be objective and valid in a traditional sense. The ultimate aim of the project was to produce locality-relevant knowledge that will lead to positive community collective action. The secondary aim was to have experiential knowledge that might inform our understanding of community learning. The project produced rich, voluminous amounts of "data" for this exploratory research, and so while limited in a traditional sense, it is not without rigor and sophistication. From an action research perspective the methods employed suggest adequate rigor appropriate to the needs of the project. We now turn to the process itself, its backdrop, development, and execution.

The Wytheville Project – The Setting

Prior to engaging participants in the first phase of action research, building a picture of their community (look), the researchers needed to do preliminary work to get the "lay of the land" (Stringer 1999, 46). At this stage, early contacts are made, and initial research is done to get a sense of the community context, identify stakeholders, and build relationships with key people (Stringer 1999, 46-63). In Wytheville, this included many meetings, both formal and informal, with government officials and other contacts. Additionally, a stakeholder interview process, utilizing the snowball method (described in more detail later), helped the research team build a preliminary picture. Finally, during this time of preliminary work, in the Spring of 2001, a data collection process was

underway to develop a community profile (Appendix A). The following description of the community draws from these sources.

<div align="center">The Greater Wytheville Community</div>

In many ways Wytheville is a typical rural community. Situated in picturesque Southwest Virginia at the crossroads of interstates 77 and 81, Wytheville is the county seat of Wythe County, and as such is centrally located in the county and is the hub of economic and social interaction for most[1] county residents (see Figure 4.1). Approximately 8,000 of the nearly 28,000 residents of Wythe County live within the town limits of Wytheville.[2] As is the case with most of rural Virginia, Wytheville is a predominantly white community (91 percent), though a black population (nearly 800 county-wide) with deep roots in the community exists and is recognized. Nearly three-quarters of the black population in the county reside in the Town of Wytheville. The community is also relatively older, with the median age in town being 44 years compared with the statewide median of 36 years.

In terms of economic indices, Wytheville lags Virginia overall but fits the norm of its region. Median household income in Wytheville was $28,043 in 1999 versus the Virginia median of $46,677. On the other hand, the cost of living is somewhat lower. For example, median mortgage costs in Wytheville (2000) are $740 compared with the state median of $1,144. Unemployment in Wythe County has been consistently above the state average, however, reaching almost 10 percent in 2001 versus a statewide rate of below 4

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[1] The exception would be the far western side of the county, including the small town of Rural Retreat, where many residents shop and dine in Marion (Smyth County). It is clear though that the great majority of county residents meet their daily needs in Wytheville and thus the "great Wytheville community" is defined as Wytheville and the surrounding area (most of the county) that is in included within that field of interaction.

[2] All data, unless otherwise noted, is from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

percent. The 2002 average for Wythe County was 7.2 percent compared with the statewide rate of 4.1 percent.
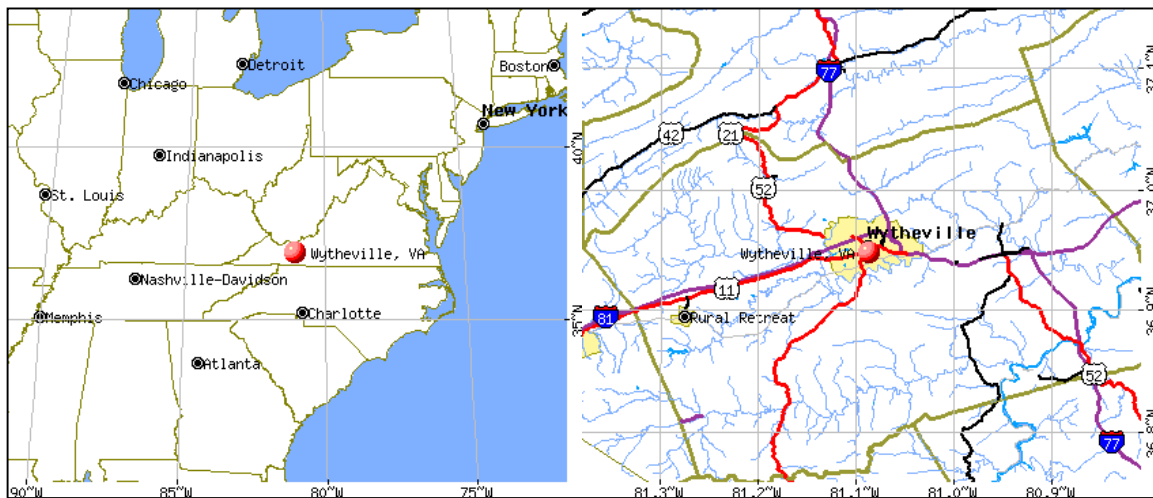
Figure 4.1 - Geographic Location of Greater Wytheville Community

Again, typical of rural Virginia, manufacturing is still the single biggest employing industry, accounting for nearly 2000 jobs county-wide. What separates the community somewhat from other rural communities, however, is a very large travel-related service sector, including gas stations, restaurants, and hotels. Those three categories employ nearly the same number as the manufacturing sector.[3] This reality manifests itself in opposite employment trends where manufacturing accounted for over 17 percent of employment in 1969 and has since dropped to 9.4 percent in 1999. Conversely, jobs in the service sector comprised 16 percent in 1969 and have risen to over 31 percent in 1999.[4] The reliance of the service sector is also expressed in the Town of Wytheville's revenue structure, as lodging and meals taxes comprise 28 percent of total revenue (FY 2000) and is the Town's largest revenue source.

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[3] Source: County Business Patterns, U.S. Census Bureau (2000)
[4] Regional Economic Information System, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Prominence of the Interstates

The amount of travel-related industries in the community underscores the dominant presence of the two interstates (77 and 81) and the impact this geographic reality has on community identity. Not only do the two interstates meet in Wytheville, but they overlap and share the same corridor for eight miles. Thus, through Wytheville and the eastern portion of Wythe County runs a six-lane highway, carrying the traffic of two major North-South interstates. Thus the claim by some residents that "Wythe County has more truck-stops per capita then anyone else east of the Mississippi."[5] The same could probably be said for hotel and motel rooms.

The psychological ubiquity of the interstate location for the greater Wytheville community cannot be overstated. The Town seal of Wytheville prominently displays the interstates, with the slogan underneath, "the hub of Southwest Virginia." In interviews conducted with local residents, many described their community with reference to the interstates and spoke with pride about community geography, relative to transportation. People speak of the community as being at the "crossroads" or as being within a six hour drive of Atlanta, Cincinnati, Washington, D.C., and so forth. While most residents complain about traffic, dangerous road conditions, and how they hate the many truck stops, it is clear that community identity is profoundly shaped by the interstates and the economic and social impacts that follow.

Two important points emerge from this data. First, the greater Wytheville community is similar to most rural communities in that it is older, less diverse, and less economically well-off than the state as a whole. These observations are consistent with

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[5] Quotes or paraphrased passages attributed to local residents are drawn from the 48 interviews conducted in the Spring of 2001 as part of a stakeholder analysis for the Wytheville project.

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studies of rural America as a whole. Second, the decline of the manufacturing sector as

the major employer and rise of the service sector is another important community reality

to note. While again consistent with employment trends generally, this reality also

highlights the prominence of and impact of the interstates on this community, which

prominence is equally borne out in conversations with local residents.

Figure 4.2 - Aerial View of Wytheville Area

Resident Perceptions of Their Community

The stakeholder interview process provided other insights on the community that

cannot be found in demographic data. Here one understands better *the community*; its

history, values, and uniqueness. As mentioned, the interstates are prominent and

influential in terms of the community's identity. But they are hardly the most important

characteristic of the community. Out of my many interviews and other conversations, one

factor that seems most important in the minds of residents is a *sense of place*.[6] This, of course, was not the term most residents used, but in describing what they liked most about the community, residents almost unanimously mentioned "natural beauty", "natural setting", "scenic beauty", "our mountain home", and other such phrases to describe the connection they feel with the place. And it is a beautiful area, dotted with prime farmland, unspoiled wilderness, scenic vistas, and many historical and cultural landmarks.

Figure 4.3 – Aerial View of Downtown Wytheville

Besides the sense of place and the interstates, Wytheville residents also often point to the character of the people as a source of pride. Wytheville and Wythe County are mostly blue-collar, like the region generally. In interviews many people made a point to mention the work-ethic of the people, traditional values, low crime rates, amount of charity and giving, and overall friendliness that abounds in the community. People in

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[6] See Kemmis (1990) for an excellent discussion of community and place. The work of Wendell Berry also

Wytheville generally feel that there is a good quality of life in the community and that it is a good place to raise families. There is a true sense of community pride. Perhaps no event illustrated the community pride better than the high school football team's 2002 state championship season. Seemingly every resident of Wytheville either attended or listened to the playoff games as the George Wythe Maroons played their way to high school sports glory. A victory parade in the cold of December brought out just about everyone.

Figure 4.4 – Downtown Wytheville

Community Concerns

Of course, like any community, Wytheville is no Shangri-La. There are problems that people recognize and live with. Interviewees just as easily pointed out community weaknesses as they could strengths. Perhaps the biggest overall perceived "weakness" pointed out in the interviews was "brain-drain." There is an obvious angst among adult residents that the "best and brightest" of the community leave the community after high

captures this sensibility in inspiring, challenging ways.

school and never come back. This angst is tied to the other major problem perceived by residents—the lack of economic opportunity. Local residents feel that their local economy is stagnant and too reliant on poor quality jobs such as those available at hotels and truck stops. Most could cite the relatively high unemployment rate and recognize that there are many working poor among them. This economic climate is viewed as the major reason the best and brightest leave and don't come back. There simply isn't anything here for them to come back to, many would say.

Many interviewees also mentioned education, and those that did had mostly negative things to say about the local education system. Outdated buildings and materials, the lack of technology and other "advanced opportunities", and underpaid teachers are common complaints. In fairness to the County and school district, education spending per pupil is normal for the region and about average statewide. Yet the disappointment about the education system runs deeper than simply funding. People recognize that most graduates of local high schools do not go to college. And of course, the ones that do seem to leave and never come back.

The areas of strength and weakness identified by interviewed residents demonstrates that while yes, Wytheville is unique, it still in many ways is typical of rural America. Economic anxiety, funding for schools, and brain drain are common features of rural communities. Furthermore, the rural setting, natural beauty, quality of life, and community character are oft-cited reasons for living in rural communities. So in many ways Wytheville is a good sample community to examine community learning. What was needed was an opportunity for intervention, something that would created a climate that

would make democratic experimentalism possible. As it turned out, the interstates were the key.

The VDOT Studies

"The Biggest Issue Our Community Has Faced in the Last 50 Years"

When the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) began doing preliminary studies of the I-77/81 corridor in the late nineties, citizens and community leaders immediately became concerned. For years this stretch of highway, three lanes in each direction for approximately eight miles, has been known for being congested and unsafe. Having two four-lane interstates merge into one six-lane corridor in and of itself is troublesome. Add to that some poorly constructed exits and a high volume of truck (tractor-trailer) traffic, and it is no wonder that many local residents typically avoid driving on it altogether. The traffic volumes, which during certain peak times actually back traffic up to a standstill, triggered VDOT to explore options for improving the corridor. The options were obvious enough to everyone: expand the existing corridor, separate the interstates by building a new corridor to the north or south of the existing one, or do nothing (meaning "no-build" but with certain upgrades to help traffic flow, like improving exits, signage, etc.).

The first step in VDOT's planning process is a feasibility study of all options (see Table 4.1). This study was conducted by a local engineering firm in 1998 and from all local accounts served to confuse and anger residents more than anything else. Apparently VDOT and their consultants did a poor job of communicating the scope of the study, that it was only examining the feasibility of options and not recommending certain routes or designs. From interviews it was apparent that many citizens were upset that they had no input on the study, and that certain alignments presented by the consultants went through

homes. One participant used words such as "cold" and "manipulative" to describe the process. Even though the firm was only being asked to asses the feasibility of various options, the image created in the minds of most locals was that VDOT was coming in to mess up the community.

1997-1998	VDOT feasibility study of I-77/81 corridor
Jan – Feb 2001	VDOT initiates I-77/81 location study with three year timeline Institute for Policy Outreach (IPO) contracts -VDOT location study consultation -Town of Wytheville strategic consultation IPO manages advisory committee process for location study, plans "deliberative visioning" process for Wytheville
Spring 2001	Stakeholder interviews (48) Building citizens committee (invited 38) Project planning for visioning project
June 2001	Project kickoff meeting -Community profile (look)
July – Aug 2001	Issue framing sessions (think)
Oct 2001	VDOT public information session
Nov 2001	Draft forum booklet (think)
Jan – Apr 2002	Prepare booklet for publication Gain support from County, local businesses Plan for forums, solicit participation from local organizations (act)
May 2002	Suspension of location study Booklet published Train committee members as moderators First forums held
Summer 2002 to Feb 2003	Incorporate local media in project -newspaper series -radio programs Hold forums throughout community (see Table 4.2) Presentations to other community groups (see Table 4.3)
March – April 2003	Drafting community vision statement
May – August 2003	Presentations of vision report to local groups (see Table 4.4)
March 2004	Focus group to review findings
March – May 2004	Revision of Town of Wytheville comprehensive plan based on visioning findings

Table 4.1 – Chronological Account of the Wytheville Project

Contracting with the Town of Wytheville

Local officials, for the most part, understood better that the feasibility study was the first and very early stage of a longer process. However, the results of the study – which demonstrated that expanding the existing alignment would be very difficult compared to separation – caused Wytheville officials in particular to be concerned. One could imagine scenarios where a new alignment is built that completely bypasses the Town. This thought, given the economic impact of the interstates, translates into a doomsday scenario in the minds of local residents. Simply put, the logic is that "no interstates and our economy is dead." Given the gravity of possible future scenarios, the Mayor came to express (on multiple occasions) that this issue (of what to do about the I-77/81 corridor) is the "biggest issue this community has faced in the last 50 years." The community needed to be prepared for the upcoming location study process and act preemptively. It was at this point that the Virginia Tech team entered the picture.

The location study is the formal process of narrowing down corridors, completing the "environmental" work (for the Environmental Impact Statement or EIS), concluding with making a recommendation to the Commonwealth Transportation Board. After this process, a decision is made, followed by design and build (at the very least, even in a no-build scenario, doing upgrades to the existing alignment). The location study for the I-77/81 corridor was scheduled to begin January 2001 and take approximately three years to complete.

The Institute for Policy Outreach (IPO) was awarded a $300,000 contract from VDOT to work with the consulting team on the location study. The contract included engineering work by Virginia Tech Transportation Institute researchers, an economic

impact study by associates in Applied Economics, and assistance in the public

participation element of the study. The research contract from VDOT represented an

effort of VDOT's part to explore new ways of doing things, taking advantage of the

University's research. This was true for public participation, as it was for engineering and

economic analysis. The agency does not have the greatest reputation in terms of

involving the public and recently had been "burned" on another study where great efforts

were made to inform the public but the result being serious discontent and, eventually, a

Transportation Board decision which went against the agency's recommendation.

So the time was right, from VDOT's perspective, to try something new, so IPO

was given great latitude in working with the community so that VDOT could take a more

"hands off" approach to the community work. As director of the newly formed Institute

for Policy Outreach at Virginia Tech, Ray Pethtel—former commissioner of the Virginia

Department of Transportation (VDOT), now the University's Transportation Fellow—

was able to work out a unique arrangement with Wytheville and VDOT for the next

phase of the corridor project. The Town sought the opportunity to form a relationship

with IPO with regard to the location study. Pethtel and his associates suggested to the

Town officials that they ought to engage in what they termed a "preemptive planning"

exercise whereby the community would be engaged in a process to collectively articulate

a vision for the community's future. This effort would be in conjunction with an update

of the Town's comprehensive plan which would be a very important document in the

forthcoming environmental (EIS) process. Town officials wanted to clearly "be at the

table" in the decision making process for the corridor study. They wanted to be proactive

and preemptive and ensure that they would not be "on the outside" when important decisions were made regarding the corridor location.
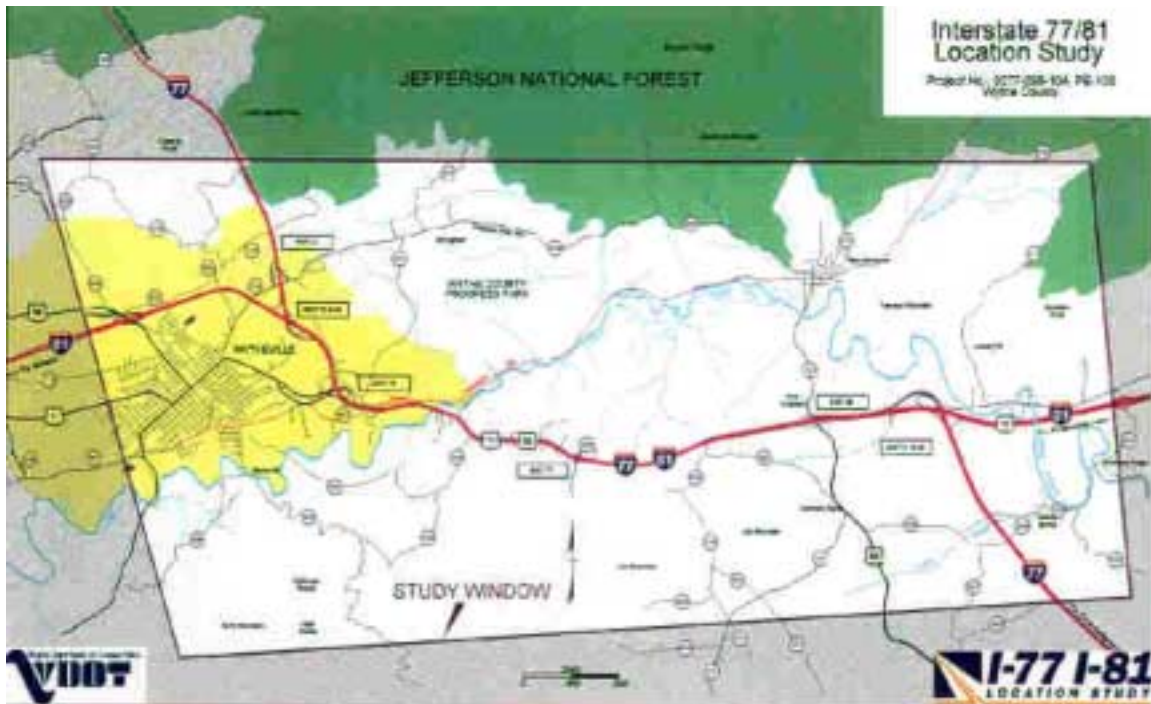
Figure 4.5 – Official Study Window Map of I77/81 Location Study (VDOT, 2001-2002)

Beyond the pragmatics of "being at the table" was a desire for Town officials, particularly the Mayor, to really see the community involved in the process. Inevitably people would be out en masse when the proverbial bulldozer was at the doorstep, but in this case, with the potential impact on the community so great, wouldn't now be the ideal time to engage citizens in a public conversation about their shared future? It was this sentiment, along with the desire of the IPO team to try a "democratic experiment" that shaped the eventual contract between the Town and IPO. The scope of work, finalized January 2001, included "strategic consultation" regarding the location study, a community visioning project which would include citizen issue forums, and an updated comprehensive plan. At this same time, as part of the VDOT contract, Pethtel secured

permission for IPO to manage the advisory committee for the location study process (something VDOT typically selects and manages). As part of the joint agreements, therefore, IPO would develop and manage a citizen's committee that would serve dual, interrelated purposes of advising VDOT and steering the community visioning project.

The Town agreed that the visioning would go beyond the Town borders to include the broader community of interest, roughly the "study window" of VDOT's location study (see Figure 4.5). Thus, through the two contracts a collaboration was born between VDOT, IPO, and the Town, all in the name of doing something different in terms of public participation. Rather than have VDOT hand-pick a committee which would provide reactions to VDOT throughout the process, a committee would be used as the focal point of a process of engaging the community at-large in a conversation about the bigger question that the location study pointed to, namely, "what do we want our community to be in the future?" The goal was to help the community find a community voice so that the committee could provide input on what *the community* wants rather than what 20 people individually want. Certainly individual input would be received at different public meetings, but the visioning project was seen as an attempt to help the community develop a strong community voice. This would not only strengthen the community's position but also provide clearer, more consistent input for the consultants and VDOT.

"Wytheville-Wythe Horizons"

The partnership with the Town of Wytheville and VDOT afforded the IPO team a prime opportunity to design a community intervention from scratch. In other words, the research team had the latitude to steer the project significantly and thus took advantage of

the opportunity to engage in what might be called an experiment in participatory democracy. While action research was the overall methodological frame for the study, the specific process innovation was the integration of deliberation with visioning. The research team looked to the Kettering method[7] for issue framing and deliberative forums as a productive way to engage many citizens on the issues related to the future of the community. The thought was that visioning can be superficial and "pie-in-the-sky" if it is not deliberative. Thus, combining visioning with deliberation created a process of "deliberative visioning" (Morse 2002).

Deliberative Visioning in Wytheville

Public deliberation, according to Mathews and McAfee (2000), "is a means by which citizens make tough choices about basic purposes and directions for their communities . . . It is a way of reasoning and talking together" (10). The core idea of community visioning, developing a clear sense of direction for the community, gets to the essence of what deliberation is about, that is, working through issues to come to a shared purpose. However, upon examining the content of many visioning programs it is apparent that the crucial element of deliberation is missing, or at least is not explicit or emphasized. Popular guides to community visioning—such as the "Take Charge Too" program (NCRCRD 2001), the National Civic League's guide (Okubo 2000), or the oft-cited Oregon Visions Project guide (1998)—do an excellent job of focusing on collaboration and the importance of assessing current realities, but they fail to show how a "community vision" is a product of deliberation. And many visions are not the products of deliberation. Many are as vague as the guidelines given on how to create a community vision. Such visions represent an aggregation of all the participants' aspirations rather

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[7] See Kettering Foundation (2001), Mathews (1999), and Mathews and McAffee (2000)

than a synthesis of them. The sum-total vision is correctly labeled by some as "pie-in-the-sky" as it fails to be deliberative, that is, to make choices together.

The IPO research team decided to design the project with deliberation in mind and see how well the Kettering process—a process designed for collaborative learning—applies at the local level. For the most part, the Kettering process has been used to guide discussions about national policy issues (National Issues Forums). Furthermore, the process tends to be issue-based, meaning citizens deliberate about a selected policy issue, weighing the pros and cons of various policy solutions. In this case the application would be different, not a single policy issue with discrete policy choices, but a broad, directional question of what the future of the community ought to be.

Components of the Process

The Kettering Process for framing issues and deliberation is rather straightforward. Issue framing is a deliberative activity that corresponds generally with the community assessment stage of most visioning models, but also in some ways with vision development. Here a group identifies concerns or issues; groups those concerns according to similar perspectives and identifies what those perspectives are; outlines the positives and negatives of each approach as well as identifying possible actions and tradeoffs (Kettering Foundation 2001). From this process an "issue book" is developed which introduces the issue and outlines the three or four "approaches" to that issue. This issue booklet is then used in deliberative forums where groups of citizens, typically no larger than 25, use the booklet as a guide to a collective inquiry on the issue. The forums are governed by certain ground rules such as not demeaning others' views, allowing everyone to speak, and exploring all sides of each perspective. The idea is that in the safe

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setting of a community forum (chairs set up in a U shape, everyone facing each other, no hierarchy, comfortable, non-threatening rooms, usually with refreshments) citizens can weigh the issue at hand and identify common ground on that issue.

The IPO research team[8] took this basic model and overlaid it onto the basic steps of community visioning to create a model of "deliberative visioning" (Morse 2002). Deliberative visioning was a five stage process of: 1) background work, interviewing stakeholders, gathering data on the community; 2) convening a citizens committee and framing the "issue" of "shaping the community's future"; 3) publishing a booklet and involve as many people in the community as possible in deliberation about a vision for the community; 4) have the committee incorporate the input from the forums into a community vision statement; and 5) seek ways to implement vision. As the research team clarified the project conceptually over a series of meetings, and naturally, as the project itself evolved, our project goals became clear. We wanted first to facilitate community learning and develop a vision statement that captures or institutionalizes this learning. Second, we wanted the process to contribute to our knowledge of community learning, and thus, the process became part of our overall approach to action research. In other words, the action research frame allowed us to simultaneously seek community outcomes and research-oriented insights.

Building the Citizens Committee

The previous discussion has provided some contextual background information on the project itself. This discussion was drawn from data collected throughout the initial, preliminary steps of the action research process. The research team was building a picture

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of the community, planning for the project, and otherwise setting the stage for the next phase. A major component of this preliminary work involved conducting 48 "stakeholder" interviews with local residents. The interviews served [at least] two purposes. First, it was an opportunity for the project manager (the author), and by extension, the research team, to learn more about the community, what some of the major issues were and what general perceptions were regarding the state of the community and individual "visions" of the future. The second purpose was to use a "snowball" interviewing technique to determine who needed to be at the table.

Interviews began with some of the community's key stakeholders as identified by Town officials. Then, during each interview individuals were asked to name others who they felt should be a part of the process. Thus the short list of interviews snowballed as a record was made of who people were referring, and overlaps of names were noted to the point where, by-and-large, the same names were coming up. Obviously the interviewing could have continue for a long time this way, but after about 50 interviews there was sufficient confidence that the list of names, particularly the list of repeat mentions, helped clarify who key stakeholders[9] were. Additionally, a list of recommended names from VDOT as well as lists from Town and County officials helped round-out the stakeholder list and complete the stakeholder analysis.

The interview protocol is included in Appendix B. The interviewees were mostly quite candid and interested to discuss their impressions of the community. The data from

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[8] The primary members of this team were myself (Rick Morse), Ray Pethtel, Larkin Dudley, Kathryn Young, and Joseph Freeman. The team collectively designed the project and it was Joe Freeman who coined the term "deliberative visioning."

[9] By "key" stakeholders I mean leaders from the primary organizations and associations that make up the community structure. Additionally, key stakeholders were other "active" citizens who oftentimes were connecting links between different social fields. Some stakeholders were also identified in relation to the

these interviews helped build an ethnographic portrait of the community, the relevant issues and attitudes of citizens. This data, in turn, informed the research team's work but also was presented in summary form to committee members as part of a community profile (Appendix A). Thus, the interviews and community profile work bridged the preliminary project work with the first "stage" of the action research process where participants build a picture of their community (look). The insights from the interviews, combined with the data collected for the community profile, were important sources of information for this process. Several strong themes emerged from the interviews, as discussed previously, and the validity of those themes were verified through the results of a 1997 County Survey, as well as in the dialogue of the committee meetings and subsequent community forums.

One goal that was made at the outset was that the project would be as inclusive as possible, therefore, the citizens committee would be open to anyone and remain open throughout the process. However, it was still important to invite some people to ensure that key stakeholders were represented. This was important not only in terms of representation of affected interests in the location study, but also for the goal of developing a "community" vision as opposed to a vision of a small subset of self-selected individuals. After the stakeholder analysis, then, 40 local residents were sent formal invitations to serve on the committee. Of the 40, which included representatives from local government, industry, environmental groups, the Chamber of Commerce, the community college, schools, churches, and others, 38 accepted the invitation.

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interstate location study as having a relatively large "stake" in that process (such as property owners or business interests).

Project Kicking Off Meeting

With committee invitations received and accepted, it was now time to officially "kick-off" the process. Location study consultants and VDOT officials had already held a location study kick-off meeting in the latter part of January, 2001 and now, after much preparation in the Spring, the community participation process was ready to begin. On June 28, 2001 the kick-off meeting was held in the Galax Hall Auditorium at Wytheville Community College, from 7:00 to 8:45 p.m. Approximately 50 people were in attendance, with approximately half being committee members who had accepted the formal invitation.

The meeting began with an introduction to the project overall by Mr. Ray Pethtel, University Transportation Fellow and Director of IPO. He explained the dual nature of the citizens advisory committee and underscored the point that "this will be an open process." Members of the research team explained different aspects of the deliberative visioning project. Joe Freeman (Lynchburg College) explained that the process is "from the ground up; based on personal experience; must include different perspectives; appreciates the knowledge each person has; is realistic about what the community can do; and identifies the broadest possible range of resources available to make the community more valued by those who live here." It is not, he followed, about "market research, opinion polling, debate, or forcing a superficial consensus." Afterward, the "community scan" (profile) was presented to the participants for initial feedback. It included observations from the interviews, a summary of a 1997 County survey, and numerous demographic, economic, and other community data. Larkin Dudley then outlined the next

steps of the process, and Scott Hodge, the lead consultant for the VDOT study, explained the next steps of the location study project.

The meeting generally went well although the team noted afterward that the location could have been better (the room was rather small) and that greater attendance would have been nice. On the other hand, given that it was during the summer and there were many other places for people to be, the almost 50 people made for a good kickoff event. Not only did approximately 20 of the committee members show up, but several others in attendance expressed interest in serving on the committee or otherwise being involved. After the meeting several people lingered in the parking lot talking to one another about the issues at hand.

<center>Issue Framing</center>

This initial "community profile" work with the participants, collecting data, organizing and presenting it, receiving feedback, and revising it, corresponds with the "look" stage of action research. Stringer explains that the "look" stage is about "building a picture" as to "enable stakeholder groups to formulate jointly constructed descriptive accounts of the situation at hand" (1999, 67). Stringer notes that one of the common methods used to help groups formulate such descriptive accounts is the use of community profiles (1999, 76-9). The stakeholder interviews and other observations informed the selection of profile data. As the data was presented and distributed, feedback was given from committee members and other participants as to other important indicators or ways of looking at the data. In fact, the community scan went through several revisions based on participant feedback and thus the "look" phase cycled through each stage of the visioning project. As befitting an action research orientation, therefore, data was used in a

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process of collaborative inquiry rather than as tool of one-way "informing" or worse,

manipulation.

Figure 4.6 – Citizens Meet for First Issue Framing Session

Identifying Issues and Concerns

The issue framing exercise that the citizens committee would next experience also

was part of the "look" stage of an action research process. It also evolved into the "think"

stage. These connections will be made more explicit as the process is described. On July

19, 2001, the first issue framing session was held in a large classroom in Fincastle Hall at

Wytheville Community College. Twenty-two members of the committee attended,

including critical community leaders such as the Mayor of Wytheville, the chair of the

County Board of Supervisors, the President of Wytheville Community College,

administrative officials from the Town and County, and the directors of the Chamber of

Commerce and Industrial Development Authority. Others in attendance included two

farmers, a high school student, and an environmental/social activist. The room was set up

in a U-shape and the official roles of some participants did not seem to get in the way of

people's active participation. Perhaps it helped that the mayor showed up in shorts and a

t-shirt.

Figure 4.7 – Participants Discuss Issues and Concerns

Participants were split into four groups and given flip-charts and asked to list and

discuss what they viewed as the issues and concerns relevant to the community's future.

Specifically, they were asked to state their concerns as well as the [supposed] concerns of

their neighbors and friends not at this meeting. Afterward, each group presented the top

four or five concerns from their discussion. Personal field notes from the evening

indicated a good group energy and other positive occurrences:

> Tonight really went well...the Mayor in particular seems very excited
> about this.... He also pointed out during the meeting to the rest of the
> group that this project wasn't just about the Town, but that it goes outside
> the Town's boundaries and was for the whole community.... Another nice
> moment came when [Mr. Gogos] (a restaurant owner) said (again), [that]
> "we can put cards with 1, 2, or 3 on a card" and have his customers
> vote...that that is how we would get lots of input. Then he said that the

whole point was not to lose the road, that the Town would dry up if the road goes. Then Ann stood up and said, "that is what this is all about, we are coming together to form a plan for the future so that we can move forward *regardless of what happens with the road*."

The research team was impressed and somewhat surprised actually by the "vision" of many of the participants. Observational notes from the evening included the reflection that "I do think it went well and that the discussions were full and rich. I don't think this group will have any trouble digging in and doing this work, they are very capable and intelligent" (field notes, July 19, 2001).

Personal observations from that first committee meeting are similar and consistent with those of others on the research team. Kathryn Young "felt like the meeting was very positive and people were energized about the process and its potential" (personal communication, July 7, 2001). The research team was concerned going into the initial meetings that preoccupation with the road issue would hinder the group's ability to think about the broader community vision. We were genuinely afraid that the road would come up often and trump other relevant issues. The fears turned out to be unfounded, however. Kathryn's observations of the evening included this account from one of the small groups:

> Someone timidly mentioned the road -- after assurance from me that they COULD talk about the road if that was an issue on their minds they seemed to unanimously agree that they did not want to discuss the road at this point. [One group members] said "I honestly don't know enough about it to discuss it thoughtfully" [and] someone else said "we will just have to wait and see" -- there was a lot of head nodding and they returned to talking about jobs and education.

Another interesting observation was made by Dr. Freeman:

> After about an hour, the groups were moving from stating personal positions to considering the relationship among the various things proposed, as distinguished from the things themselves. The sequence went

something like this: more and better jobs are necessary to improve the local economy and to keep more young people in the area; to attract the outside private investment needed for this, infrastructure and education need to be upgraded; but spending more on these requires more spending by local government; that requires more revenue; and that calls for raising taxes, and raising taxes is politically forbidden….Ms. Jones' comment that "Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die" aptly summarized the dilemma. One group did mention NIMBYs , making a similar point.

What these observations demonstrate was that in this first meeting the group began to shift from the "look" stage of action research, where they collectively build a picture of the situation by identifying chief issues and concerns, to the "think" stage where the group begins to interpret information. Stringer explains that the "think" stage is about interpreting and analyzing information, where groups develop "jointly constructed reports" of the problem(s) under investigation (1999, 89). The kickoff meeting and initial compilation of issues and concerns built a picture ("look"), and now it was time to "think." This would be the explicit purpose of the next meetings in the issue framing process, but it was apparent from the first session that the group was already beginning to analyze and interpret the picture they were building.

Finding Common Themes

The first issue framing session produced 129 issues or concerns that now needed to be grouped or categorized so that the information could be reasonably used in the next session. A handful of volunteers worked with the research team in an intermediary work session before the next committee meeting to perform this task. Seven committee members came the following week (including the Mayor and a business-owner who labeled himself "the cynic") and although it was difficult and took two hours, the 129 concerns were whittled down to seven broad groupings. Each issue/concern was printed

out on a strip of cardstock and the group shuffled the pieces around on a table until they were all satisfied with the seven groups. The groups that emerged were: appropriate education; economic growth; the need for a plan for the future; government capacity; community awareness; impact of the road project; and opportunities for youth. This work was a good example of moving from the "look" to "think" stage in action research. The work of grouping issues and concerns simultaneously helped the group build a clearer picture of the community context while at the same time initiated the process of interpreting what the issues and concerns mean and the interrelationships between them.

With the groupings made and distributed to all committee members, the stage was now set for the second issue framing session. This time we changed venues and moved out of the institutional setting of the community college (located in Wytheville) out to the county and met in the Max Meadows Ruritan building on August 2, 2001. Though the attendance was lower—eighteen this time, which included two new people—most of the "principals" were still there and the energy level was good. It is also important to note here that once again Paul Dellinger, a local reporter for the *Roanoke Times* was present. He had attended the kickoff and initial committee meeting and was writing about them in the *New River Current* section of the newspaper. The project also began having press coverage in the local newspaper called *The Wytheville Enterprise*. Additionally, through contacts made by the author, the project was given attention by the local radio station and in the Town newsletter.

The task of this second issue framing session was to identify "approaches" to the general issue of "shaping the community's future." The approaches were to grow out of, and incorporate, the issues and concerns identified during the first session. Thus the

grouping the week prior was an initial step toward identifying the approaches. After an initial overview of the process to remind the group of what they have done, and what their work would be leading to, the participants were broken up into three groups and given the grouped concerns along with the detail under each one (i.e., they still had all 129 concerns, but now they were grouped under headings). They were given flip charts and asked to develop three or four approaches to the community's future.

By far, this was the most difficult of all the meetings. One reason for this was that the research team failed to make clear what the objective was for the participants in terms of an issue book. Although some examples were given, post-hoc discussions among the research term determined that it would have been much better to have had participants participate in a Kettering-style forum, using a National Issues Forum Book, first, so that participants had a clear picture in mind of what they were working toward. Because that goal was unclear, many of the participants struggled with this stage of the process and the three groups ended up approaching building the approaches very differently. It was hoped that at the end of this meeting three or four approaches would be clear and somewhat unanimous across the small groups, but this was not the case. So after this meeting there was some trepidation about how the issue framing would work out and what the attendance would be like at the last meeting.

Defining Four Approaches to the Community's Future

Between the second and third session, the research team took the work of the committee members from the first two sessions (three if the grouping session is counted) and carefully synthesized them into four approaches that met the criteria for a well-framed issue (see Kettering Foundation 2001). This attempt to synthesize and clarify the

committee's work was sent out to them prior to the third meeting for feedback. A few committee members did email or call to offer feedback and by August 16, 2001, the third and final issue framing session, four approaches had been identified. The venue changed again for this third session, this time a conference room at the community hospital. This was a great location and went on to become the favored location for project meetings. The Wythe-Bland room, as it is called, is non-threatening, comfortable, easily accessible, and set-up for these kinds of meetings (easels, coffee-maker, ice machine, plenty of tables and chairs, etc.). Moreover, the setting was not only ideal, but the meeting was by far the best of the three. It was very encouraging to see the last of several meetings go so well.

Twenty-one committee members were present for this last session. Once again, after an introduction, the larger group was split up into smaller ones. This time each group was given one of the four approaches with the assignment to "put some flesh on the bones", that is, to spell out the specifics of each approach, including its pros and cons. After working on this for about an hour the small groups then reported out to the larger group. Each presentation was followed by enthusiastic applause and there truly was an energy to the meeting that was very positive and exciting. Field notes from the evening point out that many seemed to have "got it" where before we wondered if certain people would ever get beyond "what's in it for me?" or "what the hell does this have to do with the road?" Those sentiments had all but disappeared by this point, and after this meeting there were many nice comments to research team members. One committee member, who often refers to himself as "the cynic" and was openly skeptical coming into the process, approached the author after the meeting and commented in a very enthusiastic, approving way, that participation by the public has generally been negative in the past,

that people would come out "against" only after it was too late to make a difference. "This is a very different way of approaching [issues]" he said. "This is the first time things have been approached in another way...I hope this bears fruit" (field notes, August 16, 2001).

Of course, not everything was perfect. As is the case in most participatory exercises, it would have been ideal to have seen even broader participation. This was felt by members of the group too. Toward the end of the meeting the group was asked, "who is missing?" "Who is not at the table here that should be?" Their answers were impressive although it was disappointing to realize that they were, in fact, correct in their assessment. On the white board was written, "who is not well represented here?" Underneath was a short list as follows: "rugged individualist" [perspective] (meaning the anti-zoning, anti-tax, leave-me-alone crowd which is a significant factor in the County); "those that have lost hope" (the poor, the disenfranchised); "people [who] don't want to change"; and "brain drain" (meaning the "best and brightest" youth who have Wytheville in their rearview mirror).

Creating and Publishing the Booklet

The initial flurry of meetings was over. Including the kickoff meeting, there had been five meetings in seven weeks. The level of commitment among the "core" committee members[10] was impressive. The committee had worked together to create a joint descriptive account of their community, framing the issues of the future development of their community in their own terms. They had interpreted and analyzed,

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[10] Although 38 people had said "yes" to being on the committee, in practice, around 20 were present at each meeting, with approximately a dozen of those constituting a "core" that were there fore every meeting. Some of those that volunteered to be on the committee dropped out almost immediately when they saw that

and were now ready to act. The research team took the work of the committee and "dressed it up" and turned it into a full-blown "issue book." Early drafts were circulated over the project listserv which was created to increase communication. A status report was given at an October 11, 2001 committee meeting. During this time the committee was asked to put on its "other hat" as advisory committee to VDOT. On October 15, 2001, VDOT would hold its first public information meeting at Fort Chiswell High School.

This committee meeting was a preview of the information to be displayed at the High School and an opportunity for committee members to ask questions. It also was an excellent opportunity for the research team to convey how the broader visioning questions would tie-in to the committee's input on the location study. The committee was satisfied with the progress of the booklet and generally satisfied with the work being done by VDOT's consultants. The public meeting on October 15 was attended by nearly 300 individuals, including many committee members. The visioning project was represented at this open-house style meeting as well. It was clear though that at this point the study was still in its early stages, well before any decisions were required. The time was right for the visioning to re-take center stage.

A draft booklet was completed in November and presented to the committee in another meeting held in the Wythe-Bland room at the community hospital. Apparently not everyone had yet "gotten it" as during the presentation of approach one, "Industrial Growth is the Key", one committee member got flustered when the pros and cons were discussed. "I don't understand what you're saying - oppose which point of view?" This

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a lot of the work was not directly related to the road project. Others became more active as the project progressed and others still joined later as they were introduced through a forum or a friend.

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gentleman wondered how anyone could be against the industrialization view. "How could anyone not want jobs?" he said. But by-and-large, everyone did "get it" and were enthusiastic about having the book published and convening forums. The group went from a long list of concerns to four well-articulated approaches. There was a consensus that the approaches represented well [enough] the perspectives out in the community and that the booklet would serve as an appropriate guide to public discussion of the community's future.
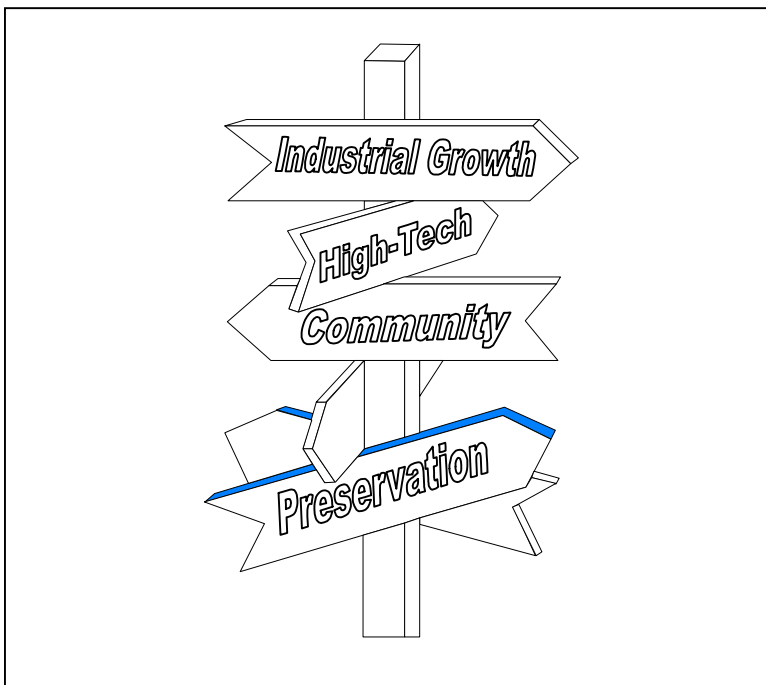
Figure 4.8 – Image From Visioning Project Brochure

Moving Out to the Community

At this point the project would now turn outside the citizens committee and out into the community (action). Whereas it had thus far been confined to the committee members and their work, now it would reach outward and seek to involve the community generally. After a break in December, the project resumed in the Spring with several meetings of a sub-group of the committee called the "forum planning team." This was a

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self-selected group who wanted to be directly involved in planning and facilitating the forums. The purpose at this stage was to increase the collaborative nature of the project by seeking "sponsors" of the issue booklet. The idea, which arose from group meetings, was that the County and local businesses would be solicited for contributions to a fund for publication and promotion of the booklet, in addition to the substantial funds already put forth by the Town. Letters were sent to local businesses and a request was made to the County. The County granted the project $3,000 after a presentation was made to the Board of Supervisors by myself and one of the committee members (the owner of a print shop who offered to print any project-related materials at cost). An additional $1,000 streamed in, in mostly small amounts, from dozens of local businesses.

After several more revisions of the booklet, adding graphics and sidebars, and formatting for printing, the initial production run of the booklet by WordSprint was completed in early May, 2002. The booklet featured the now agreed-upon project title "Wytheville-Wythe Horizons" across the top and was titled "Shaping Our Community's Future, Which Way Do We Go? A guide for deliberative forums on developing a community vision for the greater Wytheville area." The booklet is available online at www.cpap.vt.edu/ipo/horizons as well as in Appendix C here. During that time in the Spring, the forum planning team was trained to moderate forums. A brochure was also made to advertise the forum process and encourage local organizations to host a forum. The brochures were mailed out to dozens of civic organizations, churches, and schools. Two committee members became official "local contacts" for the project, point-persons for local meeting planning and information. Additionally, I made several contacts in regard to setting up forums.

Developing a Partnership with Local Media Outlets

The booklet represented what Stringer calls a "joint descriptive account" of the way people in the community think about the community's future (1999). An important part of the action research process is developing these accounts and communicating that information to the broader community. While publishing the booklet and distributing flyers helped in this regard, perhaps the most important development that came from the Spring 2002 meetings of the planning committee was the incorporation of the local media in the project. The operator of local radio station WYVE, Danny Gordon, was included in these meetings and he had several ideas for using the radio to get the word out. We planned some guest spots on his morning program as well as an hour-long evening show that would feature an extended discussion of the four approaches in the booklet by members of the citizens committee. Contact was also made with the editor of the *Wytheville Enterprise* which also became an important supporter of the project and medium of communication for the community dialogue.

The way the newspaper came "on board" is illustrative of the energy and commitment of the committee members. Toward the end of one of the forum planning meetings it was evident that the editor, who had been invited, was not going to make it. So Bill, the owner of WordSprint and one of the true project "sparkplugs" said, "hey, I know Stephanie pretty well, lets just go down right now." So Bill, along with the author and an associate, drove down to the newspaper offices, and found the editor (Ms. Nichols) there. She sat down with us and Bill gave a persuasive, impassioned explanation of what the visioning process was about. Personal field notes that evening observed how I could not have explained the purpose of the project as well as Bill had. He and many of

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the other committee members were coming to "own" the project and develop a clear sense of what it was about. The researchers no longer had to explain and lead, it seemed like it really was their project now. The editor was enthusiastic about the project after Bill's introduction. She wanted to know what she could do. During that spur-of –the-moment meeting some great ideas were generated, such as a series of articles by project participants about the four approaches. After that meeting the newspaper became a very important collaborator.

The Forums

From May 2002 to February 2003, over two dozen community visioning events took place in a variety of venues (see Table 4.2). These events included many formal, sit-down forums, as well as other events that helped get the word out further and encourage participation, thought, and most importantly, deliberative dialogue. The committee had up to this point been engaged in an "action research" process with the research team. The initial planning and community scan, along with the issue framing and publication of the booklet, constituted the "look" and "think" stages of the process as Stringer (1999) defines it. Now the committee was taking action, turning to the community at-large to seek their input, or rather, to engage community groups in the process of look-think-act themselves. The focus was to have the collaborative inquiry go beyond the committee, out into the community. Community members would now be asked to consider the community profile, to joint their own constructs of the situation. The forums would also ask them to "think", to analyze and interpret the information put together by the committee and research team and joint their own joint accounts during the forum.

Forum Description	Date	Location	Attendees (approx. number in parentheses)
Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors	5/20/02	Municipal Building	Board of Directors, Executive Director, some committee members (12)
Industry Roundtable Luncheon	5/21/02	Wytheville Community College	Mostly managers of local industries, JIDA staff, a reporter and some government officials (20)
Roundtable on Poverty	6/8/02	Community Hospital Meeting Room	Members of group included clergy, social workers, and representatives from homeless shelter (12)
Joint Governing Bodies	7/29/02	Town Council Chambers	Members of Wytheville and Rural Retreat Town Councils, County Board of Supervisors, Staffs, and a few people in the audience, including media (20)
St. Paul's Sunday School – Pot Luck	8/14/02	St. Paul's Methodist Church	Members of Sunday School group, facilitated by committee members that belong to the church (25)
Historic District Neighborhood Group	8/26/02	Home of one of the members	Local residents who live in the Historic Neighborhood District of Wytheville (20)
Community Forum sponsored by Community Hospital, Wytheville Enterprise, and WYVE	9/11/02	Community Hospital Meeting Room	Various people from community, including editor of newspaper and some committee members (14)
GWHS Senior Government, 1st Period	4 sessions week of 10/28/02	George Wythe High School	Seniors at GWHS (20)
GWHS Senior Government, 2nd Period	4 sessions week of 10/28/02	George Wythe High School	Seniors at GWHS (20)
GWHS Senior Government, 3rd Period	4 sessions week of 10/28/02	George Wythe High School	Seniors at GWHS (30)
GWHS Senior Government, 5th Period	4 sessions week of 10/28/02	George Wythe High School	Seniors at GWHS (20)
Longwood Elastomers	10/28/02	Longwood Conference Room	Mostly blue-collar employees at the manufacturing plant (20)
Longwood Elastomers	11/7/02	Longwood Conference Room	Mostly blue-collar employees at the manufacturing plant (20)
Wytheville Community College	1/31/03	Grayson Commons, WCC	Employees and student representatives a the college (20)
Chamber of Commerce (community-wide)	2/20/03	Municipal Building	Various interested citizens who responded to advertisement (20)

Table 4.2 – Community Forums Using Wytheville-Wythe Horizons Booklet

Getting the Word Out: First Forums and Local Media Efforts

The first two forums were held on back-to-back days in May 2002 with the board

of directors of the local Chamber of Commerce and with a group called the Industry

Roundtable (mostly plant managers and some political figures). Bill, the print shop owner

and "sparkplug" committee member, moderated the forum with the Industry Roundtable

and did a fantastic job. He began the meeting by explaining that the project was about

"getting a dialogue going." He did just that. Bill appeared a few days later on June 3rd

with three other committee members on an hour-long radio program broadcast on WYVE

AM and WXBX FM. The host, Danny G, interviewed four spokespersons on behalf of

each of the four approaches. A portion of the host's discussion with Bill is illustrative of

how the citizen committee members by this point had come to "own" the process.

> **Danny G**: Now Bill, you're a businessman, a very busy man. You're
> involved with a lot of things. You were at one time involved with
> downtown Wytheville. Why get involved with this?
> **Bill**: I feel like ever since I've lived in Wythe County, which has been
> approaching 17 years, I feel like we've kind of lurched issue to issue. You
> know, whether it's the prison, or the power line, or the power plant, or the
> livestock market, or the budget, the education, zoning, whatever. It's like
> we reinvent the same arguments each time. And I feel like if we as a
> community had a vision, had a mission, had an idea of kind of where we
> want to go, a lot of these issues would fall into place.
> **Danny G**: What about the comprehensive plan? We already have one. It's
> updated every five years. How does that come into play over something
> like this?
> **Bill**: I actually was involved some with the comprehensive plan, not
> directly, but when we did the survey that Liza talked about. And I think
> that the people that put together the plan do an excellent job pulling in
> virtually every aspect of our community. But the downside is, there's no
> overriding vision. There's no consensus in the plan of where we want to
> go. It's just an issue by issue thing with no unifying vision.
> **Danny G**: In other words if you don't have a focus and a vision, you
> really don't know where you're going, right?
> **Bill**: Exactly.

Another excellent introduction to the issues that had an extremely wide distribution was a series of articles written about the four approaches appearing in the *Wytheville Enterprise* in the month of July. The series of articles, written by the four individuals who introduced the approaches during the radio program in June, were introduced by the editor in a terrific editorial in the July 4th edition of the newspaper (Porter-Nichols 2002a). The editorial titled "Help Community Set Course for Future" connected citizen participation in the local visioning project to patriotism in light of September 11th. The article introduced the project and strongly encouraged local citizens to participate (Porter-Nichols 2002b).

Other Forums Throughout the Summer and Fall

The venues and participants of the forums were diverse. In June, a local group called the Roundtable on Poverty had us facilitate a forum with them in place of one of their regular meetings. In July, we held an abbreviated forum with the Joint Governing Bodies of Wytheville, Wythe County, and Rural Retreat (Town Councils and Board of Supervisors). Through the summer forums were held at a church—preceded by a pot-luck dinner and featuring an excellent, lively discussion—as well as a neighborhood group, where over 20 people packed into the living room of one of the neighborhood leaders. On September 11, 2002, a forum was held at the hospital. The intent was to suggest one could be a patriot and honor this day by being involved in public work, and that deliberation is a form of public work. The *Wytheville Enterprise* co-sponsored the event with WYVE/WXBX and the Wythe County Community Hospital.

One of the best experiences from the author's perspective as facilitator came when the local high school arranged to have forums with the whole senior class. The

seniors of George Wythe High School are divided into four government classes, each meeting four times a week. The research team (in this case, the author and Kathryn Young) were given an entire week to work with them, which worked out as sixteen sessions total, four with each group. These extended forums were very enlightening and the participation of the students was extraordinary. The high school forums offered deep insight and a perspective on the community's future that is most often ignored, or rather, uninvited. The students appreciated the chance to participate. More than half of them signed up for the listserv and five of them participated in another hour-long radio show on WYVE/WXBX, hosted by Danny G. This second radio show, broadcast live on January 30, 2003, allowed the students to highlight issues important to them and discuss their vision for the community's future.

Another unique and exciting venue for forums came at the Longwood Elastomers plant in Wytheville. The plant manager, another "sparkplug" committee member, offered to any employee an opportunity to attend a forum during work. Participants who signed up got a booklet to read beforehand and would attend the forum during an extended, two-hour lunch. The company also purchased pizza for the lunch. Over 40 employees signed up, so two forums were held on successive weeks. Most participants at the Longwood forums were "blue-collar" workers who had not participated in previous meetings. Once again, like the high school forums, the research team, found these to be extremely insightful. The participants were articulate and happy to be invited to participate in this way. Again, as the students expressed, the participants did not feel that in general, their thoughts were invited into the public discourse. Most were candid and enthusiastic in their participation. The feedback from the participants was very positive; most expressed

a desire to attend other forums, and several who did not attend later asked where and when others would be held. One employee expressed to the manager afterward that "it feels good that someone wants to know my opinion." Another said "It makes me want to be better informed so I can add more to the discussion."[11]

Concluding the Forums and Other Project Events

The last two official forums were held early in 2003. One was a forum at Wytheville Community College, officially sponsored by two campus organizations. About 20 faculty, staff, and students attended and participated in another great discussion. The Chamber of Commerce also sponsored a forum at the municipal building. Again, about 20 showed up and the discussion was excellent. There were also other events during this time that were not officially forums but, like the radio shows and newspaper articles, served to reach more people and—hopefully—broaden the community conversation. One such event was the annual "Taste of Home" event held at the high school. The project had a booth there—where hundreds passed by—that offered information, brochures, and pens with "Wytheville-Wythe Horizons" and the project website address on them. Several people stopped to talk about it with the representatives there and many took brochures and pens.

Other events where the project was able to be publicized included presentations made to the Rotary Club and the Retired Teachers Association (see Table 4.3). Also, in January, 2003, a newsletter was published and distributed to 6,000 newspaper subscribers in the County (a significant majority of the population). Articles were written by IPO staff as well as committee members (see Appendix D). The thought behind the website, newsletter, radio shows, newspaper articles, brochures, and presentations was that formal

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[11] *Project Update* newsletter, published January 2003, Institute for Policy Outreach (Appendix D).

participation in forums are but one way to engage in deliberative dialogue. The hope is

that the saturation of the themes of the project in the community would also lead to

informal forms of dialogue—at work, at home, at school, et cetera. The extent to which

this occurred is hard to determine, but it is estimated that in addition to the about 400

individuals who participated in the project directly in forums, there were hundreds, if not

thousands, more who were at least aware of the project and possibly "participating"

informally through discussions with friends and colleagues.

Event Description	Date	Location	Summary and attendance
Booth at VDOT Open House	10/29/01	Fort Chiswell High School	Various people from the community who came to the VDOT information open house. About 300 people attending the open house, with several dozen speaking with us about our work.
WYVE/WXBX Radio Program	6/3/02	WYVE/WXBX studios	Live, hour-long program featuring discussions of the project generally and of the four approaches. Four committee members came to speak for each approach.
The Wytheville Enterprise series on the themes of the visioning project	7/02	Opinion page of newspaper	Series of four articles about each of the approaches of the forum booklet. The series was introduced in a lead editorial by the newspaper's editor, lauding the project and encouraging discussion of the issues.
Presentation to Rotary Club	9/8/02	Country Kitchen Restaurant	Presentation/update of progress on visioning project and content of booklet, followed by some question and answer afterward. About 40 prominent area citizens in attendance.
Information Booth at "Taste of Home" Fair	9/12/02	George Wythe High School	Information booth at homemaking fair with approximately 5,000 in attendance. Distributed pamphlet summaries of the booklet and other project materials and spoke with dozens of people about it.
Retired Teachers Association Meeting	10/7/02	Wytheville Community College	Presentation and short discussion afterward of the project and the themes of the booklet. About 30 people in attendance.
WYVE/WXBX Radio Program	1/30/03	WYVE/WXBX studios	Hour-long radio program with local high school students discussing their experience with the forums and attitudes about the future.

Table 4.3 – Other Project Involvement Events (outside of official "forums")

A Community Vision

It is important to mention at this point that the scope of the project was altered May 2002 (right when the forums were starting) with the announcement that the location study was being suspended. Due to the Commonwealth's fiscal crisis, most VDOT projects were suspended. State lawmakers approved a proposal to look into a public-private partnership to address upgrading the entire 300-mile stretch of interstate 81 and thus the location study was halted until the details became clear. Interestingly, this change in context helped the project by making it clear that the community visioning was not in a race now with the decision making process on the road.

It was clear that important decisions would still be made in the near future, and that speaking with a strong community voice would still be necessary, but now those decisions were far enough out that the community could focus on the vision solely and go from there. That is what the citizens group did. Certainly some members who were very focused on the location study and less committed to visioning lost interest, but that mostly occurred upfront during the first few meetings. On the other hand, at this point we had committee members, such as "the cynic" who came to the process for the road only but was now fully committed and excited about the visioning project. Ultimately, the suspension of the location study was probably a good thing for the forums and visioning.

Collective Input from the Forum Process

By March, 2003, there had been numerous forums and extensive "input" by forum participants on a vision for the community. Each forum was essentially a micro action research process. The group would review and discuss the community scan (look), then consider the issues together, weighing each approach and introducing integrative ideas

(think), then at the end would articulate what the group, as a group, could contribute to the visioning process (act). Some would take further action by continuing their engagement with the visioning project. It was now time to reconvene the committee and cycle back through the look-think-act process to develop a community vision statement. The committee was asked to take stock of what had been learned, and develop a vision statement for the future.

Many of the committee members participated or even helped facilitate multiple forums and thus were hearing the deliberative dialogue firsthand. Others though had not been as involved and thus the first step in drafting a vision statement was to receive a report on the forum "input." Notes from each forum were collected and transcribed and analyzed for common themes. These themes were reported out to the committee in the first of three vision drafting meetings, held March 6, 2003. Once again, a little over 20 committee members were present (this time the group included several high school students). They were excited to hear about the forums and begin the hard task of synthesizing various themes into a coherent community vision. After receiving a report of the themes and issues that emerged in the forums, small groups broke out to develop vision themes and identify tensions. The following elements of a community vision came out of the small groups and reflected well the collective input of numerous forums and other discussions. The themes listed were—

- Preserve natural beauty
- Jobs if they maintain natural beauty
- Challenging / career jobs
- Local governments – citizens share same vision – work together
- Youth supported environment
- Encourage youth to return
- Central role of education – improve all levels kindergarten through adult
- High quality of life (churches, social groups, natural beauty…)

- IT infrastructure across whole community- micro enterprises pop up, which support the environment for that
- Unified, collaborative governments

A week later the group met again to figure out how they would reconcile tensions among their themes and how they would represent an overall vision. The planned structure of this second meeting (March 13, 2003) fell apart quickly as the complexity of the problem of synthesizing the disparate themes became a main issue. The group essentially took over the meeting and the facilitators acted as scribes. In the end, the group sketched out a metaphor of balance supported by a fulcrum that represented certain strategic areas (Figure 4.9). The balance was between economic prosperity and community preservation. Inside the fulcrum were specific strategic areas that hold-up and make the balance possible. The complete vision statement is located in Appendix E.
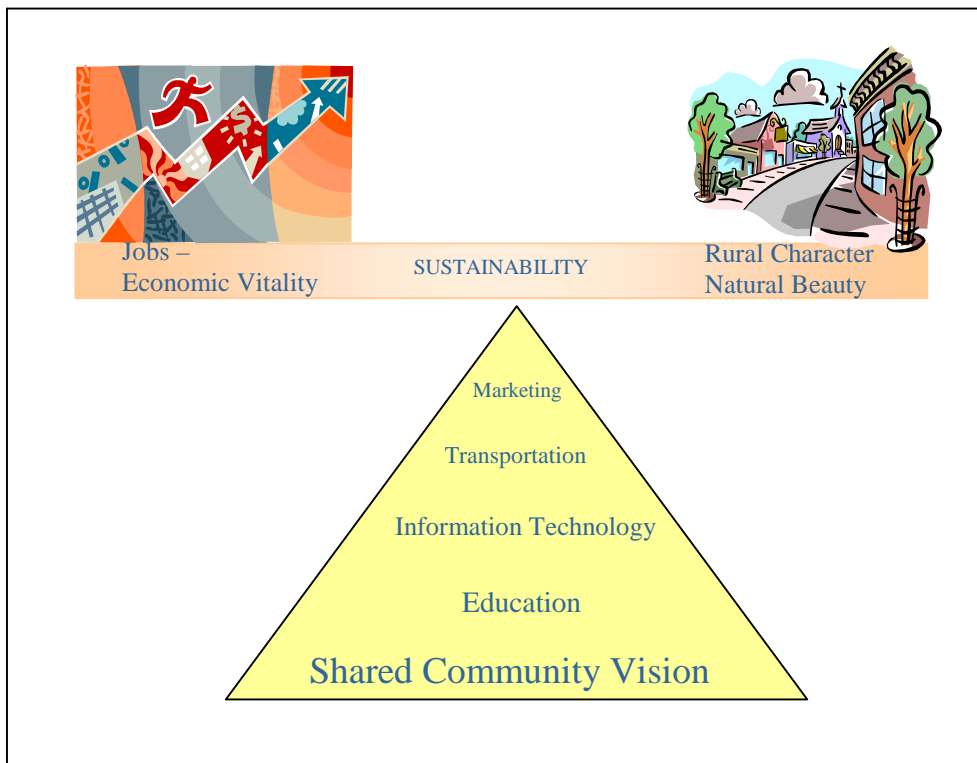
Figure 4.9 – Image from Wytheville-Wythe Horizons Community Vision Statement

The third vision drafting session on March 27, 2003, developed the themes represented in Figure 4.9. Here small groups worked on developing language to describe the specific components of the overall vision. The meeting was well attended, had good energy, and produced insights and clarifications that really helped the final document become more specific. A final session was held on April 10, 2003. Here the draft put together by myself, based on the committee's work, was presented for feedback. The next steps were discussed and there was a consensus that the draft statement should be "shopped around", that is, presented to different key bodies. The group felt it was important to obtain "buy-in" from different groups and that at that point the next steps, specifically, the idea of how to go about action planning for the vision, would become clear. Modifying the Town's comprehensive plan was viewed as one particularly important step needed to move from vision to action.

Next Steps

In the months following the drafting of the vision statement, presentations were made to the Joint Governing Bodies (of Wytheville, Wythe County, and Rural Retreat), the Joint Industrial Development Authority, the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, the Wythe Manufacturers Council, St. Paul's church (the same group that did the forum the previous year), and the Rotary Club (see Table 4.4). Plans are being made to revise the "goals and objectives" section of Wytheville's comprehensive plan so that, in Bill Gilmer's terms, the plan can be guided by a "unifying vision." The objective is to move from vision to action by using the comprehensive plan process to identify specific opportunities that are consistent with the vision, prioritize those opportunities, and then plan on how to make those a reality.

Local Group	Date	Location	Summary and attendance
JIDA Board of Directors	4/24/03	Municipal Bldg.	Joint Industrial Development Authority Board of Directors and Staff
Wythe Manufacturer's Council	5/7/03	Scrooge's Restaurant	Approximately 20 managers of local manufacturing plants and JIDA staff
St. Paul's Sunday School	6/11/03	St. Paul's Church	About 25 church members, most of whom participated in a forum previously
Joint Governing Bodies	6/30/03	County Courthouse	Joint governing bodies of Wytheville, Wythe County, and Rural Retreat and their executive staffs
Rotary Club	7/23/03	Country Kitchen Restaurant	About 40 community leaders (membership of Rotary Club)

Table 4.4 – Presentations of the Vision Statement Report

As this overview of the project has demonstrated, the action research process continuously loops back through the look-think-act spiral. Action took many forms in Wytheville. The committee took action in getting the booklet published and helping to organize and facilitate forums. Developing a vision statement was another form of action. Other forms of action in the future [hopefully] will be policies, programs, and other organized efforts to make the vision a reality. However, beyond these more "tangible" actions, one very important lesson derived from this project is that *talk is action*. The work of coming together, working through tough issues and forging a common ground, of articulating that common ground and developing a statement that there is a consensus on—that is action. That is "public work" in its most basic form.

Research Focus Group

On March 5, 2004, a focus group was held with eight of the principal informants of the project, eight committee members who are leaders in the visioning project. Befitting the action research approach, the community learning concept described in this chapter and illustrative examples from the project were presented to the group. After the

presentation the group discussed with the author, for about 90 minutes, their impressions

of this work and what they felt needed to be done next to see the vision realized.[12] One of

the principal findings of this session was the realization that the group's key "finding" of

the visioning project, that there must be a shared community vision across all the key

community institutions, confirmed the theoretical propositions of community learning

offered in this chapter. In other words, the participants who developed the community

vision articulated the argument made here regarding learning across the community field

(albeit without using those terms). The group concluded with a commitment to each other

to develop some regular forum of interaction for community leaders, including "official"

leaders and project "sparkplugs" like Bill Gilmer. One of the members of the group will

approach the Chamber of Commerce about helping something such as this happen

logistically.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to fulfill two objectives: first, to offer a descriptive

account of the Wytheville project, or in other words, report on the process and outcomes

of that project, and second, to explain the methodological basis of the empirical

component of this dissertation. The descriptive account, and the more detailed accounts

discussed in the next chapter, are drawn from the extensive data collected as part of the

action research process. The different forms of data collection referred to above are

consistent with an action research approach which embraces multiple sources of

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[12] See Appendix F for the focus group protocol. This event was loosely structured in order to maximize dialogue among participants, so the protocol served as a general, rather than strict, guide for the meeting. A research assistant took notes in addition to my own meeting notes.

knowledge and places "locally created" knowledge on equal ground with more "objective sources."

With this contextual information as background, the study now returns to learning. How does a community learning perspective inform the evaluation of this work? On the other hand, how does this experience inform the developing understanding of community learning? This is the subject of the next chapter, where the preceding description given serves as the backdrop for more specific accounts that shed light on specific elements of the community learning construct. Here specific accounts or stories are given that capture the reality of actual citizens engaged in dialogue about their shared future. Thus the ideal-type is overlaid on the actual experience of Wytheville to see what can be learned about how communities learn.

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CHAPTER FIVE

COMMUNITY LEARNING AND THE WYTHEVILLE PROJECT

> Truth be told, I got involved in the visioning process with my own axe
> to grind: I thought I knew where our community should be heading,
> and I wanted to help formulate a plan to get us there. It's been a real
> eye opener for me, to hear the heartfelt concerns of so many and such
> diverse people, to realize that the process of deliberation itself is so
> valuable, that the insights of the many, shared creatively, are more
> powerful than the insights of the one.
>
> Bill Gilmer, Citizens Committee[1]

The concept of community learning described in chapter three offers a holistic framework for thinking about community participation and development. It is holistic in that it highlights the structural and process features of community, and the interrelation between the two, whereas most treatments of community and participation focus on one or the other. As stated previously, the concept is an ideal-type, meaning it is a generalized construct, not perfectly manifest in any single case, yet based in empirical reality. Thus community learning is likely to occur to some degree in most localities, but never "perfectly", or manifested in the same ways across cases. Certain features of the community process, for example, are present across different communities, but the particulars of the process (i.e., setting, style, frequency) are likely to differ. In the same way, two communities may display features of community structure, yet those structures are unique and not necessarily comparable.

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[1] Bill Gilmer is a resident of Wytheville and owner of WordSprint, a local printing company. He is one of the founding members of the citizens committee serving as advisory group to VDOT and steering group for the Wytheville/Wythe Horizons community visioning project. This quote is from an article he wrote in the "Project Update" newsletter, published January, 2003 by the Institute for Policy Outreach (Appendix D).

The main features of community learning, however, are argued to be generalizable across communities, the key points being that community learning is a precursor to community renewal and that institutionalized community learning, becoming a learning community, contributes to *sustainable* community renewal. What is not generalizable is the way in which the features of community learning, and how they might be institutionalized, are manifest across different communities. This last point makes it difficult to conceive of analytic studies of community learning in the mode of "traditional" social science, based in the scientific method.

Because human communities vary widely, the features of local society being so context dependent, it makes more sense to study community learning inductively, through interpretive methods, rather than deductively. An interpretive approach provides rich descriptions of "reality" at the ground-level. It gives representation or "voice" to the "subjects" being studied. While generalizability is not sought in its traditional sense, we do, however, look for *transferability* so that others may "identify similarities of the research setting" and findings with their own particular circumstances (Stringer 1999, 176).

In this "findings" chapter the Wytheville project is utilized as a field study, an opportunity to learn more about community learning. Though the purpose of the action research is first to improve the community, it also produces rich and varied data sources (Table 5.1) which provide an opportunity to explore and test new ideas and hopefully come away with a better understanding of the community learning perspective. As mentioned earlier, community-based action research seems to be a particularly appropriate setting to look for community learning, as the approach of action research is

the kind of collaborative pragmatism that undergirds community learning. In other words,

action research is a process of collective inquiry, an effort to create a consensus that

inspires people to work together for the common good (Stringer 1999). Community-

based action research may well be the methodology for community learning.

Data Source	Nature of Data	'N'
1997 Wythe County Survey	Frequencies for all responses in table format	2904
2001 Stakeholder Interviews	Interview notes, transcribed, organized in QSR N5	48
Personal Field Notes	Typed and hand-written field notes "capturing" meetings and also reflecting on community interactions	N/A
Study Team Field Notes and Correspondence	Typed up notes and email communications from study team members' observations	N/A
Committee Meeting and Forum Notes	Easel-pad meeting notes from committee meetings and transcribed easel-pad notes from all forums	Approx. 400 participants in forums and committee meetings
Forum Questionnaires	Short questionnaire given at most forums. Typically about half of the participants would fill it out completely.	145
News media and email archives	Dozens of newspaper articles, other publications, and hundreds of emails	N/A
Follow-up Focus Group (March 2004)	Two hour focus group with key informants from project	8

Table 5.1 – Data Sources Drawn on in Wytheville Study

The experience of the Wytheville project is examined, therefore, to illuminate the

concept of community learning and derive some preliminary lessons learned. The

multiple and varied data sources (Table 5.1) from the action research are drawn upon

here in this exploratory examination of a concept. This chapter is organized around the

principal components of the community learning concept as articulated in the six

postulates from chapter three. The descriptions from Wytheville are used to not only

illustrate the components of the concept, but also to illuminate them or explore them in greater depth.

The Community Process

The emphasis throughout the "deliberative visioning" project was to engage citizens with each other so that they could learn collectively. The committee meetings, community forums, and visioning sessions all emphasized "deliberative dialogue" which, practically speaking, is a hybrid of dialogue and deliberation, encouraging a process of mutual understanding *and* (at least at certain points) "choice work." The kind of collaborative learning referred to here as the "community process" was evident throughout the different stages of the Wytheville Project. This section explores the role of "integrative dialogue" in community learning through the first three postulates. The first postulate of the concept specifies the nature of the learning process that is the basis of community learning, namely, that it is a process of collective knowledge creation. The second postulate refers to structured processes facilitating the community process. Postulate three relates community process to community structure, stating that the process builds the relationships that constitute structure.

Creating New Knowledge

The community process is one of creativity, of integration, where people create new knowledge through an interactive, communicative process. New knowledge may take the form of new ideas, shared understandings, or collective "framings" of issues. The knowledge created in the community process is knowledge of the group [who created it] collectively. It emerges in the group process and is collectively held, and maintained, by the group. In Wytheville there were examples of this new knowledge throughout the

different stages of the project. This section looks to some of these examples to see how they may illuminate postulate one.

Collectively Framing Issues

> **Postulate I**: The community process creates new, collective knowledge in the form of shared meanings or collective ideas.

During the issue framing sessions and subsequent meetings leading up to the publication of the issue booklet, participants were asked to take their individual perceptions of the community and transform them, collectively, into a group account of the issues. To use the language of action research, the group was charged with developing a "collaborative descriptive account" of the ways in which people in the community approach or could approach its future development (Stringer 1999, 75). The group was asked to learn collectively, to create new knowledge. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the research team facilitated this process using an adapted form of the Kettering Foundation's guide to issue framing (2001). Participants went from listing over one hundred concerns and issues relevant to a community vision and transformed those into four approaches or perspectives.

New shared meanings

Based on the themes that emerged from the stakeholder interview process, some of the would-be approaches were expected. Others, however, were not and seemed to be clear signs of collaborative learning. In order to examine this analytically, interviews of twelve committee members from the initial set of interviews were selected to compare how participants discussed the community's future then with the group product of the issue framing. The twelve were selected because they all were active members of the

committee who were at most of the issue framing sessions. Because the phenomenon of interest is the collective learning of the group, it makes sense to compare individual perceptions going in with the group perceptions at the other end of the process. Group perceptions mean that the group collectively creates and takes ownership of certain ideas.

The stakeholder interviews took place in the Spring of 2001, before the committee was formed and the issue framing process began. I asked participants a range of questions regarding perceptions of their community. When asked to describe their community's future and also to provide their "preferred vision", a clear theme of balancing industrial growth with rural preservation was evident. Eleven of the twelve interviewees specifically mentioned that they saw the community growing in the future and that there needed to be planning for that growth in order to preserve the community's quality of life. Some representative comments include

> If they go as they are now we'll be like any other overdeveloped suburb or Charlottesville. . . . lost natural beauty . . . the things we like the most about being here.

> Wythe County for a long time has stayed stagnant, maybe by choice . . . but now, with our proximity, it is going to happen. . . . Wal-Mart, Lowes . . . we have to be prepared, organized for [growth]. . . . have to have infrastructure ready for it . . . . the county as a whole needs to look at zoning, growth control.

> I see Wytheville growing a lot in next 20 years. The pattern is set for growth . . . it will happen. . . . [I think] we need to have more controlled growth in the County and that the County [needs to] be more progressive in their thinking.

Naturally, the high-growth, industrial development approach, as well as a rural preservation approach, were articulated in the issue framing process and became approaches in the forum booklet. But the other two approaches, around technology and

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particularly "social infrastructure", where not clear themes in the interviews. The community generally had not framed the issues in this way.

The approaches of industrial development and preserving greenspace were already part of the public discourse for the most part and the interviews made that abundantly clear. The sample of 12 interviewees who were active on the committee bears this assumption out. But a collective recognition of the need to develop the "community" or a vision of transforming the community around high-tech, were not at all evident up front. But there were traces. One of the interviewees clearly wanted to see a "high-tech approach" to the community's future.

> . . . the solution is to get high speed, wireless infrastructure, and [make it] a prime place fore entrepreneurs to come. If we had in place in Southwest Virginia a high speed infrastructure, we would attract entrepreneurs . . . information age companies. . . . If the county has fiber or wireless all over you would encourage information based economic development. . . . Build it and they will come. . . . We are so oriented to the big plant, the big park . . . it doesn't make sense given the trend of manufacturing in our country [going oversees] . . . that is not our future. The future is in information over product. . . . Infrastructure, marketing, education . . . it begins to snowball.

This individual was the exception, however. For the most part people talked about growth in terms of factory jobs and Wal-Marts.

Similarly, there were two interviewees that suggested the kind of collaborative, civic engagement orientation of the booklet's "approach four", but this was the exception rather than the rule.

> Certain organizations will have more impact [in the future] . . . [like] Kiwanis, Rotary . . . Instead of going our separate ways we will work together, we won't be in competition. . . . Cooperation between the County and the Town will have to be a reality. . . . [we] can't continue to go our own way. . . . [it is] almost like the Town and County are interdependent.

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> Without visioning we are dead in the water. . . . we need consensus in the county about what it is we want to be . . . we have to find a reasoned approach to growth . . . no decision is a decision . . . We need more participation in decision making . . . generate a better informed set of governing bodies . . . The Board of Supervisors has come a long way though, making an effort to learn . . . more diversity . . . all positives.

Both of the remarks above point to approach four at least indirectly. But again, these comments were exceptions. Although many people recognized (almost universally) a need for improvement in town – county collaboration, it was rarely listed as a focal point for a vision for the future.

The results of the issue framing sessions, however, were different. These sessions illustrate how the group created new shared meanings that were not evident across the interviews. In the first issue framing session, the large group was broken up into four small groups. Each group was given a flip chart and asked to discuss and record their reactions to the following: "Thinking of the future of the community, What are your concerns? What are the concerns of your friends and neighbors?" This activity generated over a hundred written comments. Within some of the groups, discussions turned to what is commonly referred to as NIMBYism (meaning, "not in my backyard"). The sentiment was that participation in community affairs was slight to nonexistent unless people were against something. Specifically, the following related comments were recorded:

> Not sure citizens know what they want

> Those against win in planning future

> Apathy - only against, loudest are organized and negative! Example, prison, zoning

> NIMBY - seems to be only response

> Changes in when people work - shifts makes interaction harder

Portion of population has lost hope - self perpetuating?

Community not ready for social diversity

Negative focus seems to be loudest heard

These, along with a few other comments were grouped under the heading "community awareness" by the group of committee members that worked on the categorization between the first two meetings. A group sense of a problem or issue was beginning to emerge. The structured process of having the group categorize issues raised helped facilitate the learning process in this case. It raised group awareness and lead to further dialogue on the issue.

After the smaller group of committee members categorized the concerns, the categorized list was sent out to the committee in preparation for the next meeting. The list was reviewed to start off this meeting, this time held at the Max Meadows Ruritan building. Once again, the larger group was split into small groups charged with the task of identifying generalized "approaches" or perspectives based on the clusters of concerns. Here the groups were asked to discuss the *core beliefs and assumptions* of the various concerns and identify approaches based on these different motivations and values. Once again, the "community awareness" approach emerged, this time in a more articulated form. Two of the three groups explicitly included an approach around this idea. One group articulated it in terms of improving the "relationship of the individual to the community" in terms of the government – citizen relationship, the community nurturing children, and people being "positively engaged" in their community. The other group approached it in terms of "planning with citizens, including a focus on youth and getting citizens to be involved." At the end of the evening, after the three groups presented their

approaches, one participant offered an integrative set of three approaches, one of which discussed the "culture of the community."

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the second meeting was difficult, being rather abstract for the participants. Nevertheless, by the end of the evening, the four approaches were beginning to crystallize. The research team took the group's work at that point and discussed together their observations of the discussions and the product of that evening's work and developed four approaches that seemed to be an appropriate integration of the work done so far. The fourth approach was labeled "focus on social infrastructure" and was meant to capture the issue as it was thus far articulated. This categorization was then sent to the committee for feedback and clarification and then presented in person at the final issue framing session. The group unanimously endorsed the four approaches as capturing their collective work and then that evening worked again in small groups to "flesh out" the approaches in preparation for developing them into a discussion booklet. The "community" approach became well articulated, focusing on community leadership, civic engagement, and working cooperatively together. The group (again) collectively endorsed this newly articulated idea.

What began as a few scattered comments relating to community participation had developed into a well articulated community "issue." While it is apparent from the interviews that a few of the committee members had thought about "social connections" before, it certainly was not a collectively shared meaning. Through the issue framing process it became such a shared meaning, just as the third approach about technology was. This is an example of the community process. Different experiences and perspectives joined together in a group process and created something new. Certainly the

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twenty or so individuals in the group did not have that "knowledge" before it was

articulated collectively. Some had thought about the problem of NIMBYism, and perhaps

had even talked to others about it. But over the course of four meetings a collective,

group idea emerged that became new knowledge to all of those who participated in its

creation.

This is one clear example of the new knowledge as it created by the citizens

committee during the issue framing sessions. The other three approaches the group

articulated (industrial growth, rural preservation, and the "technology wave") also

represent new knowledge in the sense that the group collectively framed (or reframed)

the issues through the course of their group work. Although industrial growth had

certainly been a concept that everyone understood at some level coming into the sessions,

the group now had a *collective understanding* or a *new shared meaning* around that issue

that was not there prior to their interaction.

Discovering themselves

A forum with the "Roundtable on Poverty," a group of local social service

workers, clergymen, and activists, who share a concern with alleviating poverty in their

community, was spirited throughout. When the group addressed "approach four", the one

about community involvement, "some real discovery" began to occur. The discussion

included exchanges about how much people seem to be "against everything", the "not in

my backyard mentality." A local pastor noted that he saw very little action across groups

in the community, such as churches working together. Other comments noted the need to

be more "inclusive" and for an "expanded sense of community." Another noted that

perhaps "a sense of community that embraces *community*" is the appropriate starting

point for the community vision. Local government ought to include people better, another mentioned, but "citizens must accept responsibilities too." Another expressed how there just were not many "community" meetings. She asked, "when do we really have an opportunity to exchange ideas with each other?"

What occurred in this meeting, clearly, was this issue of community involvement had not been discussed in this way before and that as the group shared their perspectives and experiences with it, a collective "framing" of the issue occurred. This was evident in the observations of the meeting and the flow of the discussion, as well as in the comments written down on a short questionnaire. The question asked after the meeting was whether "the group came up with any fresh thinking?" More than half of the participants mentioned something about the community involvement issue, with comments such as "the need for greater participation from all segments of the community", "participating fully in community", and "I liked the direction of inclusivity (total community)". The answers to this question, asking about what "the group" produced, give clear indication that the community involvement idea, as the group framed it, was a group product. It was an integration of the information presented in the booklet and the different experiences and perspectives of the individuals in the group. That it was a "group" idea was corroborated not only in the research team's field notes, but in the responses given by the participants on the questionnaire.

In the end, the research team found that the majority of forums experienced a group "a-ha" around the ideas contained in approach four. The introduction of the subject-matter caused participants to reflect on their own experiences with community involvement, and as those experiences and ideas were shared, the groups naturally

coalesced around this idea. Different groups would focus on different elements, but evidence of group recognition and appreciation for the issue was evident from the forum notes and post-forum questionnaires. Virtually every forum concluded with group recognition that any vision for the community would need "approach four" to be actualized. This is rather remarkable given the differences across groups; some with business managers, others with retirees, with government officials, with "blue-collar" workers, and yet others with high school students. No matter the composition of the group, one collective product of the dialogues remained the same, the mutually supported notion that greater community involvement is necessary for the community to move forward in *any* direction.

Reframing "community leadership"

Another example of a group "a-ha" moment centered on the issue of community leadership. A forum was held on September 11, 2002 at the community hospital, co-sponsored by the *Wytheville Enterprise*, WYVE Radio, and the Wythe County Community Hospital. The idea was that one way to commemorate 9-11 would be "celebrate democracy by discussion [the] community and its future" (Porter-Nichols 2002b). Although the advertising was quite well done for this forum, only 14 people came that evening. It was hard to predict on that first anniversary how people would respond. Nevertheless, the 14 participants were eager to participate and the ensuing discussion was excellent.

The meeting was punctuated with moments of real collective learning. In other words, the community process emerged from the structured discussion. This was particularly noticeable around "approach four" concerning "social infrastructure." The

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group began talking very cynically about what they termed "community leadership."

Specific comments from that conversation included

> "The average Wytheville guy does not feel like he has one bit of access to the government" [lots of echoes of agreement in the room] "I am speaking for myself."

> "Wytheville is a very closed, elitist society . . . it is a little fiefdom . . ."

> "Yes, that is the mushroom treatment – keep them in the dark and feed them a lot of [manure]"

In other words, the discussion was focused on "us" and "them." Community leadership was being characterized and understood by the group as what "they" (meaning government officials in the Town and County) are doing or not doing to "us" (meaning everyone else).

Then something changed, rather remarkably. At this particular session there were six members of the research team present, four principal researchers and two graduate assistants. After the meeting we had a "debriefing" to compare notes (literally and figuratively). Everyone recognized the shift regarding community leadership. One of the forum participants commented about what "we" are doing about this, which *shifted the trajectory of the discussion*. The conversation went back and forth and began to include comments like

> "there is not a culture of collaboration [here] . . . there is a desperate need for . . . people to come together"

> "are we sure we want to preserve community character" [in reference to approach two, pointing out that lack of collaboration and togetherness is not a desirable trait]

> [speaking of developing community leadership] "Leadership starts when the children are little – in the schools – people do things because they think they can"

"We should lead the change instead of allowing the change to lead us"

In other words, there was a noticeable shift in how an issue was framed from "what they can do for us" to "what can we do for ourselves?" The shift in the conversation allowed the group to open the door to knew lines of thinking, including how they can develop leadership in a broad sense. This turned the discussion toward what could be done in the schools and how the community could create a climate of active citizenship. In the concluding segment of the forum, the facilitator asked the group what observations they want to submit *as a group* to the visioning process. The following is the list they made, copied verbatim from the meeting notes.

- Be prepared for change
- Need yardstick to measure what we already have
- Need for the right balance
- Need broader community involvement
- Need more access to government
- Need to develop new leadership
- Need to develop leadership capacity, ambition
- Don't wait on government

The group "a-ha" was a dramatic shift in how the group framed community leadership. The community process enabled participants to look beyond a we-they mentality and begin to think in terms of leadership more holistically.

Mutual Understanding Develops

Group recognition of the importance of community involvement was noted in almost all of the forums (including the high school students), as listed in the forum notes at the end where the group was asked what they all agree on. Another related, major example of integration on a particular theme (or developed mutual understanding) that occurred across forums was the idea of the need for an appropriate synthesis of the approaches rather than going with one. At the end of most forums participants

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collectively expressed a desire to have the approaches work together, that they must work together, rather than to move forward with one only. This is manifest (again) in the forum notes and also in many comments written down on the forum questionnaire.

Many of the responses to the group idea question asked after the forum related to how the approaches work together. For example,

> "relationship between four approaches is fragile, however, they must work together in some ways to improve this community"

> "Balanced idea with community and its growth"

> "Combine all four areas"

> "We started to meld the four approaches and prioritizing"

> "I liked considering the four approaches and how they could all be used in planning our future"

When the committee reconvened after the series of community forums concluded, this sentiment of finding an appropriate balance between all the approaches and how they can be seen to support one another, was evident. The committee had a shared sense of how "approach four" reinforced the others, how technology could help support preservation and also improve the economy, and so on. It was deeper than simply saying "we want it all." The group(s) wrestled with the contradictions and sought synthesis, an integration, that represented a realistic vision for their future development. The process of dialogue throughout the forums helped create this integration that would become the foundation of the community vision statement.

Again, the important distinction between this knowledge—integrated knowledge as a product of the community process—and knowledge that an individual could gain about the issue just from reading the booklet, is that the group, as a collective, develops a

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mutual understanding of it based on their discussion and the interweaving of experiences and perspectives that takes place therein. While many people certainly could have read through the booklet and come to that conclusion themselves, not all would have in this manner. The dialogue—the interplay of ideas, perspectives, and experiences—changes individual and collective understanding and produces something new. This is how the group or collective idea, as Follett called it, can simultaneously belong to the collective and the individual (1998). This is the community process (Follett 1919).

Integration Compared to Other Sources of Knowledge

The preceding accounts demonstrate a variety of forms the "new knowledge" of the integrative (community) process can take. During the issue framing sessions, knowledge in the form of a *collective framing* of an issue, that clearly did not exist prior to the intervention, was created. In this case the learning was *evolutionary*, that is, the framing process was gradual, over many meetings. But there did come a point where it was clear that the group, collectively, shared an understanding of how they framed the issue. During the community forums the community process was observed in group "a-ha" moments; noticeable shifts in the group discourse. One example demonstrates how a group can collectively come to share a new idea or meaning. The Roundtable on Poverty group left the meeting collectively aware of the importance of community involvement, a product of their dialogue. The other example from another forum showed how a collective framing of an issue can suddenly shift, and be re-framed. In this case a group re-framed community leadership from "them" to "us."

Whether one chooses to specify learning in terms of a "collective idea" or a "shared meaning", what all of the learning exemplifies is that the community process

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produces shared or collective understanding that did not exist prior to the process. This is what makes the community process so important and so vital to community learning. The community "learns" something in those exchanges that it could not learn any other way. This is perhaps why action research is so relevant in the community context. It represents a "third way" to obtain community information. Table 5.2 illustrates this point by summarizing the main themes drawn from three different sources of community information. The first is quantitative data from a survey the county administered in 1997. Access was given to the data from this survey and it was analyzed as part of the overall community profile process. The second kind of data was the qualitative data from the stakeholder interviews.

The third data pool comes from the forums, where "input" was collective rather than individual. Each data spoke to broad thematic areas of concern for the project: community strengths, problems, and priorities for the future. The survey data and interviews were analyzed and presented in terms of these themes to the citizens committee during the initial community profile stage. The input from the forums was summarized in terms of these main themes at the beginning of the vision statement drafting process. The first and most obvious observation from these summaries is that the same themes can be recognized across the different pools of data. The dominant theme of the importance of scenic natural beauty was consistent. The need for better job opportunities was consistent.

Thematic Area	1997 County Survey	2001 Stakeholder Interviews	2002-03 Community Forums
Community Strengths	Scenic natural beauty (65%)	Scenic natural beauty	Scenic natural beauty, "rural, small town character"
	Rural character and open land (57%)	Friendliness and work ethic of the people	Good people
	Small community atmosphere (54%)	Good quality of life	Strategic location of community
		Location, access via interstates	
Community Problems	Lack of job opportunities (67%)	"Brain drain", losing "best and brightest youth"	Lack of quality, "career" jobs
	Rising county taxes (59%)	Education system	Education system
		Lack of zoning in county	Youth, "brain drain" issue
		Lack of "vision", no "big picture"	Lack of positive community involvement (NIMBYism)
		Town-County disconnect	Town-County disconnect
			Lack of community-wide vision
Priorities for Future	Public schools (79%)	"Diversified" industrial growth	Zoning in the county
	Fire, rescue, and emergency services (71%)	High quality, "clean" jobs to keep youth	Information technology as way to balance good jobs and environment
	Law enforcement (62%)	Planned, "orderly" growth	Increase community collaboration, including Town-County, citizens, civic groups, churches, etc.
	Grow at same rate or slower (88%)	Town-County work together more	Developing community's tourism potential, again, balancing good jobs and environment
			Shaping interstate plans to meet community needs

Table 5.2 – Main Themes from Three Sources of Community Input

Table 5.2 demonstrates the progressive "richness" of data as one moves from one level to another. For example, because a survey limits respondents to categories already identified, the other dominant theme of angst over "brain drain" was not identified, and neither was the consistent them of town-county relations. The interviews brought out these themes clearly and the themes carried over and were very much present in the forum dialogues. So what did the dialogues produce that was "new", that could not have been discovered in interviews? The table suggests that there are two important groupings of "new" knowledge that is evidence of the community process. First, the forums produced *collective or shared understandings* of issues. For example, as discussed in this section, while some people in the interviews touched upon "NIMBY" involvement or the lack of a community-wide vision, the forums clarified and sharpened this theme, and most importantly, transformed the insights into *collective held* knowledge as opposed to the perceptions of a few people.

Another form of new knowledge from the forums is found in some of the differences between the main themes of the interviews and the main themes of the forums. For example, in the interviews, the need for better collaboration between the town and county was consistently mentioned as a priority for the future. This observation was carried forward through the forums, but importantly *expanded* to include a broader recognition of the need for collaboration between citizens, government, civic groups, churches, etc. This was a dominant theme of the forums and a clear indication that community leadership had been reframed and a new, shared vision of community collaboration created. Other new priorities emerged in the dialogue as well. While some (very few) of the interviewees mentioned technology and tourism as important priorities,

the dialogue in the forums highlighted the role these sectors can play in maintaining an appropriate balance between job growth and community preservation. In other words, technology and tourism were major themes from the forums that were not identified as major themes in the interviews.

Finally, one other observation made when comparing the three pools of data is the difference in emphasis on the idea of growth. In the 1997 survey, when asked how they would like to see the community grow, an overwhelming majority of respondents said either at the same rate or at a slower rate (or none at all). On the other hand, when asked about their vision for the community's future in the stakeholder interviews, a majority of the participants spoke in terms of growth, how the community should grow, that should plans be made. In the forums, however, growth took on a much more moderated perspective. When people did discuss growth, it was virtually unanimous that the rural character and scenic beauty was simply an unacceptable trade-off. In other words, through the dialogue citizens came to a shared understanding that the growth they would like to see is in terms of economic opportunity, and that does not have to translate into real population growth necessarily. The vision that grew out of the forums embraced this notion of balance and defined growth in terms of economic opportunity, not community size as was implied in the interviews. It seems as though the forums helped citizens reconcile the seemingly conflicting opinions raised in the survey; little or no growth but a desire for more and better jobs. The vision statement reflects this new knowledge in its articulation of how a balance between economic opportunity and preservation is possible.

Structured Processes and Learning

Postulate II: Structured processes of dialogue and deliberation facilitate the community process.

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Postulate II makes the case for structured processes of dialogue and deliberation as creating conditions for the community process. This section looks to this component of community learning and what role structured processes played in the Wytheville study. Specifically, it was found that there is a learning curve for participants in learning the process. Furthermore, the important role of the facilitator is considered as structured processes typically require some sort of moderator or facilitator present to keep the process "structured."

Learning the Process

The learning in the issue framing sessions was more than the new shared understandings created in terms of framing the issues. The group had to learn the process itself and this proved to be a challenge. No one in the group had participated in an "issue forum" before, let alone an "issue framing." Though the research team talked about dialogue, deliberation, visioning, and so forth many times, and provided participants a "map" of where the process was headed, it became painfully apparent during the second meeting that many participants were lost in terms of the process. The fact that the group was framing issues so that the community at-large could have deliberations over those issues was repeatedly explained, but it took quite some time for this to be fully understood. Occasionally someone would ask "now what does this have to do with whether or not we keep the road?" or at other times certain members would want to "sell" their solutions to the group. The group worked through this, however, with the help of the research facilitators. It became apparent to us (the research team) that one way to help the group learn "the process" would be to have them participate in a forum first, then back up and say "this is where we are heading."

This was a lesson learned in terms of facilitating the learning process. Yet somehow the participants persisted and eventually "got it." The fourth meeting (third with the entire group) was where the approaches were clarified to the point that the booklet could be made. The energy and creativity during that session was palpable. The group collectively seemed to have "learned" the process and were excited about what they had produced. My field notes from that evening reflect this learning.

> I reminded folks of where we've been and where we hope to go. I gave another pitch about deliberation, the need to honestly face tensions among our own value systems, etc. I felt well received and that everyone was receptive and excited about the direction this was going in. Toward the end of the night it even seemed that [a public official who seemed skeptical in the first few meetings] is starting to "get it." [The participant who labeled himself "the cynic"] is definitely into this . . . he is very enthused. . . . the groups all did fine jobs of seeing both sides of each issue. As they presented their stuff to the whole committee everyone clapped at the end of each presentation. There was a good deal of enthusiasm and many nice comments to us [the research team] afterward ("good job", "this is great", etc.). ["The cynic"] approached me and commented (in a very enthusiastic, approving way) that, as was brought up a lot in the issues listing, participation by the public has only been negative in the past, that people would come out "against" only after it was too late to make a difference anyway. "This is a very different way of approaching [issues]" he said. "This is the first time things have been approached in another way . . . I hope this bears fruit . . ." (names substituted by descriptions to maintain anonymity)

Though in hindsight the research team agreed that having the group experience a forum and an "issue book" first would have accelerated their collective learning of the process, it was very clear that they did learn the process anyway.

One important observation to make here, therefore, is that the community process must be learned. While social interaction can create shared meaning we find that specific forms of interaction, namely, dialogue and deliberation, are particularly well suited for facilitating learning. This observation is well established in the literature (Johnson and

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Johnson 2000; Isaacs 1999a). Yet, we do not give attention to the fact that dialogue and deliberation represent a distinctly different way of communicating. It takes time for individuals and groups to learn the process. The experience from Wytheville indicates that the learning of the process is as valuable as the learning in terms of content. As the group collectively seemed to "get it", the level of enthusiasm and commitment went up.

Creatively Integrating

The preceding accounts illustrate how the community process was manifest in the committee work as well as within the isolated forums that took place as part of the community outreach phase of the project. It is apparent that creative integration can occur not only in extended forums of interaction, but also in more short term instances. This was the case for groups that normally meet together, like the neighborhood group or Sunday School group, as well as for groups that came together simply for a forum (where the community at-large was invited and we did not know before hand who the participants would be). There did not seem to be a qualitative difference between organized groups and the ephemeral groups that came together for community-wide forums. The creative community process occurs rather naturally when people are given "safe" space to speak and can agree on some bounds to the conversation (i.e., what we called ground rules). The structure of the booklet helped focus the creative process along the lines of the issue at hand, and in many ways was a stimulus for creative thinking since the ideas were presented in ways that people had not conceived before.

Beyond having a proper setting and a stimulus, such as the discussion book, it appears that the facilitator plays a crucial role in the community process. At many points the research team fretted about the structure of the meetings and the actions of the

facilitator. The facilitator not only helps ensure the "ground rules" necessary for the community process are kept (i.e., respect each other's views, don't talk over people, etc.), but the facilitator can also move the discussion along to seek creative integrations. Throughout my own field notes as an observer of forums I noted time and again that the process gained momentum and really became a learning process as the facilitator would more toward identifying what the group viewed as the primary tradeoffs and what "common ground" they could agree on at that point.

Upon reflection it seems that the need for a facilitator is more than anything a function of time. In other words, because in each case time was limited, the question was always how to steer the discussion toward "the common ground part." If time is not an issue, the experience of Wytheville indicates that interested citizens, given the chance to talk about community affairs, will create the "community process" quite naturally themselves. Yes, sometimes they talk past each other, and yes, sometimes the conversation breaks down. Here a facilitator can be very helpful. Likewise, learning "skills" of deliberative dialogue – learning the process – or at least agreeing to respect others' views, definitely helps citizens create dialogue rather than debate. In general, the overall impression from the forums and committee work is that the community process is quite natural given favorable circumstances.

The previous examples from the issue framing and community forums illustrate the community process as it was experienced in the Wytheville Project during the issue framing sessions and community forums. Several observations can be made relative to Postulate II, about the role of structured processes of dialogue and deliberation facilitating the learning process of community. First, the experience of Wytheville

suggests that a formula for stimulating the community process in one-time meetings such as the community forums is to have a discussion guide (the forum booklet) and a "safe" space for authentic dialogue, created and maintained by a skilled facilitator, and the result is often the kind of "a-ha" moments described above where the group learns together and creates new shared meanings.

It is also useful to structure processes in a way that forces participants to address the full range of issues that emerge. There is a natural tendency to gravitate toward dominant themes or issues and discard or forget about more seemingly "minor" observations or comments. If this was the case in the issue framing process then the booklet probably would have been industrial growth versus rural preservation, period. The reason the technology and community building approaches emerged is because the comments or concerns that lead to them were "left on the table" and people were asked to consider them throughout the issue framing. This lead to further reflection and integration and the eventual articulation of the approaches as they now exist in the booklet. Facilitators of learning processes should consider ways to keep even the most marginal of concerns "on the table."

Evolving and Restructuring

Another observation from the issue framing process concerns focusing on underlying assumptions. This is a common element of dialogue (Isaacs 1999a) as well as part of the issue framing process (Kettering Foundation 2001). It was apparent that during the issue framing sessions, when participants were able to really get to the point of *exploring together the underlying assumptions* of different approaches, creative ideas and

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shifts in understanding were more likely to occur. This of course is almost impossible to "measure" but nevertheless it was evident in experiencing the evolution of the group.

The experience of the issue framing sessions and the forums identifies two *different manifestations of group learning* which might be termed *evolutionary and revolutionary*. One way learning occurs is over time, through *repeated sessions of dialogue whereby new shared meanings gradually emerge and coalesce* (evolutionary). For the most part this is how learning occurred during the issue framing sessions. Another manifestation of learning is the "a-ha" moment when there is a sudden shift in conversation where the group collectively "creates" a shared meaning or alters an existing shared meaning. This is revolutionary, at least for the group, and it occurred frequently in the community forums where a *combination of the structured dialogue and the flow of the conversation produced new shared meaning or understanding in a short period of time*.

Developing Relationships

> **Postulate III**: The community process creates, maintains, or strengthens the relationships which constitute the social structure of community.

Postulate III suggests a relationship between process and structure in that participating in the community process positively affects the relationships that constitute community structure. The Wytheville Project provides significant anecdotal evidence of this assumption. Many new friendships were made throughout the process, particularly among those that worked together on the citizens committee. Many of these individuals were already acquainted with one another, but being involved in a rich discussion outside of formal roles added a new dimension to some of those relationships. It is quite clear

that elected officials from the Town and County have discussed matters of community importance together on numerous occasions. The link between the Town and County is a crucial one in the overall community structure.

Yet the interviews highlighted dramatically a sense of disconnection between the Town and County governments. Over the course of the project, however, elected and appointed officials sat down together, with other community members, in a nonofficial setting to discuss openly issues that were community-wide as opposed to jurisdictionally based. While it is hard to account for how those relationships changed over the course of the project, it is apparent that participating in the dialogue only served to better the relations and strengthen the bonds that already existed. A member of the Town Council, in the March 2004 focus group, noted that the Joint Governing Bodies meetings (held quarterly) have traditionally been very superficial and a "waste of time." More recently, however, the meetings have had a lot more "depth" and a lot more of thinking in terms of "what is good for the whole . . . looking at the standpoint of working together" as opposed to thinking only in terms of jurisdictional interests.

Many other relationships were formed through the process that perhaps at least begun to be new links in the community network. One of the important connections was between the local newspaper, *The Wytheville Enterprise*, and the citizens committee. While the paper is very civic-oriented, it seems that the direct involvement and sponsorship of the visioning process helped link the newspaper to other institutions in ways that have not been done before. More study would need to be done in order to clarify some of the new "linkages" but on the whole the experience of the committee and

the research team suggests that participation in the process only served to help make connections or strengthen existing ones.

Some very active, key "players", who may not hold any formal position on a board, commission, etc., seemed to become energized in the process and build new linkages. A case-in-point is one of the visioning project leaders, Bill Gilmer, who is extremely well connected and is widely recognized in the community. Beyond owning a thriving printing business downtown, he is involved in the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, and a host of other charitable activities. He was a facilitative leader throughout the project, such as the time, mentioned in the previous chapter, when he "sold" the project to the newspaper editor and secured her enthusiastic support for the project.

Another instance of how this individual made new – or perhaps activated dormant – connections in the community is when he helped arrange a community forum sponsored by the hospital. Due to his connections with the hospital administrator, Chamber of Commerce, the radio station, and the newspaper, the event became a collaborative venture, displaying community field-like properties. His business designed an advertisement which was given a quarter page in the newspaper for free. The hospital contributed the space and refreshments. And the radio station publicized the event. The presence of this kind of bridge-building, "generalized leader" is one important indication of how the process helped develop the structure.

Focusing Attention on Community Structure

> **Postulate IV**: A model of community as the structure of interinstitutional relations focuses the attention of researchers and community participants on the linkages across community institutions and social fields.

The fourth postulate of the community learning concept states that a model of community as the structure of interinstitutional relations focuses the attention of researchers and community participants on the linkages across community institutions and social fields. As noted previously, the stakeholder interviews highlighted some important features of community structure in Wytheville. One very interesting finding from the interviews with regard to perceived weaknesses or problems with the community had to do with inter-governmental relations, discussed more fully later in this chapter. Another interesting cluster of comments from the interviews in terms of social structure was the number of people who described as a community weakness a culture of NIMBYism when it comes to community issues. One life-long resident expressed it as, "people only get involved if they are against something." The sense seems to be that although there is community pride and that many individuals and groups do a lot to benefit the community, that this somehow does not translate into strong community involvement. When it comes to difficult community-wide issues, people only get involved if they are against something. Moreover, there is no culture of citizens coming together to discuss community issues. When people get involved in numbers it is typically in protest of something.

A few key stories from the recent past were repeatedly told or held up as typical manifestations of this culture. The major example given relates to the recent (late

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nineties) decision of whether or not to site a private prison in the county. Some leaders in the County government argued that a private prison would be an economic boon for the community and negotiated with a private firm to locate in there. Apparently the issue "blew up" and really divided the community. Several mentioned that citizens were split, about 50/50, for or against the prison. People mentioned County Board meetings with crowds shouting at supervisors as they arrived. The proposal ended up being defeated and the board member who spearheaded the effort was voted out of office after his first term.

A more recent decision by the Town to develop a piece of farmland into a shopping center featuring a Wal-Mart and a Lowes also generated a lot of political heat, again, mostly of the NIMBY variety. Even more recently, the County's decision to approve a livestock market also generated a great deal of NIMBY involvement. What all the examples illustrate is that the community has no history of inclusive dialogue on public issues. Decisions were made and certain citizens rose up in opposition. This is apparently why the County still has no zoning ordinance even though the number against zoning is relatively small.[2] What the interviews revealed was that although some formal relationships between organizations are obviously present, the reality of the community structure is that it is fragmented, that community culture historically is not perceived to be as collaborative as it could be.

Throughout the project it was also evident that there are a myriad of ways in which organizations may collaborate beyond having overlapping leadership. "Active" relationships across organizations and institutions need not be formal. Perhaps a teacher becomes acquainted with an administrator at the hospital and the two develop a program

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[2] A 1997 County survey indicated that a quarter of surveyed residents were against zoning, with half being for it and the other quarter being unsure.

for high school seniors to volunteer at the hospital as part of their curriculum. Clearly this is the kind of linkage we are looking for when speaking of community structure, but it would not show up in a network analysis. This is where the notion of "active" versus "passive" relationships (Lane and Dorfman 1997) comes in, and it involves a number of interactions far too complex than could ever be analyzed using network analysis. This is not to imply that community structure is too complex to analyze; it only underscores the fact that at present our methods for "measuring", and further, for understanding it are in the very early stages of development. This is an area ripe for further methodological innovation.

Social Structure of the Greater Wytheville Community

Given these problems of assessing community structure, we now ask, how does this model of community learning focus us on the structure? The stakeholder interviews indicated that a rather dense network, in terms of overlapping leadership, exists in the Wytheville area. This is not surprising given that it is a relatively small rural community. Numerous people, on numerous occasions, expressed to me a perception that about 200 people run (or govern) the community, defined generally as the County or at least the greater Wytheville area. The following comments from two key informants, both community leaders, expresses the sentiment well.

> ...I have long thought that about 200 people run the County. They overlap, run the Town, County, Rotary, Chautauqua...there are certain movers and shakers in the community...by and large they are more articulate.

> You know...I figured out one day, about 200 people actually run this county. That's people that actually serve on commissions, committees,

joint authorities, elected positions, town manager, all that, 200 people at the most.[3]

In fact, even with an incomplete knowledge of all the organizations and all the leadership for all of the organizations, a core clique can be identified that includes [at least] the Town and County governments, planning commissions, the industrial development authority, the Chamber of Commerce, the community hospital, the community college, and the Rotary Club.

A preliminary examination of leadership of primary community organizations does substantiate this. The Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, Joint Industrial Development Authority, Wythe County Community Hospital, and the Town and County Governments have numerous connections with each other and other organizations. The School District and Community College have fewer links than expected, however. Still, the amount of overlap is probably due to the fact that Wytheville is a relatively small, rural community. Furthermore, the community culture is characterized as historically being one of non-engagement in the sense that there is small minority that actively participates through serving on boards and commissions and a large majority that only gets involved when "the bulldozer is at the door."

The community structure question is not one of whether there is overlapping leadership so much as to what extent there are "active relationships" across community organizations (Lane and Dorfman 1997). The preliminary network analysis, which did reveal numerous linkages, failed to make links (again, in terms of overlapping leadership) between some organizations which we know from the interviews have significant

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[3] First quote from interview, July 2001. The second quote is from Danny Gordon, manager of local radio station WYVE and member of a number of local boards, including the industrial development authority. The quote came from the radio program on the community's vision, broadcast live on June 3, 2002.

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interaction. One such case is the community college and the Town government, supporting the point that formal linkages are an inadequate assessment. Community structure is about relationships. There is clearly a dense web of relationships across the institutions that govern the community. However, there are weak links, the most important of which has been identified by almost every person interviewed in 2001, that is, the relationship between the Town and the County.

Informant Perceptions of Community Structure

As discussed briefly in chapter four, the dozens of interviews I conducted were remarkable for the congruity on the town – county relationship issue. Although some of the elected officials from the town and county mentioned that "they are working together on some things" and "things are better now than they have ever been", the majority of comments reflected widespread recognition of a disconnect. Representative comments include

"they don't work together well"

"the Town and County often go in different directions"

"its better now than it was, but there is still room for better relations"

"don't see dialogue between Town and County. Town Manager and County Administrator aren't brainstorming on projects, or cooperating on projects."

Despite these and many other negative comments about the relationship, many interviewees, both public officials and others, recognize that the relationship is better, and that the current leaders are on very good terms with one another. What is different, apparently, is that "there are different mindsets." Or, as one official candidly noted, "right now we are kind of marching to the beat of different drummers."

This issue resurfaced in the post-project focus group of key informants. The concept of community structure seemed intuitive to the group generally. In a discussion of how the community vision would be implemented, everyone agreed that it would take a collaborative effort between different community institutions, particularly the Town and County governments. One member of the group noted that the two governing bodies "are very far apart ideologically" and that somehow the two would have to come closer together. Another commented that the two bodies actually have a lot of interaction in the field of economic development. One of the elected officials in the group followed by saying that "there are a lot of off-the-radar avenues for interaction between the two" and cited several examples of joint-ventures. However, it was pointed out by another that the interaction seems limited to specific areas of cooperation rather than a generalized culture of collaboration.

The focus group also identified other links that need to be made in terms of the community vision, beyond the need to strengthen, or make "active", the link between the two governments. Although there was participation in the project by the president of the community college and by the hospital, it was noted by the group that they need to be more involved and connected with the other institutions that played a more prominent role (such as the Town, Chamber of Commerce, and Industrial Authority). Also, the involvement of youth and schools generally was noted and identified as an area that needed more work.

Postulate IV understands the "community" of community learning is represented by a structure of relations and that for learning to happen at the community level it must impact that structure. The key informants that participated in the follow-up focus group

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all seemed to agree that the community has a strong web of relations that facilitate communication and coordinated action across community institutions. One member of the group pointed out that the inter-institutional coordination "goes on all the time" informally, "just cut up and sliced." He noted Rotary Club meetings and other situations where institutional leaders interact. Whether or not the relationships are "active" or "passive" is hard to tell though. Everyone in the focus group agreed that the community structure could be strengthened. Perhaps the most important "lesson" regarding community structure from the Wytheville experience is that although it is difficult to approach analytically due to the complexity of relationships, it nevertheless "makes sense" intuitively and serves as a powerful way to understand community.

Community Learning in Wytheville

Postulate V: Community learning occurs as knowledge created through the community process is fed-forward to the level of the community structure or field. A community has learned when this collective knowledge is institutionalized across the community structure, or rather, embedded across the web of community institutions.

In the Wytheville project there was ample evidence of group or collaborative learning, what is termed here the "community process." Like the new creations made by a jazz improvisation, we saw in the forums and particularly so in the citizen committee work, the evolution of new ideas and new mutual understandings as a product of the interplay of perspectives, ideas, and experiences that occurred within the structure of a deliberative dialogue. Though bounded by the culture and language of this particular community, citizens nevertheless explored new ways of framing issues and were able to

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jointly articulate previously unarticulated issues in their own terms. At least to some extent, they experienced democracy as a creative process, the process of community.

The greater issue, however, is whether the learning that occurred during the visioning process ever became "community" learning. Certainly the citizens committee learned and participants in community forums learned individually and collectively, but can we say in any meaningful way that "the community" learned? The concept of community learning described in chapter three says that community learning occurs to the extent that the knowledge created in the community process is fed-forward to and embedded in the structure of community. This embedding or institutionalizing of knowledge may take the form of shared understandings across that structure, new community norms, practices, rituals (i.e., new community institutions), or formal community-level policy, or new associations or organizations.

Finding evidence of community learning, therefore, entails identifying "artifacts" of community learning. Changes in community-wide norms, language, and ritual would be difficult to discern this early into the intervention. We would expect such changes to be gradual, evolutionary, and therefore, this would be almost impossible to trace at this point. On the other hand, there may be some *social artifacts* that at least suggest that the learning did reach the level of community, that the new knowledge became embedded, at least to some extent, in the community's social structure.

<p style="text-align:center">Artifacts of Community Learning</p>

Two such artifacts appear to be the forum booklet and the community vision statement. The way in which the two documents were developed and distributed indicates that the knowledge contained in them represents more than simply the learning

of a handful of local residents. The knowledge represented in those documents appears to have been distributed across the structure of the community, the web of community institutions. How is this so? The community learning concept developed in chapter three suggests that the learning that occurs in the community process can become *community* learning when the knowledge produced is *fed-forward to the level of community*.

When we understand community to mean the structure of social relations in a locality, specifically in terms of the community-oriented institutional linkages, we understand that community learning is learning across that web or network of networks. New knowledge is embedded across the web of community. In the Wytheville Project, the learning was fed-forward to the community level in three different ways: 1) the learning can take place within the community field; 2) the local media can integrate knowledge at the level of community; or 3) "new" knowledge at the group level can be communicated and integrated, formally or informally, to level of community structure.

Embedding Knowledge in the Community Field

The publication of the booklet (by a local printer, at cost) corresponded with a local media campaign which included a series of articles in the newspaper discussing the four approaches of the booklet and an editorial lauding the visioning effort. The local radio station publicized the booklet through advertisements and guest spots on the morning program by representatives, all leading up to an hour-long broadcast featuring committee members discussing the contents of the booklet. A booth was set up at a large homemaking convention. Pamphlets were mailed to churches and civic organizations. In

short, the word got out and a great many people[4] in the community became aware of the question of the community's vision and the issues as they had been framed in the booklet.

Perhaps more important than the sheer number of people exposed to the "four approaches" was the fact that *key representatives of the institutions constituting the community structure* took part in developing, publishing, and promoting the booklet. The booklet became a collaborative creation of individuals from the Town and County governments, the community college, the hospital, the Chamber of Commerce, the JIDA, and so on. In retrospect, perhaps the weakest link in this web was the local school district. Although one of their top administrators was on the committee, it was not until the high school students became involved that the schools were a major contributor.

The important point here is that the new knowledge in terms of the way the issues were framed and articulated in the booklet became embedded at the level of community structure, at least to some extent, due to the individuals involved in its creation and distribution. In other words, the community is defined in terms of a structure of inter-institutional relationships that became "active" when the different institutional leaders worked together to make the booklet. The active form of community structure is precisely what Wilkinson (1999) explains is a community field. A community field arises when different social fields in a community are linked together actively in some form of collective action *for the community* rather than for some narrow interest. So one way for community learning to occur is for the learning process (the community process) to occur within the community field. The work of the citizens committee was precisely that. The

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[4] We estimated that over 400 people interacted with the project team on a face-to-face basis in forums and other project activities. But it is likely that the number of people at least familiar with the project and themes it addressed numbered in the thousands given the newspaper and radio exposure, several articles in the Town newsletter, the website, and a newsletter that went out to 6,000 households.

issue framing work was some form of community field, an "activation" if you will of the community structure (which, by definition, maintains or strengthens that structure), and therefore, the learning that occurred there was not just group learning, but community learning.

Furthermore, the collective action of publishing the booklet (recounted in the previous chapter) is indicative of a community field. As the collective action was about sharing this new knowledge (the framed issues), it too is part of the process of embedding knowledge at the community level. For the booklet to be published as it was, not only did the committee rally behind it, but the county government, Chamber of Commerce, and several local businesses became part of the effort formally in contributing time and money to make it happen.

To summarize, learning becomes "community learning" inasmuch as the learning knowledge created in the learning process is fed-forward somehow to the level of community structure. One way for this to occur is for the learning process to occur within the community field. The community field is an active manifestation of community structure and if learning is occurring across that field, then it is clearly community learning. This occurred in Wytheville as the issue framing and subsequent publication of the product of that issue framing both took place in the community field as opposed to within a more limited social field. Throughout the process, knowledge was being embedded in the community structure.

Local Media as Medium of Integration

In retrospect, the role of the local media was perhaps under-appreciated by the study team as a feed-forward mechanism of community learning. This is particularly the

case with the forum booklet and later, the newsletter that was published. The local newspaper ran numerous stories and editorials about the project, including the featured series on the four approaches. The lead editorial in the July 4, 2002 *Wytheville Enterprise* appealed to citizens' patriotism and encouraged community participation in the visioning project.

> For more than a year, Virginia Tech's Institute for Policy Outreach has been working with a group of area citizens representing a vast cross-section of interests, business types, government and civic organizations. This group has been discussing how the community could develop a practical vision for its future – one that could serve as a guiding philosophy when various issues come before it.
>
> Their work has produced a booklet designed to help citizens deliberate – not debate, not politick, but listen and talk – about the community's future.
>
> This booklet presents four different perspectives on the future, which were developed to spark deliberation. Hopefully, this deliberation will help community members find common ground to establish a shared direction. (Porter-Nichols 2002a)

The newspaper editor continued by giving an overview of the four approaches and explaining that over the next four weeks, guest columnists would be writing about each of the approaches. She encouraged citizens to get involved "in this vital citizen-oriented project that has the potential to improve our future and that our out children and their children" (2002a).

Many other newspaper articles were written in *The Wytheville Enterprise* as well as in the larger, regional newspaper, *The Roanoke Times.* Later, toward the end of the forums, some of the knowledge "captured" was related to the community at large in the form of a newsletter, produced by project staff and distributed as a newspaper insert so that the approximately 6,000 subscribers all received one (see Appendix D). Additionally, the local radio station ran two hour-long programs about the project, the first to introduce

the booklet and the second featuring high school students giving their perspectives after having participated in forums. These local media collaborators were crucial in getting the word out and, in a sense, feeding-forward the more "localized" knowledge to the community level. Friedland (2001) underscores the importance of local media as an integrating medium of communication at the community level, an observation which corresponds to the Wytheville experience and points to an area that could have been utilized better.

In addition to thinking about the composition of groups which engage in deliberative community processes (like dialogues, study circles, wisdom councils, etc.), we need to think carefully then about the ways in which knowledge is fed-forward, and integrated at the level of community structure. Friedland points to local media which was (as mentioned) perhaps underutilized in Wytheville despite the great extent to which the media was involved. True integration that spans the whole of the community network is likely to occur over long periods of time rather than in discrete time-frames like this intervention. Repeated communication via local media could be an important alternative way for learning that occurs at the level of a social field to become embedded across the community structure. Yet communication media is likely not as powerful as face-to-face contact with regard to embedding knowledge at the community level. Having participants of past forums join the visioning group and participate in the formation of the community vision certainly had more impact than the existence of a report of the forums available to the committee members.

Integrating Group Learning at the Community Level

The development of the community vision statement also demonstrates community learning. It too was an example of learning in the community field but also illustrates another way the "feed-forward" process occurs. The 15 forums, along with other public events, produced large amounts of data or "input" for the committee to consider in drafting the statement. Rather than individual input though, the forums offered the collective wisdom that emerged from the group process. This, of course, was intentional. The project was "deliberative" visioning by design in order to avoid merely collecting a laundry list of "preferences," and was structured to be so through *formal* and *informal* processes.

Since all of the committee members could not attend each meeting, a reporting system was put in place so that the committee could learn from the forums. At the conclusion of the forums the author, as project manager, compiled all of the forum notes, field notes, and post-forum questionnaires and put together a report on the primary themes that emerged from the forums. Luckily there were dominant themes that cut across forums, such as the emphasis on synthesizing approaches and the importance of "approach four." Additionally, there were several "new" ideas that emerged in forums that needed to be presented. The information was presented to the committee in the form of a SWOT analysis, that is, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified by citizens over the course of nine months and nearly two dozen forums.

Over four meetings the group, which now included several high school students and other new members who joined after participating in forums, incorporated the themes and ideas into a community vision statement. The statement can be seen to be an artifact

of community learning, similar to the booklet, because it is the product of deliberative dialogue at the level of community structure. In the case of the vision statement, this dialogue not only included the experience of those drafting the document, but also included the *additional* knowledge of many forums that wrestled with the same issues. In other words, the knowledge from the forums was *formally* fed-forward to the level of community structure by the reporting system and thus the community forums can be said to be part of an overall community learning process.

The knowledge from the forums was also fed forward *informally* in two ways. First, several of the core committee members attended, and in some cases helped facilitate, many of the forums. They experienced first-hand how people were talking about the issues and what common ground was being created for the vision statement. In this way many of the committee members went into the visioning sessions already with as sense of what the forum "input" was. Bill Gilmer was (is) one of the project sparkplugs, having facilitated several forums and attended others beyond that. Leading into the visioning sessions, Bill captured this informal feed-forward process perfectly in an article he wrote in the project newsletter (Appendix D). Summarizing his experience in the forums, he states

> Indeed, almost everyone who's been involved in the vision process so far has expressed the same core values: an appreciation for our quality of life and a desire to preserve it; an awareness of the need for jobs, for economic growth; a desire to keep our young people involved in the community , to prevent the "brain drain" where so many of our best and brightest leave after graduation; a love for our natural environment, our open farmlands, our mountain ridges, our clean air and water; the need for continuous improvement in our educational systems; an awareness of how important tourism is to our prosperity.

This articulation of what he was hearing corresponds remarkably well to the formal "report" given in the first visioning session.

Another way the feed-forward process can happen informally was evidenced where citizens participated in a forum and then participated with the committee in drafting the vision statement. At the end of each forum we reminded participants that the committee was "open" and that if anyone wanted to help draft the vision statement they were welcome and encouraged to do so. Several of the high school students as well as a few others did just that and so the committee that met during the visioning sessions was expanded to include these new members that could now take the knowledge gained in the forum and introduce it to the mix during the drafting of the vision statement. This was particularly meaningful in the case of the high school students, who in their dialogues regarding opportunities for youth in the area came up with several new ideas and perspectives that had not surfaced in other meetings.

Toward a Learning Community

> **Postulate VI**: A "learning community" has a well-developed community structure that has institutionalized the practice of community learning, thus facilitating a sustained community process. Such communities are said to be taking advantage of the "collective intelligence." They have created ongoing "forums for interaction", or space for the community process at the level of the community structure or field.

Over the last three years in Wytheville, the citizens committee, as a cross-section of social fields in the community, provided a vehicle for what is called here community learning. The argument is made that community learning is a source of renewal and change for communities, much like organizational learning is for organizations. New ideas can lead to innovations in a community. New shared understandings, different ways

of naming and framing problems, and new ways of thinking about solutions, likewise can be a source of growth, adaptation, and change. But in the end, real, lasting change and renewal occurs when community learning leads to the transformation of a community into a learning community. A learning community, as the name implies, is continually learning and thus has the greatest capacity for renewal, for adaptation and change, for sustainability.

Community learning occurs at the intersection of process and structure and so in learning communities we find the process itself becoming a norm at the structural level. Such changes are evolutionary and not revolutionary, however. While ideally some sort of community development council would have grown out of the visioning project, it is more likely that some of the committee members may recognize the value of their collaboration and begin working that way informally. Perhaps some of the project "sparkplugs" will call together people for coffee sometime to discuss how elements of the vision will be implemented. Perhaps a kind of community leadership coffee klatch could evolve out of such interaction. And perhaps within the organizations represented in the committee, changes will occur to "open up" more and encourage more dialogue, within the organization as well as without.

This last point highlights an important point this study makes for understanding what is required of the "learning community." The learning community is where community learning meets organizational learning or so-called learning organizations. Local organizations, as nodes in the community web, form the institutional infrastructure of the community. It is across these organizations that learning is or can be embedded, and it is within these organizations that the process of learning must be cultivated. The

institutionalization of practice (the practice of community learning) requires local

organizations to be learning organizations. The community cannot be learning, renewing,

and changing if its organizations are not transforming themselves as well. The

community process must be embedded within the community's organizations as well as

across the network of organizations which constitute the community. Again, we would

expect institutionalization of this sort to be evolutionary.

Local Government

In a discussion on the role of organizations in community development, Alice

Schumaker observes that of the organizations that most often participate in community

visioning programs, local government has the greatest "capacity to initiate change." Yet,

it is local government that often is "the most difficult to change" (1997, 107). For a

variety of reasons it seems that the public sector is most resistant to change or least likely

to embrace an organizational learning framework. This is an interesting observation that

deserves more attention elsewhere. Suffice it to say here, though, that this observation

held true in Wytheville, despite the fact that it was the Town government that initiated

and funded the visioning project. So if there are even the slightest indications of

institutionalization of practice within the Town government, we might say that this is one

piece of evidence that suggests Wytheville may be on its way to becoming a learning

community.

One of the most gratifying observations of this study has been the role of the

Town government in the evolution of the project. Initially Town administrative officials

were content to be "hands-off" and let the project progress along without any substantive

participation. The assistant town manager participated off and on in the committee, but it

was the Mayor and another councilman that really participated enthusiastically. Through informal conversations with Town officials (and, for that matter, with the County officials that participated) it seemed that most of the citizens committee was "getting it" while the administrative officials were more skeptical. Perhaps this is natural, given their roles and histories, but it was nevertheless somewhat disappointing. This skepticism changed over time though, to the point where now the Assistant Town Manager, who also serves as the Town planner, is working with the Town planning commission to revise the comprehensive plan significantly.

The plan is to give the comprehensive plan a "vision" it has never had, a vision based on the broader community vision drafted by the citizens committee. In the past, the comprehensive plan was drafted and subsequently revised when necessary by Town staff and approved by the planning commission and city council after (perhaps) some presentations of the work to community groups. Historically citizens have shown very little interest and the process was internal and mostly superficial. Now the Town sees a different potential for the comprehensive plan, a potential that is possible because of the community learning that has occurred due to the visioning project. There is a large group of citizens that have discussed their visions of the community's future and are interested in doing something to make a difference. The plan now is to have a public process, that builds off of the visioning work, to really give the comprehensive plan a vision and spell out specific goals and objectives consistent with that vision. The planning commission has expressed their interest and at the time of this writing, they are moving forward with plans to revise the plan accordingly, in collaboration with citizens from the visioning

project and any other interested citizens. The revised plan should be complete by the end of the summer, 2004.

This recognition of the value of the visioning process, of the participation of the citizens, is an encouraging sign that the Town government as an organization may be opening up more, seeking ways to "make space" for the community process. Inasmuch as the Town seeks more horizontal connections and collaboration—which is apparent in their comprehensive planning process, not to mention their support of the visioning project—this key organization in the community network may be leading out in the process of the community becoming a learning community. Additionally, there is a sense that over the last few years, the Town – County relationship has been improving. The collaboration during the visioning project has only helped in this sense. The County formally supported the project and became a collaborator. Town and County officials worked side-by-side on the committee. The recognition of the importance of collaboration between the two organizations was one of the dominant themes of the visioning process and duly recognized by those organizational leaders. The positive trajectory of this crucial link in the community structure is another positive manifestation of the community transforming itself into a learning community.

Follow-up Focus Group

The question of how a community becomes a "learning" community speaks to one of the most important questions that anyone who engages in "community work" must address. Discussions of projects like the "Wytheville Project" or any other community involvement effort, are discussions of *community intervention.* An intervention is by its very nature impermanent. A consultant intervenes with a community, does some good

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(hopefully), and then at some point, exits. A local government holds a series of public meetings to update a comprehensive plan, then the work is done, and the participation stops. The key question then is what happens *after* the intervention? More often than not the answer is nothing. A plan is put on the shelf and becomes history. Clearly the last few years in Wytheville, the work of the citizens committee constituted community learning as defined here. But this was due, in large part, to the fact that a funded team of researchers facilitated the process. While the citizens took ownership of the process to some extent and a lot of growth and development occurred, one must ask what will happen once the formal "intervention" is over? Will the work fade away into distant memory? Or will the community move forward and continue to learn, becoming a learning community as opposed to merely a community that has learned?

These questions were the focus of the follow-up focus group held in March 2004. After a presentation of the main findings of this dissertation research, I turned to the group assembled and asked them, essentially, "what's next?" Not surprisingly, this was exactly what the group was thinking and they were eager to discuss it. One of the participants noted that people often ask him, knowing that he has been very active in the visioning process, "after this is all over, what am I going to see?" He noted that although the process is about the long term, people want to see results in the short term. Everyone then agreed that the movement on the town's comprehensive plan was one important, recognizable "product", particularly if that results in identifying specific priorities for the town as anticipated. It was then pointed by another participant that the county is currently revising their comprehensive plan. I explained that the assistant county administrator told me the vision statement would be a reference document in that process. Several members

of the focus group then responded by saying that they would look into how they can get involved in the county's process to see that the revision is consistent with the community vision statement.

The observation about the town and county "running on separate tracks" came up several times again in the focus group and underscored an important realization by the group collectively that *their finding*, one of the core attributes of the vision statement, was that the entire community, meaning all the different institutions, including the town and county, must share the vision for it to be a reality. Thus, an attribute of a learning community would be that the different institutions that constitute the community structure do share a vision.

When I followed up by asking how that is going to happen in Wytheville, one group member suggested that perhaps it will happen informally, as different community leaders interact naturally, like at the Rotary Club. At this point another group member spoke up and initiated a "group a-ha" moment that bodes well for the prospects of developing into a learning community. He said "I'm concerned that if the group meeting here today doesn't meet again nothing we have talked about will ever go forward." He went on to explain that the uniqueness of the visioning project was the fact that community leaders from different sectors were are at the same table discussing the community's future. What he was referring to is precisely what we have discussed earlier as the presence of a "community field", the "active" form of community structure. He recognized the importance of the communicative linkages and as he spoke up, others in the group followed and reinforced this idea.

The key to becoming a learning community, according to the focus group, is "communication." One of the participants, a public official, explained that good communication will see vision to fruition, while poor communication will render it to the shelf to be forgotten. As the group discussed this point and offered ideas of how this might be done, and who should be included in that group, the question about what happens post-intervention arose again. "Who has the time to take on the leadership role that Rick has been doing?" One answer came from one of the Town officials. He reminded everyone that the project was possible because of the high-level commitment of the Town. "The governments must provide leadership", he explained, and additionally, there must be "participation by the public to make sure it doesn't die." Everyone seemed to agree that "one person simply can't do it."

While several ideas were suggested for how to keep the group meeting were suggested, no final decision was made beyond agreeing that the visioning committee, as it were, needed to continue. While some felt that a regular meeting time and formal agenda would be necessary, most felt, in the end, that there was value simply in *coming together as a group of community leaders to discuss the community*. At the end of the meeting the group identified the Chamber of Commerce as an ideal "boundary-spanning" organization that might be able to informally organize a quarterly lunch, or something to that effect, where the visioning committee could move the vision forward. One of the members accepted the responsibility to follow-up with this proposal and see if the first quarterly meeting could be set up sometime in the next few months.

What the focus group came up with seems to corroborate Postulate VI. A learning community institutionalizes the process of community learning. In this study of

community learning we find that one way a community learns is when the community process, the learning process, occurs in the community field. The proposal of this group to meet together as this group of leaders of community institutions seems to be precisely that, a semi-formal manifestation of learning within a community field. In fact, the group itself, inasmuch as their work constitutes a community field, represents the community in terms of being a learning community. In other words, if this group evolves into a "learning group", it will represent a sort of microcosm of the broader community. They represent the leadership of the different social fields in the community that collectively make up the community structure. So quite literally, the evolution, and broadening, of this group, represents the evolution and development of the community at large. Also, it is reasonable to assume that if the group is successful, other avenues of institutionalizing community learning may grow out of that.

The community does seem to be heading in the direction of becoming a learning community, but the question of developing into a learning community is a long term one. Learning communities do more than sporadically learn, they have a *culture of learning* and continually expand participation and engagement. Learning communities are continually building bridges and embrace dialogue as a positive way to use difference as a source of creativity and innovation. It will take Wytheville a lot more time to fully realize the benefits of community learning, but initial indications are that the deliberative visioning process has helped awaken many key community members to the possibilities.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the Wytheville Project through the lens of community learning. We found that the facilitated committee meetings and community

visioning forums provided a context for the community process to occur. Here citizens from different walks of life, who share the community experience, engage in a structured deliberative dialogue to creatively explore issues of common concern and search for common ground. The community forums consistently displayed elements of collaborative learning or the community process in that new, mutually created and shared understandings of issues emerged from the dialogue. The issue framing with the citizens committee, in particular, produced collective conceptualizations and ideas that clearly were group products.

The stakeholder interviews which were an initial part of the Wytheville Project shed light on Wytheville's unique community structure. Community structure refers to the horizontal linkages among the various social fields of the community. The interviews particularly brought to light an image of a relatively small group of individuals (200 or less) who participate actively in community governance. These highly active individuals serve on multiple boards and commissions and often occupy official roles as well. An examination of the leadership of some of the primary community organizations corroborated this impression, though several "weak links" were apparent, such as the relationship between the school system and other community organizations and the wide-spread agreement that the relationship between the Town and County governments could be better.

Considering the peculiarities of Wytheville in terms of community structure highlighted an important finding that much more theoretical and methodological development is needed in understanding community structure. Top-down methods seem inappropriate and common network analysis methods likewise seem to miss much, or

most, of the reality in terms of relationships between social fields. Important community leaders, identified in the interviews, would have been entirely missed if a mere interlocking directorate analysis was used. Similarly, where some organizations overlap, actual collaboration between organizations did not always follow.

The Wytheville Project provides two important social artifacts that witness to some nascent community-level learning. The "product" of the issue framing sessions, the forum booklet, and its subsequent publication, became a collaborative effort that enriched the project and helped embed the learning at the level of community structure. The composition of the committee who framed the issues reflected to a large extent the community structure in its "active" form, a community field, and additional support that was gathered along the way to publication helped further the institutionalization of this new knowledge. The role of the local media was identified as being a critical integrating mechanism, supporting the communication theory of community put forth by Friedland (2001). The vision statement also represents community learning, again based upon the process being located in the community field and also in the incorporation at this "community" level of new knowledge developed in forums throughout the community. Group learning that occurred in social fields such as a neighborhood group, church group, or workplace, was integrated upward to the level of community structure as that knowledge was reported and utilized by the committee and as members of those groups joined the committee.

Finally, the question of what constitutes a learning community was viewed from the perspective of Wytheville. Although it is too early to tell what lasting effects the intervention might have on the community, the Town's plan to rework their

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comprehensive plan and the apparent improving relationship with the County appear to be evidence that perhaps the community process is itself becoming institutionalized, at least in small, evolutionary ways, in community organizations. The recognition by some of the key participants that they needed to continue meeting and learning together also suggests that the process of community learning is perhaps becoming embedded in the community structure. Local organizations will necessarily need to become learning organizations, however, to support a learning community. A learning community may be remarkably similar to a learning network except that the bond of the network is locality-oriented collective action rather than the private interests of business firms (Knight 2002).

One last observation is important to note at this point. The Wytheville Project amply demonstrates a crucial theme of the community learning concept, that is, the duality of structure and process. Engaging citizens in the deliberative dialogue clearly helped build the relationships that constitute community structure. After most meetings, participants mingled afterward and continued the dialogue. In many instances people were making new friends although certainly in many cases they already knew each other. In any case, the process of engaging in a constructive, creative, convivial conversation is a relationship-building process. It builds community by highlighting the common ground people share. Despite the many differences of opinion on zoning or taxes, for many people it was eye opening to realize how much they did, in fact, share in common. On the other hand, the existing (and constantly evolving) community structure was always an important constraining factor on the community process. Town – County relations, for example, were a constant undercurrent at many meetings. On the other hand, the

collaborative relationships that already were strong, for example, between the town

government and the community college, helped to facilitate and encourage participation.

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CHAPTER SIX

LEARNING AND COMMUNITY RENEWAL

Determine who are the most influential citizens in every segment and at
every level in your city—in the neighborhoods, in civic organizations,
corporations, unions, churches, minority groups, the professions, and so
on. . . . Do they know one another? Have they ever met to discuss the
future of their city? Have they made a real effort to understand one
another, a real effort to work together?

John Gardner (1995)

We now return to the questions raised in the introduction. How can public
administration contribute to community renewal? How can an emerging "new public
service" paradigm integrate a community perspective with the dominant perspectives of
management, politics, and law? The articulation and exploration of community learning
in the previous pages offers a step toward a community perspective for public
administration. Community learning is a concept that holds significant promise for
rethinking community participation in public administration, and generally speaking, the
role of public organizations in community development.

This chapter explores some of these themes and the specific contributions of the
community learning perspective. I begin by highlighting these contributions, including
specific lessons learned for public administration practice. I then discuss some of the
questions raised in this study and point to future research opportunities. Finally, I
conclude by considering how a community perspective contrasts with the dominant
perspectives of public administration and make an argument for a community perspective
as a foundation upon which a new public service might be built.

Summary and Contributions

In the preceding pages a concept of community learning has been developed and explored empirically. Community learning is an integrative concept drawn from many literatures, primarily participatory approaches in public affairs, organizational learning, and community development. The basic premise is that communities, as social collectives, can learn. How this learning may occur is specified in Chapter Three in six postulates, that is, six fundamental component principles of the concept. Each of these postulates are explored and elaborated upon in the context of the Wytheville Project, a community-based action research study conducted over the last three years.

Postulate one states that the "community process" creates new, collective knowledge in the form of shared meanings or collective ideas. This is a process of integrative, collaborative learning. The experience of the Wytheville study demonstrated how the learning can take the form of new shared meanings or altered shared meanings. These shared or collective meanings or understandings constitute new knowledge that did not exist prior to the interaction process whereby it was created. The research also indicated that the learning can take multiple forms, either evolutionary or revolutionary. In the issue framing process, the evolutionary creation of a shared framing of the issues occurred over several meetings and literally hours of face-to-face dialogue. On the other hand, the community forums highlighted how deliberative dialogue can be punctuated with group "a-ha" moments where a new idea emerges or a shared meaning is dramatically altered. These learning moments are not only personally enlightening, but have important implications for the community, such as when groups shifted their understanding of community leadership from "them" to "us."

Postulate two highlights how *structured* processes of dialogue and deliberation facilitate the community process. Here it is observed that the "tools" of formal dialogue, deliberation, or "deliberative dialogue" create the circumstances where the community process can occur and are thus important elements of community learning. In Wytheville it was observed that participants needed time to learn the process, that the process of community learning is very different than conventional patterns of discourse. It was also found that the role of the facilitator in pushing the group to explore underlying assumptions or keep issues "on the table" was also important for the creative process.

Postulate three looks to the relationship between process and structure, specifically, that the community process creates, maintains, or strengthens the relationships which constitute the social structure of community. Throughout the Wytheville study it was apparent that certain community "sparkplugs" were energized by the process and sought to build bridges and created new linkages to further the project's objectives. Furthermore, evidence from the forums suggests that at the very least, participating in the "community process" strengthens current relationships and opens the door to new ones.

Postulate four says that a model of community as the structure of interinstitutional relations focuses the attention of researchers and community participants on the linkages across community institutions and social fields. In Wytheville one of the main "findings" of the visioning project was a collective recognition that no vision is possible for the community without a strong network of collaborative relations. Key informants corroborated the assumptions of the community structure construct by acknowledging the need for the cross-sector citizens committee to continue meeting in order for the "vision"

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to be implemented and expanded in the future. Ultimately, understanding community as the structure of interinstitutional relations within a community is about creating and maintaining "active" relations across different social fields and institutions rather than merely having formal linkages that suggest the potential for interorganizational cooperation.

Postulate five explains what separates "learning in community" from "community learning." Community learning occurs as knowledge created through the community process is fed-forward to the level of the community structure or field. A community has learned when this collective knowledge is institutionalized across the community structure, or rather, embedded across the web of community institutions. One of the important findings of this study is the exploration of how this feed-forward process occurs, or rather, how knowledge is integrated at the level of community. The experience of Wytheville demonstrates three ways in which this occurs. First, the learning can be embedded within the community structure. Put another way, the learning can take place "in the community field," meaning that the participants in the learning process represent the institutions of the community structure. Thus the community structure is "activated" in the learning process and is manifest as a community field.

Another way the feed-forward process occurs is through the medium of the local media, such as newspapers, radio, and television. Finally, the feed-forward process can occur when group-level learning is transmitted, either formally or informally, to the community level. In the case of Wytheville, formal reports on the forums were communicated to the citizens committee which represented community structure. Also, as

participants in community forums participated later with the citizens committee in drafting the community vision statement they carried forward the learning informally.

Finally, postulate six VI makes the connection between community learning and the "learning community". A learning community has a well-developed community structure that has institutionalized the practice of community learning, thus facilitating a sustained community process. Such communities are said to be taking advantage of the "collective intelligence." They have created ongoing "forums for interaction", or space for the community process at the level of the community structure or field. In Wytheville, participants recognized this intuitively in their articulation of "shared community vision" as the basis of their vision statement. They also recognized the need to carry forward and even expand the interaction of the citizens group so that the process does not "die" with the end of the formal intervention.

Implications for Practice

Community learning is a concept woven together from many threads of literature. It is a multidisciplinary concept with multidisciplinary applications. It is an approach that integrates insights from [at least] organizational learning, participatory approaches to public affairs, and community development. While there are many potential applications to be made in a variety of specific fields, the focus of this dissertation has been community renewal, and as such, this section will focus on the primary areas of practice that deal directly with community renewal. Community learning makes an important contribution to our understanding of the theory and practice of community participation in public affairs. The concept also makes important connections to our understanding of

public leadership. Finally, the learning approach offers an important contribution to the study and practice of community development.

<div align="center">Community Participation</div>

Community participation from the point of view of public professionals is a means whereby the community or relevant communities participate in the policy process of the public organization. From the citizen's point of view, community participation is "public work", it is an exercise in democratic citizenship, working voluntarily for the betterment of one's community (Boyte and Kari 1996). All too often the citizen and public professional views of participation are disconnected. This leads to participatory processes that are frustrating for all parties involved.

One of the reasons for this disconnect, as mentioned in Chapter One, is that the dominant perspectives of public administration—management, politics, and law—do not "get" community. In other words, the common frame of reference for the public professional does not connect with the community-based frame within which citizens are operating. The tendency for public administration is to view participation as something to "manage" (Thomas 1995). Jim Creighton notes that historically "there were three options -- TELL the public, SELL the public, or CONSULT with the public -- the normal approach was either to TELL, and if that didn't work, try to SELL" (2003, 1). Participation was essentially a public relations job. More recently, public hearing requirements have given people at the very least the right to be heard before a decision is made. However, dissatisfaction with the hearing process has bred innovations in participation that are more consultative in nature. Today, participation is viewed as much more than the "TELL – SELL" approach of the past. If the public relations approach was

one-way communication, then today's consultative community participation is about two-way communication, where citizens, ideally, have "an opportunity to influence the decision from the beginning to the end of the decision-making process" (Creighton 2003, 2).

A wealth of literature has developed concurrently with these changes in how public agencies approach community participation. A perusal of the top journals in public administration, planning, and policy analysis over the last two decades makes abundantly clear this explosion of interest in participation. Yet for the most part, the perspectives which guide these studies of participation still come from management, politics, and law. Consequently, the communication pattern, while evolving from one-way to two-way, is still about learning in terms of knowledge transfer. The agency transfers knowledge to the public and the public transfers knowledge to the agency. An understanding of the *community process*, however, recognizes a greater potential for this communicative exchange. Knowledge can not only be transferred, it can be created, and the process by which this knowledge is created, not to mention the knowledge itself, is a tremendous resource for the community.

Focus on Collaboration

Many practical lessons for public agencies grow out of this "participation as learning" perspective. The experience of the Wytheville study highlights many of these lessons. First, not all participatory processes are "learning" processes. Structured processes of dialogue and deliberation that include public officials as equal participants facilitate the community process, and by extension, community learning. While hearings, polling, workshops, and even focus groups may all serve important purposes in terms of

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involvement, the community process is most likely to occur in dialogue and deliberation, where the purpose is not to "tell" or "sell", or even "consult", but to create shared understanding, and in some cases, create common ground for action. It was important in Wytheville to have the public officials participating along side "regular" citizens. Having the Mayor show up to the first issue framing session in shorts and a t-shirt made a difference. It reinforced the idea that this time and place is for people to meet *as citizens* to talk about their shared interest in the community.

Community learning may also represent a more desirable framework for thinking about participation and community renewal generally because it is not *issue centered*. Cheryl King and her colleagues argue that authentic participation places citizens closest to the issue as opposed to conventional approaches to participation that place administrative processes and structures closest to the issue (1998). While this makes sense from a decision-making perspective that quite naturally is issue based, this implies that participation, therefore, is issue-by-issue. Community learning, on the other hand, implies an ongoing process, supported and facilitated within a structure of relationships that is built and maintained through the process.

Participation from this point of view is not about the agency identifying an issue, then considering how to involve citizens. Community learning is not just learning about an issue or from a response to an issue, but it is about learning about each other, about shaping and reshaping shared meanings, about learning democracy and building institutions. These kind of fundamental, community-constituting activities are not issue-centered, they are relationship centered. Community learning is ultimately about what happens between and among people as they interact. Thus, participation as learning is

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ongoing, fluid, and adaptive; not discrete and issue-based. This is not a critique of "authentic participation" so much as an extension of it. Authentic participation, I suggest, takes place within a more general, ongoing process of community learning. In such an ongoing, organic process, "issues" are likely to be identified earlier and probably in a different form, than would occur from an issue-by-issue perspective.

Another practical implication of the learning perspective to participation: the need to engage citizens with each other, as well as with the public agency. When participation is "managed", the thought process tends to be in terms of citizens providing input to the agency and the agency providing information for the citizens. This only reinforces a culture of individualism that is antithetical to community (Bellah et al 1996). The law already affords individuals the right to provide their input into public decision making processes. Community participation ought to emphasize the community part, which is why the term community, as opposed to citizen, participation is used here. Thinking in terms of the community process, one would want to think of processes and structures that enable the participants to interact with one another so that learning can take place. Most current participation formats lack this perspective. Even advisory committees and workshops often fall back to individual-oriented processes like nominal group technique and voting.

Finally, another important implication for participation is that when the focus is learning, one must consider where and how people can learn and create knowledge together. The city council chambers are rarely, if ever, a natural setting for citizens to learn together. One of the innovations of the Wytheville Project was the "go to them" approach. While this has certainly been done in other settings, the conventional wisdom

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for community visioning or other planning processes is to hold a few public meetings where everyone is invited. A high school gym or recreation center is reserved, newspaper advertisements publicize the event, and, of course, the same 20 citizens show up to the meeting. Or on the other hand, with controversial projects, the same setting exists only with hundreds of angry citizens packing the place. Neither of these venues seems likely to generate community learning. Recognizing this, the research team organized forums around people's schedules, with the majority of forums being "hosted" by a local organization or group.

The result of this decentralized, longer-term approach was not only more people participating, but also people participating that normally would not. The 40-plus people who participated in forums at Longwood Elastomers (a manufacturing plant) were not people who we normally see at public meetings, either due to work and family schedules or, more importantly, due to a feeling of being "shut out" of the process. The forum at the church included primarily couples, who were able to attend because their children were being babysat there at the church. In having a forum at the workplace, or the church, for example, we were able to facilitate a learning process in a setting where the people were more likely to learn. The settings were "safe" spaces for dialogue which enabled more people to be involved and to be involved in a way that facilitated learning rather than collected individual "input."

Process/Structure

Another important finding of this study is that community learning is about more than just "good process." In fact, one of the primary contributions of the community learning approach is that it simultaneously considers structure *and* process. The

community renewal literature seems to be bifurcated somewhat along the lines of process and structure. On the one hand, there is the social capital literature which emphasizes the role of social structure in contributing to positive community outcomes (Green and Haines 2002). On the other there is an increasing focus on "good process." This is particularly the case in the public affairs literature, where much attention is given to the "question of how to engender effective and satisfying participatory processes," or in other words, how to achieve "authentic participation" (King, Feltey, and Susel 1998). While the relationship between process and structure may be implicit in some of this work, by and large the focus is on one or the other.

One of the important contributions of the organizational learning perspective is the attention paid to the reciprocal relationship between process and structure. This recognition of the duality of structure and process is based on the theory of structuration developed by Anthony Giddens (1984). Organizational learning considers how group learning feed-forwards to the level of organizational structure while at the same time understanding that organizational structure feeds-back and provides a context for group learning. This relationship carries over in the community learning concept as we come to understand that the learning process develops community structure while at the same time the community structure is providing the context for and ultimately shaping the learning process. Similarly, the knowledge created in the community process feeds-forward to the level of the community structure in a community learning process. And it is when the process becomes institutionalized across the community structure that a learning community develops.

So the important lesson for practice is a realization that community networks and other social ties and associations on the one hand, or good process on the other, standing alone, are insufficient. In fact, the presence of both may still be insufficient. It is when process meets structure that community learning occurs. One of the principal findings of the Wytheville study is that this combining of process and structure can occur in at least three ways. One can design processes to take place in the "community field." This is where the community structure is "activated" by literally bringing the key institutional representatives together at the same table to engage one another in deliberative dialogue.

Another way the "feed-forward" process can occur is through the appropriate use of the local media. Local newspaper, radio, television, and perhaps the internet[1], can be a powerful integrating mechanisms, taking group-level knowledge and communicating it to the broader community. Finally, processes can be designed, as was the case in Wytheville, to formally feed-forward the knowledge created in smaller groups, through "capturing" learning and reporting it. The knowledge may also be informally fed-forward by joining participants in group-level processes with community-level groups and processes.

When designing community participation programs, public professionals should look to both process and structure. They should ask whether the processes stimulate collaborative learning and to what extent the participants in those processes represent the community's structure. Moreover, they might ask to what extent the processes can be institutionalized across the community structure. How can the public sector facilitate the "forums of interaction" necessary for this institutionalization to take place? Community

participation should consider ways to integrate the development of "public" social capital

in the community with the use of "good processes" that enable citizens to learn together.

Designers of such processes can recognize that the process has benefits beyond the

content it produces. It also produces relationships, it builds the community structure.

Thus, implementing community learning processes not only generates learning, but it

also generates an architecture of relationships that enables continued learning as well as

other forms of collective action.

<center>Public Leadership</center>

The community learning approach also has important connections to the

developing literature on "public leadership." Public leadership is different than traditional

notions of public sector leadership, which is about *organizational* leadership. Jeffrey

Luke explains that

> public leadership occurs when an individual or group focuses attention on
> an issue or problem and elevates it to the public agenda, stimulates
> concerted action among diverse stakeholders to address the issue, and
> ensures sustained action during implementation. Public leaders act as
> catalysts in a collective effort to achieve a desired result or outcome.
> (1998, 23)

Luke's "catalytic" leadership (1998) as well as what others call "collaborative"

leadership (Chrislip and Larson 1994; Rubin 2002), and "civic entrepreneurialism"

(Henton, Melville, and Walesh 1997[2]), are theories of public leadership that correspond

with the community learning approach.

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[1] This was another suggestion made in the follow up focus group. It was suggested that local community intra-nets, such as the Blacksburg Electronic Village, can be linking mechanism between groups and individuals and perhaps provide another "forum of interaction" across the community structure.

[2] Henton, Melville, and Walesh describe these entrepreneurial public leaders as "civic revolutionaries" in their latest work (2004).

I have noted elsewhere how certain citizens in Wytheville practiced collaborative leadership and acted as "civic entrepreneurs" in making the project as successful as it was (Morse and Dudley 2002). Indeed, were it not for some of the "core" members of the citizens committee, it is doubtful the project would have been even minimally successful. These catalytic or collaborative leaders came from different sectors of the community. Certainly the mayor, Trent Crewe, displayed catalytic leadership in initiating the project and having the foresight to engage in such a process. Alan Hawthorne, the executive director of the Joint Industrial Development Authority, was also instrumental in the project's success. Bill Gilmer, a the owner of a local print shop, and Joe Freeman, manager of a manufacturing plant in town, were [are] perhaps the most important public leaders in this case, even though they are not in government. They were the glue that held the project together. It was often the behind-the-scenes actions of these individuals that provided a spark to the project. Mr. Hawthorne organizing a forum at his church, or Mr. Gilmer's bringing on the newspaper editor as a project partner, or Mr. Freeman's avocations of "approach four" ideas, were all acts of public leadership that made community learning possible.

The Wytheville study is a prime example of the need for public leadership. An important lesson is that public leadership could benefit from the concept of community learning. Most of the time public leadership is policy-focused and thus is thought of as sporadic or arising when the circumstances warrant. This was the case in Wytheville of course. The location study represented a timely issue that people could rally around. It was the spark that was needed to focus the Town's attention enough to contact Virginia Tech. It was also the impetus for many of the participants to join in the first place. If a

community is to become a learning community, then it is reasonable to suggest that it will take steady, constant public leadership; leadership that is collaborative and facilitative. In Wytheville, as it was left in the focus group, we understand that it may just take a Joe Freeman and/or a Bill Gilmer to see that the group meets regularly as was suggested, in order for the community learning to evolve into the development of a learning community.

Community Development

As discussed in Chapter Two, the field of community development uses the terms "community learning" and "learning communities" in ways not unlike what has been described here. For the most part, the terms reflect the intersection of adult education and community development, where ideas from group learning are joined with theories of social capital. Moore and Brooks (2000) also utilize organizational learning in developing their representation of community learning. Although the context remains communities of place, ultimately, for Moore and Brooks, community learning is about community-oriented groups that learn. In other words, the learning entity is not proposed to be a community of place but rather a group of people working on behalf of a broader community. Examples given often include regional cooperative ventures.

Other community developers, such as Ron Hustedde, talk about learning communities in terms of how particular communities of place can be learning entities. Yet this approach never specifies the learning process. The term "learning community" seems to denote a progressive, developing community. The dynamics of the learning process or how one might actually say a community has learned are not addressed.

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Thus in the current community development literature it is not clear whether the "community learning" described is information sharing or the creative process that builds shared understanding and innovative ideas. The conceptualization offered here offers a more concrete description of community learning. It more precisely addresses why one community might be a learning community and another is not. Community learning, while it includes information exchange, is primarily about *knowledge creation* since it is the new knowledge and the process by which it is created that is a source of renewal and change.

One of the blind spots in the community development literature, as well as the community renewal literature generally, is that the role the public institutions can play in building community is virtually ignored. A community learning perspective helps fill this gap. When one understands "the community" to be the structure of inter-institutional linkages within a local society, it becomes obvious that public institutions are in a prime position to "lead the way" in building community (Frederickson 1997b). Local governments and schools have pervasive linkages in the community network and furthermore, due to their "public" missions, are ideally suited for making connections and "cultivating productive public conversations" (Bramson 2001).

George Frederickson explains why it is not unrealistic to think that civil servants can be leaders in building community. For one, they see on a daily basis the "disconnect between the cities they work for and citizens' concerns and needs." So making efforts to bridge the disconnect "would be high-order pragmatism." Frederickson also finds local government officials to be generally "idealistic" in a positive sense. They are looking for ways to be effective. Finally, working out processes and structures that help the city as an

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institution become more community-focused will ultimately play out in the details of their work. "Bureaucrats", Frederickson notes, are "details people" (1997b, 32). These observations are consistent with what we found in Wytheville. Though cautious, and even skeptical at first, some of the local public officials are carrying forward the visioning effort in exciting ways, such as the different approach to the town's comprehensive plan.

In the follow-up focus group, one of the officials noted that the process was made possible because of the town's resources and commitment and that "to keep this going we are going to need the same level of commitment by the local governments." Another public official in the group agreed that while it will take a community-wide effort, "the government has to provide leadership." The local governments, schools, and economic development agencies clearly have the resources, connections, and legitimate authority to lead out in the community learning process. They can build bridges. They can create forums for interaction. While other organizations, particularly the Chamber of Commerce, play similar boundary-spanning roles, the observations of the focus group are important to note, "government has to provide leadership."

Questions for Future Research

This analysis has raised as many questions as it has answered. It is clear that the community learning concept needs more conceptual and methodological development. This study has only examined the role of formal, structured "deliberative dialogue" sessions and how they facilitate the "community process." But certainly the community process, collaborative learning, occurs in other contexts. We need to understand better the myriad of contexts in which we learn together. Also, this study focused on how knowledge is fed-forward to the community level through group composition at dialogue

sessions, formal reporting mechanisms, and to a lesser extent, local media. Again, there are likely other feed-forward mechanisms and this demands more research. We also need to better understand community structure and how to assess it. Finally, we need to know better how a community becomes a learning community. Do formal mechanisms, such as a "community betterment council" have to be in place to facilitate ongoing community learning or can this occur at a more decentralized manner?

In this section, we look to a few specific areas related to community learning that seem to be important avenues for future research, in addition to those previously mentioned. Certainly there are others, but a few in particular stand out. First, this study has highlighted the importance of community structure while at the same time recognizing that we still have much to learn about it. The Wytheville experience also raised questions as to the role local government managers can or should play in facilitating community learning. Another area to explore are the applications of this perspective beyond that of local government or local public institutions generally. What about state and federal agencies? What about nonprofits? In the follow-up focus group there were suggestions about utilizing the internet to facilitate community learning. This insight is important, and raises the question currently being explored by those considering "e-democracy" as to what role communication technologies play in democratic practice. Another critical question raised in the follow-up focus group relates to the issue-centered question. Do you need a crisis to stimulate involvement? Can community learning be ongoing, outside of a visible "issue"? Finally, it seems that community learning as an analytical device may aid the study of other participatory innovations, beyond community

visioning. Some of these innovations are highlighted as suggested avenues for further community learning research.

Understanding Community Structure

In terms of mapping community structure, the methods of network analysis, analyzing interorganizational relationships by looking at interlocking directorates, or by monitoring resource flow, simply do not correspond with the realities of community life. Perhaps a network map would be an initial step, then, utilizing the action research framework, one could present the map to community members for their interpretation. Interviews, focus groups, and other forms of group work could then be used to develop a community-based map of the community structure. This would be a nice addition to a community-based action research project, going beyond stakeholder analysis to examine the relationships between and among stakeholders. This knowledge, created jointly in the group process, would provide powerfully important information for a community that desires to learn as a community.

The Role of the Local Government Manager

Another interesting question for future research is what the role of the local government manager is in a community learning process. John Nalbandian has documented a shift in the professional responsibilities of local government managers, a shift toward community. As "facilitators of community and enablers of democracy," it seems city and county managers are important public leaders in an overall community learning process. Yet the experience in Wytheville did not bear this out. The two local government managers preferred to stay at an arms length and for seeming good reason. For one, they are at will employees, meaning they can be fired by their respective boards

at any time. For this reason alone they walk on a political tightrope. Yet both managers in this case are well respected by their boards and are in no danger of losing their jobs. So there must be more to the story.

It seems that city and county managers are in particularly public roles and likely have very pragmatic attitudes toward working with citizens. Ultimately their chief responsibility is as CEO of the local government organization, and from this frame of reference, a "community learning" process may seem pretty inefficient and perhaps even dangerous. It also just so happens that both managers are engineers by training, which is not atypical in smaller communities. This background may also reveal something about why the managers may be reluctant to be involved. It is likely a combination of factors, training, responsibility, and experience that would explain this phenomenon. Obviously the broader question of how we should think about the specific role of the local government manager in the community learning process could be a subject of future research. If local governments are to play key roles in stimulating and maintaining community learning than we ought to understand better the motivations within the organizational leadership that would help or hinder the process.

Applications Beyond Local Government

The focus of this study in terms of public administration has been on local government. The holistic approach to community governance that is the community learning perspective suggests an important, even central role for local government administration. Local government can be a powerful catalyst in the evolution of community learning. As "enablers of democracy" local government officials can provide the necessary leadership to build partnerships and facilitate processes that engender

community learning (Nalbandian 1999; Frederickson 1997b). It is hard to conceive of a "learning community" that does not feature public leadership from local governments. Local governments are clearly a critical institutional foundation of democratic community governance (Box 1998). By extension, therefore, local governments are critical institutional components of community learning.

Community learning should inform more than just local government practice, however. Many, even most, public agencies can be said to operate within a community context. While public agencies may not play a central role in developing learning communities, they certainly can consider a community learning perspective in designing community participation. Rather than seeking individual input only there could be processes set in place that either tap into existing community learning processes or seek to stimulate community learning in the context of the specific policy domain. In fact, this is already happening in many arenas, particularly environmental management. The emergence of collaborative environmental decision-making processes is an exciting innovation in how public agencies facilitate community participation (Randolph and Bauer 1998). Similarly, the story of the Quincy Library group in Northern California points to intriguing possibilities in terms of the connection between state and federal agencies and community learning, though such community-based processes are not without controversy (Owen 2002).

At the local level, community learning also has important implications for other public institutions, such as schools, and also for local nonprofit groups, particular those "community-based organizations" that focus on community development. These implications are not explored here and therefore this is another area ripe for future

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research. Specifically, the role of community development corporations and other boundary-spanning organizations should be explored from a community learning perspective. Furthermore, the Chamber of Commerce in Wytheville played an important role in terms of linking institutions in the overall community structure. The role of the Chamber in community learning processes deserves more attention as well.

Role of Technology

Another potential future line of community learning research is the role of technology, specifically communications technology. While not explored in this study, this issue was raised by one of the group participants in the March 2004 follow-up focus group. Within the discussion of how Wytheville could become a "learning community" one participant argued that better utilizing information technology could facilitate the "linkages" necessary to make that a reality. This observation also was part of the overall findings of the study in that the vision statement makes reference to developing an electronic village. However, the extent to which communications technologies such as email, electronic bulletin boards, and even electronic villages advance democratic participation is still a question without definitive answers.

With the term "e-democracy" becoming ever more popular, it seems very relevant to ask serious questions regarding the impact of these technologies on community learning. What are the impacts on relationships across community structure? What are the implications for the technology in terms of process? Can people learn collectively without being face-to-face? These are but a few of the many questions that comprise future research on the role of technology in community learning. From the perspective on democracy advanced here –that of collaborative pragmatism – it seems fair to suggest

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that e-democracy should mean that the technology supports community learning

processes, or at least does not hinder them.

Do You Need a Crisis?

A final question for future research raised here was again discussed in the follow-

up focus group of March 2004. Participants were asked whether they believed a "crisis"

or what Kingdon (1995) calls a "focusing event" was necessary in order for the visioning

project to be successful. The group unanimously agreed that yes, a crisis is needed. It was

the road issue that spurred the Town's association with Virginia Tech and it was the road

issue that brought out most of the participants for the project. Yet when the location study

was suspended, the project continued. This may be due to the fact that the road issue did

not go away, it was only delayed. But it may also be due, at least in part, to the fact that

the process took hold with the citizens group. Even "the cynic" said he is now "hooked"

on the process and sees its value beyond any particular issue.

Is it naïve to think that the process can be ongoing, without an issue at the core?

Can a community vision serve as a core? These are important questions that need to be

explored further. Community learning, as discussed above, is not issue-based, though it

can be. However, if community participation requires an issue, a "crisis", then what does

that mean in terms of sustaining the process, of there being the possibility of a "learning

community?" Community learning suggests that people be engaged on an ongoing basis

and that participation in the process "hooks" people to it, and, importantly, to each other.

However, this assumption needs more exploration and testing. The question is of major

importance for further conceptual development of community learning and for the

practice of community participation generally.

Toward a Community Perspective for Public Administration

As suggesting in the introduction, this study of community learning is part of a large project that considers what a community perspective actually means for public administration. This larger project is long term and evolving. George Frederickson, in two articles published in the 1990s, opened this line of inquiry in contrasting a community paradigm versus what he called the "institutional" paradigm of the city (1996; 1997b). Also, Frederickson's colleague John Nalbandian has expressed a shift toward a "community paradigm" in the practice of local government management (1999). Yet for the most part, the content and implications of this community paradigm for public administration have not been explored.

The community perspective is consistent with the emerging "New Public Service" approach that is the meta-movement within the field of public administration that is citizen or community focused. The ethos of "public service" seems to correspond rather well with a perspective of public leadership facilitating and enabling a community learning process. Public service oriented local government would seem to be at the heart of a "learning community." The community learning approach is a step toward this broader community perspective and at least suggests what the features of this perspective are in contrast to the other dominant perspectives. Table 6.1 revisits the dominant perspectives on public administration and adds another, the community perspective. This exercise is meant to be suggestive more than anything and certainly not final or complete. It is offered to stimulate thought about what a community perspective actual means for the field.

6.1a - Perspectives on Public Administration (c) McGraw-Hill, 2002 (by permission) | **6.1b – Community Perspective**

Characteristic	*Perspectives*				*Community*
	Traditional Management	*NPM*	*Politics*	*Law*	
Values:	Economy, efficiency, effectiveness	Cost-effectiveness, responsiveness, to customers	Representation, responsiveness accountability	Constitutional integrity, procedural due process, robust substantive rights, equal protection, equity	Civil discourse, trust, responsibility toward common good
Organizational structure:	Ideal-typical bureaucracy	Competitive, firmlike	Organizational pluralism	Adjudicatory (adversary)	Collaborative networks, both formal and informal
View of individual:	Impersonal case, rational actor	Customer	Member of group	Individual and/or member of class, reasonable person	Embedded in community, responsible citizen
Cognitive approach:	Rational-scientific	Theory, observation, measurement, experimentation	Agreement and public opinion, debate	Inductive case analysis, deductive legal analysis, normative reasoning, adversary process	Integration, group process, collaboration
Budgeting:	Rational (cost-benefit)	Performance-based, market-driven	Incremental (distribution of benefits and burdens)	Rights funding	Participatory budgeting
Decision making:	Rational-comprehensive	Decentralized, cost-minimizing	Incremental muddling through	Precedential incrementalism	Consensus, common ground for action
Government function characterized by:	Execution	Execution	Legislation	Adjudication	Service, facilitation

Table 6.1 – Comparing a Community Perspective with Others
"Perspectives on Public Administration" box (6.1a above), Rosenbloom and Kravchuk 2002, p. 39, reproduced by permission of McGraw-Hill Publishers. "Community Perspective" box (6.1b) by author (2004).

It is important to note that the community perspective is not being advanced as an alternative to or replacement for any of the other perspectives. The existing perspectives in many ways complement each although there are obvious tensions among them. The same might be said for an emerging community perspective. It may serve as a counterbalance to the excesses of the others. It might also provide another ethical perspective that is pragmatic in nature as it would be based in a context of ongoing learning and adaptation. It suggests responsibility and accountability to the community and to the role the agency plays in strengthening or renewing the community. With an understanding and appreciation of a community perspective, a new public service can indeed lead the way to community renewal. This leadership comes not from the top, nor from the bottom, but in partnership with other community institutions; partnerships built upon active relationships and a culture of learning.

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COMMUNITY SCAN
Considering Local Realities and Trends

These data are a collection of indicators that may help you better understand some of the issues. Review this scan in light of your own experience and consider what the community might look like in the future if nothing were to change.

Population

Table 1 - Total Population

	1970	1980	1990	2000	% Change 90 to 00	% Change 70 to 00
Wytheville	6,069	7,135	8,038	7,804	-2.9%	28.6%
Wythe County	22,139	25,522	25,471	27,599	8.4%	24.7%
Virginia	4,651,448	5,346,797	6,189,197	7,078,515	14.4%	52.2%

Table 2 - Race (percent of total; 2000 Census)

	White	Black or African American	Asian	Other
Wytheville	90.8	7.2	0.7	1.3
Wythe County	95.8	2.9	0.4	0.9
Virginia	72.3	19.6	3.7	4.4

Table 3 - Age (2000 Census)

	Percent of Total				Median Age (years)
	0-19	20-44	45-64	65 and over	
Wytheville	21.5%	30.1%	25.6%	22.8%	43.8
Wythe County	24.1%	34.2%	25.9%	15.8%	39.4
Virginia	27.4%	38.4%	23.0%	11.2%	35.7

Source of Data for Tables 1-3: U.S. Census Bureau
note: County figures in tables 1-3 include the Town of Wytheville

Housing

Table 4 - Building Permits by Type and Location

Structure - Location	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total 1990-2000
Single-Family - Wytheville	16	18	20	19	24	19	26	22	9	31	27	**231**
Single-Family - Wythe County	82	71	81	67	66	67	97	75	73	20	55	**754**
Manufactured - Wytheville	12	11	19	16	27	11	8	11	17	17	14	**163**
Manufactured - Wythe County	217	194	234	228	232	283	232	305	343	91	224	**2583**

Source: Mountain Shelter, Inc. (2001)

Table 5 - Housing Units and Occupancy (2000)

	Total Housing Units	Percent Increase since 1990	Percent Occupied	Percent of Occupied Housing Owner-Occupied	Percent of Occupied Housing Renter-Occupied
Wytheville	3,776	7.0%	92.8%	60.5%	39.5%
Wythe County	12,744	19.6%	90.3%	77.3%	22.7%
Congressional District	262,067	13.2%	89.5%	73.6%	26.4%
Virginia	2,904,192	8.1%	92.9%	68.1%	31.9%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Table 6 – Types of Housing Units as Percent of Total (2000 Census)

	Single Unit Attached	Multiple Unit	Mobile Home	Other
Wytheville	69.0%	22.6%	5.8%	2.7%
Wythe County	66.6%	8.2%	23.5%	1.6%
Congressional District	65.9%	11.3%	20.7%	2.1%
Virginia	62.3%	21.5%	6.4%	9.7%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

note: County figures in tables 4-5 include the Town of Wytheville

Figure 1 - Average Cost of New Homes by Type Based on Building Permits Issued 1990-2000
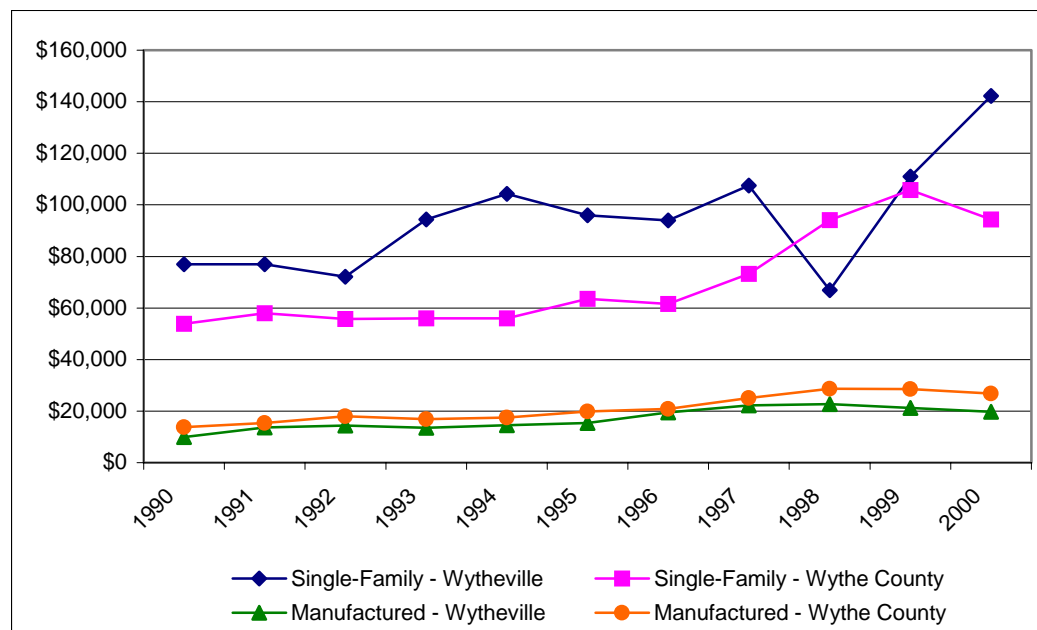
Source: Mountain Shelter, Inc. (2001)

Local Government

Table 7 - Local Government Revenue (FY 2000)

	Wytheville	"Peer" Towns[1]	Wythe County	"Peer" Counties[2]
Total Revenue	$6,553,694	-	$50,231,376	-
Per Capita	$816	$757	$1,874	$1,780
Source of Funds				
Local	72.7%	75.8%	42.9%	44.9%
State	27.0%	23.3%	48.8%	46.9%
Federal	0.4%	0.9%	8.3%	8.2%

(1) Virginia Towns with population between 5,000 - 10,000

(2) Virginia Counties with population between 10,000 - 35,000

Table 8 - Primary Sources of Local Revenue (FY 2000)

Town of Wytheville	Amount	Percent of Total	Peer Towns
1. Lodging and Meals Taxes	$1,313,201	27.6	19.5
2. Property Taxes	768,865	16.1	23.3
3. Business License Tax	577,084	12.1	12.9
4. Earned Interest	445,565	9.4	4.2
5. Consumer Utility Tax	364,856	7.7	6.4
6. Local Sales & Use Tax	331,954	7.0	9.5

Wythe County	Amount	Percent of Total	Peer Counties
1. Property Taxes	$9,831,796	45.7	60.7
2. Charges for Services	5,237,712	24.3	13.5
3. Local Sales & Use Tax	2,161,560	10.0	6.4
4. Earned Interest	944,404	4.4	2.8
5. Consumer Utility Tax	827,657	3.8	3.1
6. Lodging and Meals Taxes	605,482	2.8	1.1

Table 9 - Local Government Expenditures (FY 2000)

	Total Maintenance & Operating Expenditures	Per Capita	Percent of Total M&O Expenditures							
			General Admin.	Public Safety	Judicial Admin.	Public Works	Edu-cation	Health and Welfare	Parks and Rec	Comm-unity Develop-ment
Wytheville	$5,687,067	$708	16.8	29.3	n/a	40.3	n/a	n/a	9.9	3.7
"Peer" Towns	n/a	$644	12.0	34.9	n/a	39.5	n/a	n/a	8.1	5.3
Wythe County	$44,205,356	$1,649	1.9	1.8	7.7	6.0	61.4	18.4	1.5	1.3
"Peer" Counties	n/a	$1,630	3.7	2.2	9.4	4.4	64.6	12.4	1.4	1.8

Source of Data for Tables 7-9: *Comparative Report of Local Government Revenues and Expenditures - FY 2000*, Auditor of Public Accounts (2001)

Table 10 - Property Tax Rates per $100 (1999)

Locality	Average Effective (True) Tax Rate
Wythe County	**0.53**
Bland County	0.51
Carroll County	0.44
City of Galax	0.62
Grayson County	0.44
Pulaski County	0.52
Smyth County	0.64
Montgomery County	0.56
Roanoke County	1.03
City of Roanoke	1.13
Prince William County	1.26

The effective tax rates are calculated by the Cooper Center at UVA and are available in the most recent edition of *Tax Rates in Virginia's Cities, Counties, and Selected Towns* (2001). Although the 2001 nominal rates are available, the effective rates (1999 is the most recent year available) are much more accurate for making comparisons because they control for variations in assessment techniques among localities.
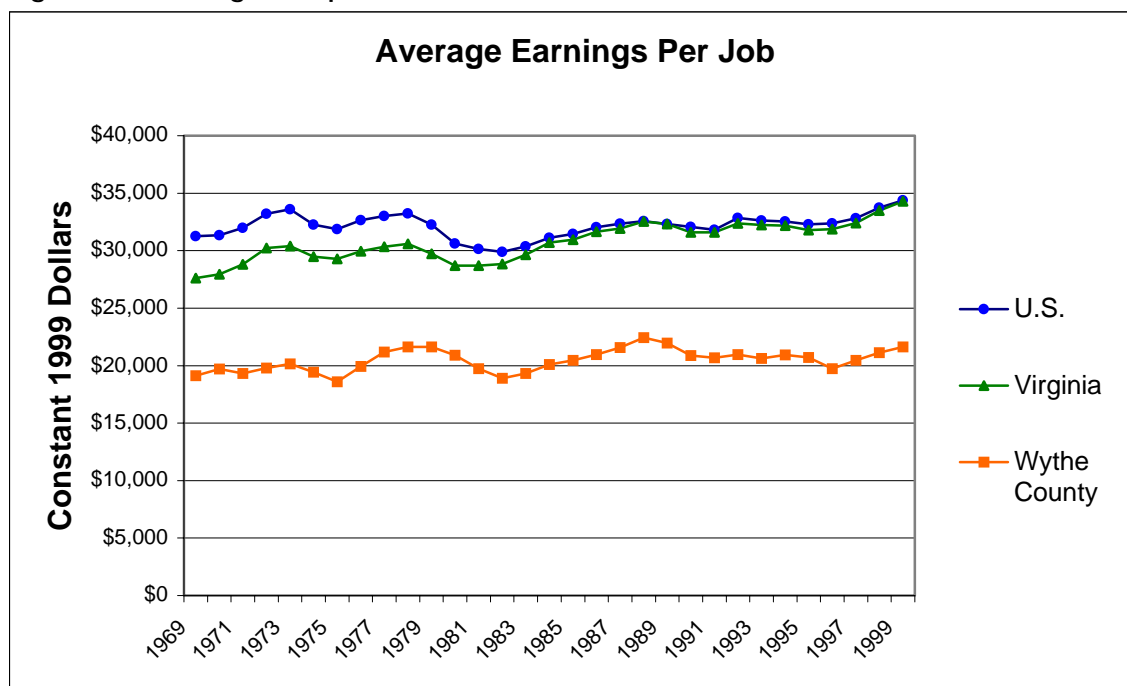
Economy

Figure 2 - Income Comparison 1969-1999
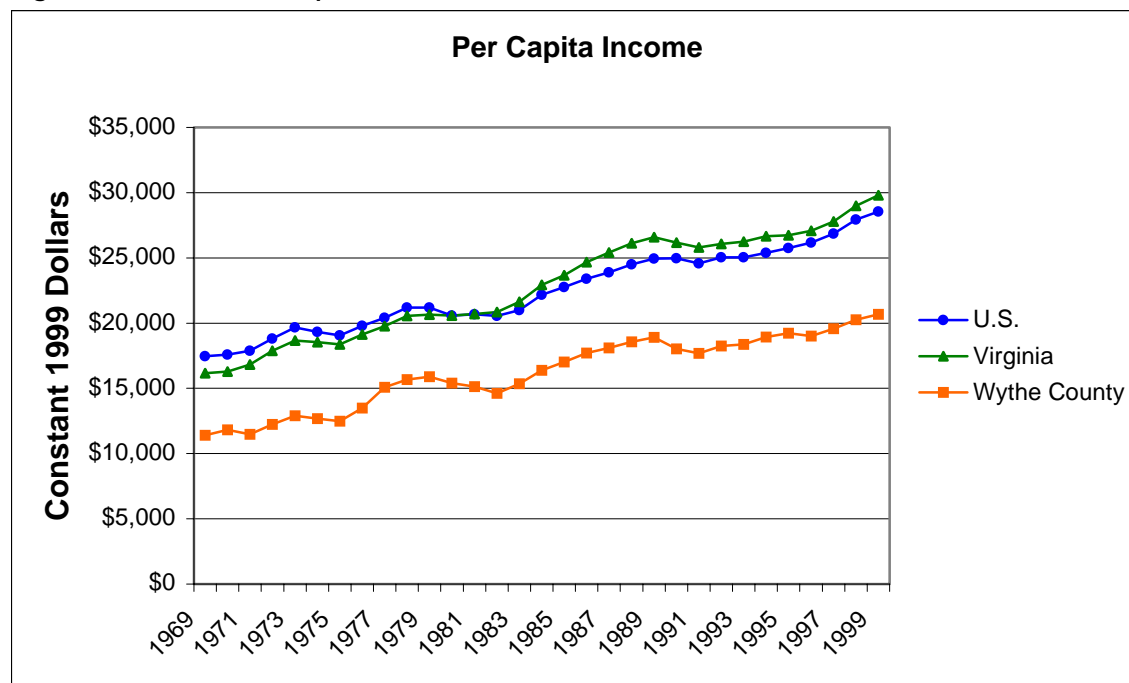
Source: Regional Economic Information System, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Figure 3 - Earnings Comparison 1969-1999

Average Earnings Per Job

Source: Regional Economic Information System, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Table 11 - Poverty Estimates, Wythe County
(Percent Population Below Poverty Level)

	1989	1993	1995	1997	1999
Wythe County	16.1	19.5	15.6	16.2	11.0
Virginia	10.5	12.0	11.3	11.6	9.6

source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 12 - Percent of Employment by Industry (PT and FT)
(Wythe Co. & Virginia)

| Industry Group	1969		1979		1989		1999	
	WC	VA	WC	VA	WC	VA	WC	VA
Manufacturing	17.4	17.5	21.6	15.3	18.1	11.9	16.0	9.4
Services	16.0	16.5	15.6	19.8	22.5	25.6	24.6	31.3
Farm employment	16.0	4.7	11.4	3.0	7.9	1.7	7.0	1.4
Government	14.1	28.2	15.5	23.9	14.2	21.0	14.7	18.3
Retail trade	13.6	13.1	13.5	14.2	19.6	16.0	20.7	16.1
Construction	10.0	5.5	7.5	6.2	6.8	7.0	4.2	6.2
Transportation & public utilities	4.0	4.8	3.4	4.5	2.7	4.5	4.2	4.8
Mining	3.7	0.7	2.8	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.8	0.3
Finance, insurance, real estate	2.8	5.5	4.3	7.9	3.6	7.0	3.8	7.4
Wholesale trade	1.8	3.1	3.8	3.8	3.3	4.0	3.1	3.7

Source: Regional Economic Information System, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Table 13 - 2000 Wythe County Business Patterns (selected industries)

Industry	Employees (FT & PT)	Establish-ments	Annual Payroll	Payroll per Employee
Manufacturing	1,974	43	$55,882,000	$28,309
Gas Stations	605	32	8,352,000	13,805
Retail Trade (less gas stations)	1,380	153	24,508,000	17,759
Accommodations	342	21	3,895,000	11,389
Food services & drinking places	945	50	8,990,000	9,513
Health Care and Social Asst.	1,224	55	28,478,000	23,266
Transportation and Warehousing	340	36	11,376,000	33,459
Construction	271	61	8,352,000	30,819
Information	159	14	4,811,000	30,258
Professional, Scientific, Technical	120	41	3,033,000	25,275

Source: County Business Patterns, U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 4 - Unemployment
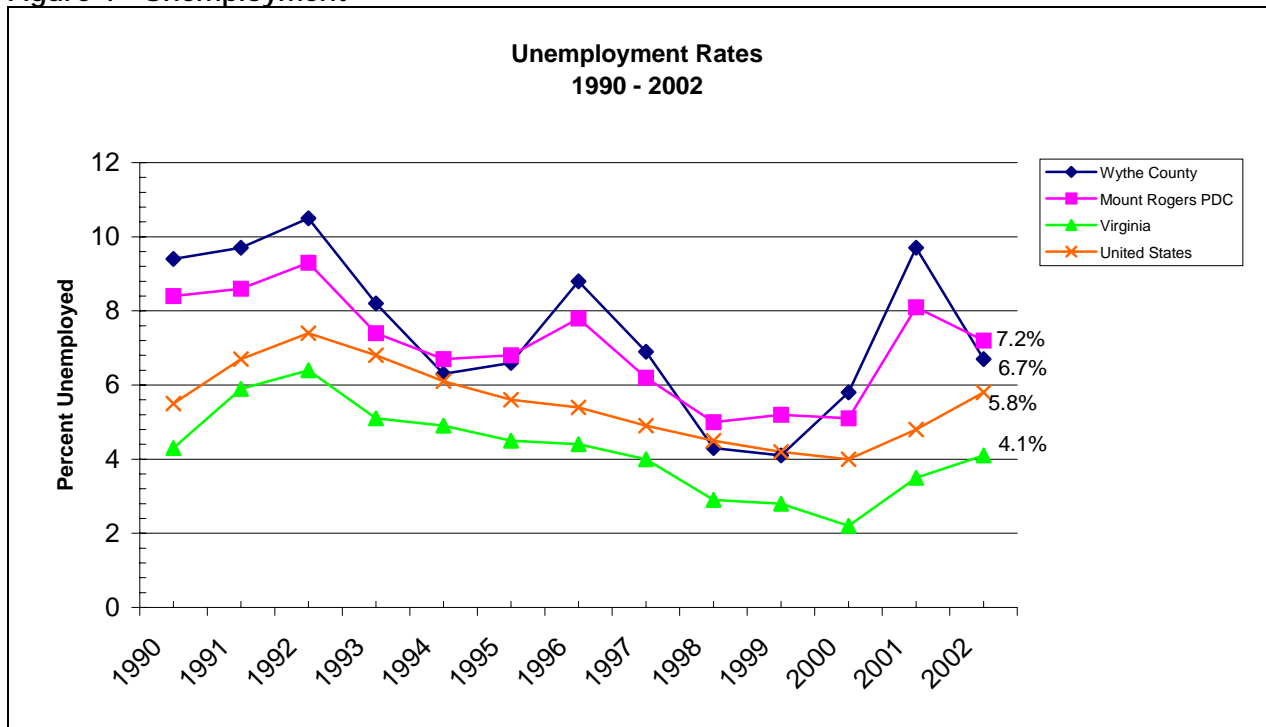
Source: Virginia Employment Commission

Education

Table 11 - K-12 Public Education Data

	Wythe County	State Average	State High (District)	State Low (District)
Total Expenditures Per Pupil[†]	**$6,087**	$6,985	$11,697 (Arlington Co.)	$5,436 (Bedford Co.)
Pupil-Teacher Ratio K-7[†]	**13.3**	13.6	19.5 (Campbell Co.)	9.1 (Charles City Co.)
Pupil-Teacher Ratio 8-12[†]	**11.5**	11.8	17.5 (Isle of Wight Co.)	6.0 (Highland Co.)
Dropout Rate[‡]	**2.27**	2.99	6.32 (Accomack Co.)	0.73 (Hanover Co.)
High School Graduate Plans[‡]				
Percent attending 4-year college	**30.1**	47.7	74.3 (Falls Church)	18.6 (Page Co.)
Percent attending 2-year college	**39.9**	24.5	49.0 (Russell Co.)	10.3 (Surry Co.)
Percent with other plans	**3.2**	8.5	31.8 (Hopewell City)	1.7 (Richmond Co.)
Percent with no plans	**26.7**	19.3	49.6 (Page Co.)	2.9 (Falls Church City)

[†]Superintendents Annual Report, Virginia Department of Education (1999-2000)
[‡]Average rate from 1997-2001, Virginia Department of Education

Table 12 - Educational Attainment, persons 25 years and over

	No H.S. Diploma	H.S. Grad or Equi-valent	Some College, No Degree	Assoc Degree	Bachelor Degree	Grad or Prof Degree	Percent High School Grad or Higher	Percent Bachelor Degree or Higher
Wytheville	28.8%	26.8%	17.4%	7.2%	13.6%	6.2%	71.2%	19.8%
Wythe County	29.8%	32.4%	18.1%	7.5%	8.4%	3.7%	70.2%	12.1%
Congressional District	30.9%	31.7%	16.9%	5.8%	8.8%	5.8%	69.0%	14.7%
Virginia	18.5%	11.3%	20.4%	5.6%	17.9%	11.6%	81.5%	29.5%

source: 2000 U.S. Census (note Wythe Co. figures include Town of Wytheville)

Agriculture

Figure 5 - Farm Receipts

Total Cash Receipts from Farm Marketings - Wythe County (millions of dollars)
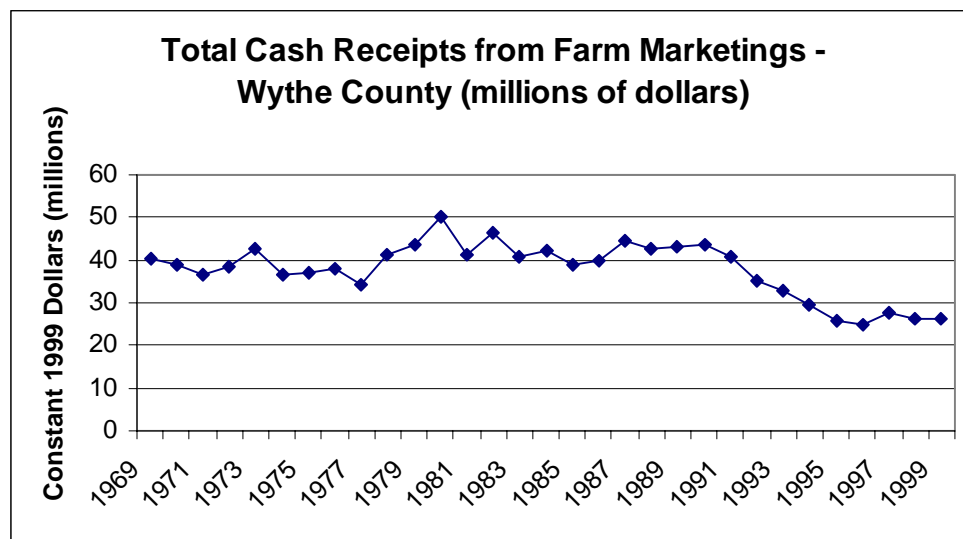
Source: Regional Economic Information System, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Table 13 - Other farm indices

Wythe County	1987	1992	1997
Farms (number)	746	725	734
Land in farms (acres)	143,474	131,366	139,554
Total cropland (acres)	76,944	75,075	77,979
Beef cow farms (number)	440	457	447
Milk cow farms (number)	123	91	58

source: U.S. Census of Agriculture

note: The 139,554 acres of farmland comprises 47 percent of the county's area. Livestock products account for over 90 percent of farm sales. Wythe County ranks 6th in cattle production statewide, 8th in overall hay production, and 4th in corn for silage production (Virginia Agricultural Statistics Service).

Other Indices

Table 14 - Cost of Living

	Median Home Value	Median Monthly Mortgage Costs	Median Gross Rent
Wytheville	$85,100	$740	$390
Wythe County	$77,300	$670	$401
Congressional District	$76,400	$718	$407
Virginia	$125,400	$1,144	$650

source: 2000 U.S. Census

Table 15 - Crash Statistics for Wythe County

	1999	2000	2001
Crashes	663	652	590
Fatalities	6	9	3
Injuries	426	414	366
Death Rate*	0.29	0.43	0.14

source: Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles
*deaths per 1000 licensed drivers
  2001 death rate statewide was .18, for
  Bristol District, .33

Table 16 - Crimes Reported in Wythe County

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Robberies	4	8	3	3	6	10	8
Aggregated Assaults	15	18	17	14	24	25	50
Burglaries	88	84	48	66	50	51	93
Larcenies	348	502	484	549	515	541	582
Motor Vehicle Thefts	34	42	33	33	55	30	39
Arsons	8	5	1	6	2	7	5
Murders	3	3	2	0	0	2	0
Forcible Rapes	0	4	1	6	9	5	2

source: Uniform Crime Reports
(United States Department of Justice - Federal Bureau of Investigation)

Table 17 - Travel Time for Wythe County Workers

	1990	2000
Average travel time to work	20.6	24.2
Percent workers who travel less than 20 minutes to work	54.0%	47.5%
Percent workers who travel 30 minutes or more to work	26.8%	30.8%

source: Census Transportation Planning Package 2000

Table 18 - Total Traveler Spending (Millions of Dollars)

Locality	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Montgomery County	48.6	50.5	47.5	48.3	49.0	53.3	55.8	54.1	58.7	59.9	65.3	67.3	69.1
Wythe County	36.7	38.4	39.1	42.8	47.0	44.5	46.5	47.3	59.8	62.1	65.7	67.8	68.9
Carroll County	14.2	16.0	16.5	18.9	20.0	20.6	21.3	27.0	32.2	35.9	36.5	40.3	41.8
Smyth County	12.5	11.5	11.2	9.9	13.4	16.1	16.5	17.5	14.4	14.9	16.2	16.3	16.7
Giles County	14.2	14.4	12.9	13.1	13.9	13.7	14.2	13.1	13.1	13.9	14.4	15.6	16.4
Bland County	2.8	3.2	4.0	3.9	4.1	4.4	4.6	4.5	6.1	6.8	7.5	7.6	7.6

source: Virginia Tourism Corporation

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Interview Protocol and Interviewees
Stakeholder Interviews
Spring 2001

*(1)Background information about respondent. How long have you lived in the area? Are there many members of your family close-by? What is your occupation? Do you belong to any civic organizations, including churches, or other local clubs or groups? Please identify which ones.

*(2)What do you think of as your local community (geographically/politically speaking)?

*(3)What are the community's strengths? What do you like most about your community?

*(4)What are the community's weaknesses? What do you like least about your community?

*(5)When it comes to important issues that impact the community, who has the most influence over the decisions made?

*(6)Please describe what you think Wythe County and Wytheville will be like in the future. Are there any particular opportunities you see? What is the time horizon you are thinking of? Is there any difference in 20 years? In 50 years?

*(7)[Possible follow-up] Is this your preferred vision? If not, what is? What needs to be done in order for this vision to be realized?

*(8)Do you see any difference between Wytheville's and Wythe County's futures? Why or why not?

*(9)What outcomes do you want from this community visioning?

*(10)As we begin community visioning process, who would be some of the key people to talk to? Any specific recommendations for the steering committee? Would you like to be involved in some way [if so, what is the best way to contact you]?

Interviewees in Stakeholder Interview Process (Spring 2001)

Date	Name	Affiliation
27-Mar-01	Alan Hawthorne	Joint Industrial Development Authority (Exec Director)
17-May-01	Albert Armentrout	Max Meadows Ruritan
17-Apr-01	Andy Kegley	Mountain Shelter, Inc.
9-May-01	Ann Crockett-Stark	Wythe County Board of Supervisors
24-Apr-01	Bill Gilmer, Jr.	WordSprint (Rotary, Chamer of Commerce)
22-Apr-01	Bill Smith	Smith Enterprises
10-May-01	Bill Snyder	Wytheville Planning Commission
17-Apr-01	Bill Weisiger	Town Council
9-May-01	Carl Stark	Former Mayor, Wytheville
17-May-01	Charles Crockett	Town Council
17-Apr-01	Colin Peel	Camrett Logistics, Inc.
17-Jul-01	Dan Porter	Wythe County Board of Supervisors
16-Apr-01	Danny Gordon	WYVE/WXBX
24-May-01	Danny McDaniel	Wythe County Board of Supervisors
17-Apr-01	Dave Elmore	Morton Powder Coatings
17-Apr-01	Dave McPherson	Chamber of Commerce Board
17-May-01	David Danner	Danner Dairy; VT Extension
16-Jul-01	David Shaver	Virginia State Police
15-Mar-01	Dick Phillippi	M L Development of Virginia, Inc.
16-Jul-01	Dicky Davis	Prominent Land Owner along interstate corridor
17-Apr-01	Ferd Hammack	Petro Shopping Center
17-Apr-01	Gene Metzger	KOA Campgrounds
17-May-01	Harold Hart	Old Fort Western Store; Property Owner
16-Apr-01	Janet Blair-Emmons	Factory Merchants Mall
27-Mar-01	Jennifer Jones	Chamber of Commerce (Exec Director)
17-Apr-01	Jody Gibson	Chamber of Commerce (President)
10-May-01	Joe Freeman	Longwood Manufacturing; Industrial Authority
16-Jul-01	John Crowgey	Prominent Land Owner in Wytheville
17-Apr-01	Libby Huddle	Max Meadows community activist
17-Apr-01	Linda Spiker	Wytheville Enterprise
16-Apr-01	Liza Field	Wythe Conservation Network
17-Jul-01	Louise Crockett	Concerned Citizens Network
24-May-01	Lynn and Susan Goforth	Goforth Enterprises
17-Apr-01	Oral Jones	Oral Jones Real Estate
10-May-01	Peter Patel	Hampton Inn
5-Apr-01	Ron Kime	Old Fort Antique Mall; Big Walker Lookout
10-May-01	Rosa Lee Jude	Tourism and Public Information, Town of Wytheville
16-Apr-01	Sam Jones	Hodges, Jones & Mabry, P.C.
5-Apr-01	Clare McBrien	Crossroads Shelter
17-May-01	Stephen Bear	Asst County Administrator, Wythe County
10-May-01	Stephen Moore	Asst Town Manager, Wytheville
5-Apr-01	Steve Irvin	Joint Industrial Development Authority
16-Apr-01	Steve Lester	Blue Ridge Insurance Group
17-Jul-01	Tasos Gogos	Ocean Bay Restaurant
23-May-01	Tom Bralley	First National Bank
24-May-01	Travis Jackson	Rural Development; Hospital Board
16-Jul-01	Trent Crewe	Mayor, Town of Wytheville
5-Apr-01	Wayne and Ty Roop	Wytheville Office Supply

APPENDIX C:

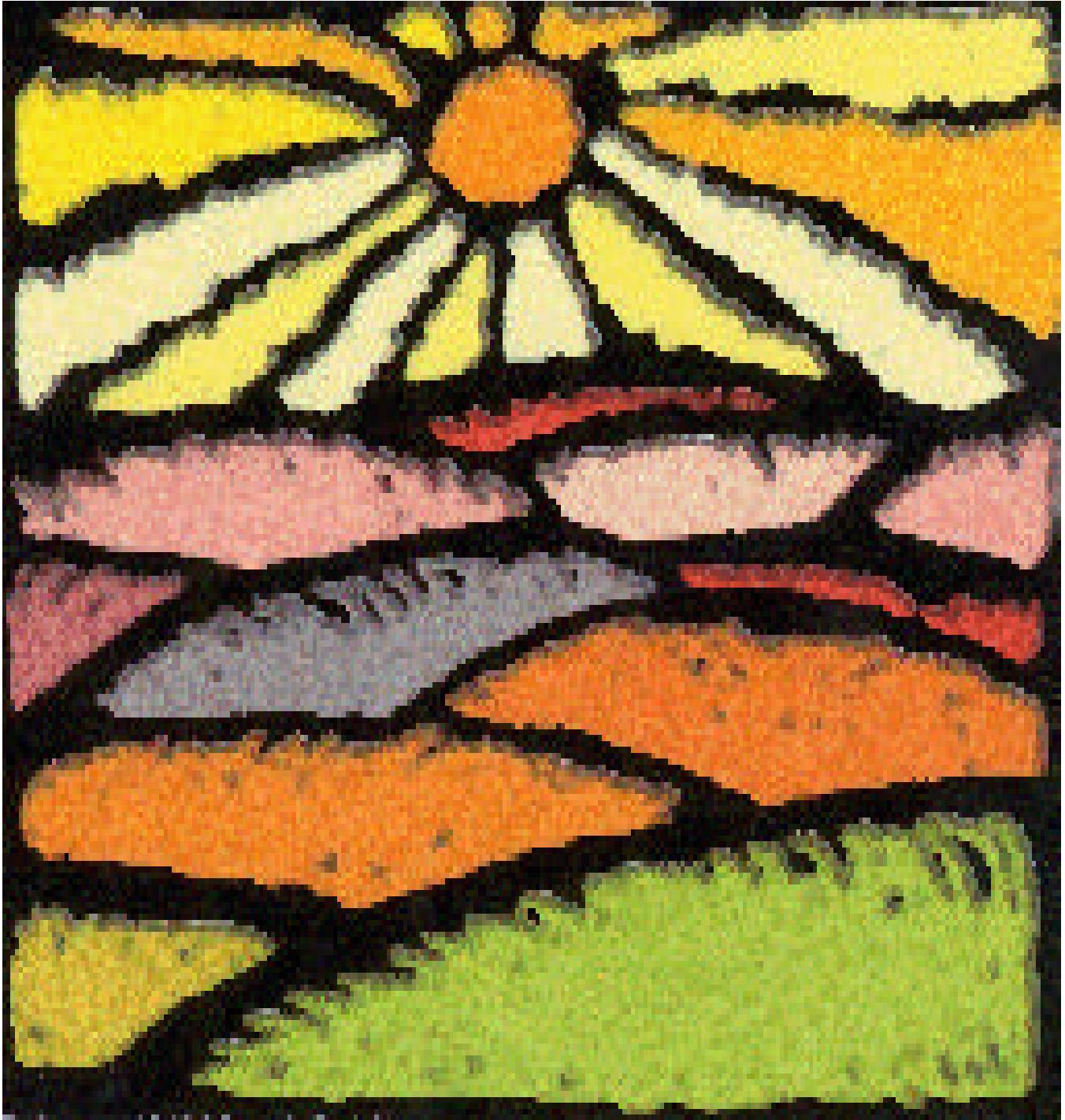**COMMUNITY FORUM DISCUSSION BOOKLET**

[PAGES 269-286]

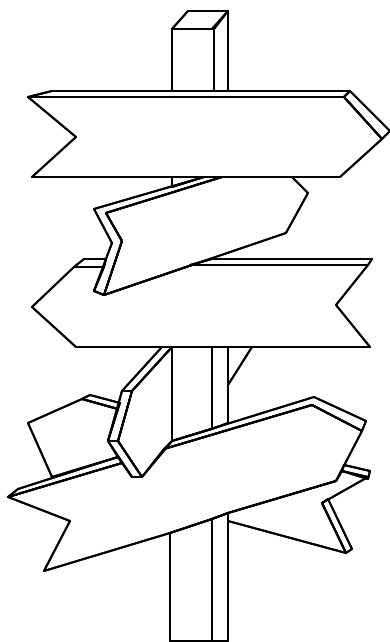THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

WYTHEVILLE/WYTHE HORIZONS

Shaping Our Community's Future

Which Way Do We Go?

A guide for deliberative forums on developing a community vision for the greater Wytheville area

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Wytheville/Wythe Horizons

Shaping Our
Community's Future
Which Way Do We Go?

ABOUT THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

During the summer of 2001, a group of Wytheville area citizens, assisted by a research team from Virginia Tech, met to talk about how the community could develop a practical vision of its future. The following comments from participants suggest the need for a "vision" – a sense of what the community can do about its future:

"With the right sort of visioning process we could be very successful. Without it, we go *issue by issue*."

"I would like to see citizens of the Town and County discover that their values and goals, their vision of the future, are not that different."

To develop a vision based on how the community sees itself and the practical possibilities of its future, the group agreed to try a different approach. That different approach is *deliberation*.

Deliberation is NOT debate. It is NOT public relations. It is NOT political horse-trading. It is sitting down and listening to and talking with each other about the future. While it doesn't end in total agreement, it "can point people in a particular direction and give them a foundation for sharable or

interconnected purposes."

This booklet is designed to help you and your fellow citizens deliberate about the future of the community. The Tech research team has gathered some basic information that you may find useful. It is presented in a seperate attachment. The main portion of the booklet describes four different perspectives on the future. They are different but not mutually exclusive. You may find certain elements in each that you like and others you don't like. The four approaches are intended to start deliberation, not provide the answers. Answers may be developed at the issue forums that will be held over the coming months by clubs, churches, schools, and other interested organizations.

Keep in mind that the goal is not to choose one approach, as you will likely find things you like and don't like within each one. Instead, through the process of deliberation we will work our way toward a shared understanding and identify common ground that can become the basis of a community vision, a shared sense of the direction for the community.

Another important development for the community has already begun. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has started the lengthy process of deciding what will be done about the I-77/I-81 corridor. By discussing more broadly what the future should be, the community can equip itself to deal more effectively with specific issues like this one. As VDOT sets its planning process in motion, the community must work to speak with a strong voice, considering alternatives in the light of its own plans for the future. The community can actively shape its future.

Please read this booklet. Discuss the perspectives with your family and friends. Plan to attend one or more of the forums as they are held. Participate in one of the working groups that will be formed to develop the community vision statement. And, most of all, encourage others to do the same. It will be time well spent.

CONTENTS

Shaping Our Community's Future

· ·

Which Way Do We Go?

COMPARING THE APPROACHES

Industrial Growth Is The Key

Bringing in new jobs is the key to the community's future. A strong local industrial base will be the foundation of a prosperous future for all.

What Can Be Done?

- Invest in physical infrastructure such as roads, water, sewer, and gas to support industry.
- Provide tax incentives to attract new businesses.
- Invest in workforce development tailored to meet the demands of incoming industry.

In Support
- More jobs means less unemployment and demand for community services.
- More jobs mean more opportunities for youth to stay.
- More jobs mean more revenue to improve schools and recreation programs.

In Opposition
- This approach subsidizes new growth at the expense of existing residents.
- Industrial growth can mean a decline in farmland and other green space, decreased air quality, and increased traffic congestion.
- Many new jobs are part-time and low-wage with no benefits.

A Likely Tradeoff?

Focusing on *growth* and bringing in new jobs may come at the price of losing the non-economic factors that contribute to quality of life such as clean air, scenic beauty, low crime, and overall rural, small-town character.

Preserve Community Character

The attractiveness of this community is in its rural character and scenic natural beauty. We must work to preserve our cultural, historical, and natural heritage.

What Can Be Done?

- Invest resources in the community's existing assets, such as Wytheville's downtown.
- Make specific efforts to preserve open space. Zoning ordinances and conservation easements, for example, can protect valued areas from sprawl.
- Utilize natural, cultural, and historical resources in terms of tourism. Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the region.

In Support

- Preservation means less change and expense for the community.
- This community is a great place to live. Let's not give that up.
- People come here for the rural character and scenic beauty.

In Opposition

- This approach does not address the problem of our youth leaving and not coming back.
- Can preservation adequately address the community's unemployment problem?
- Many people do not want to see any measure that could interfere with their property rights.

A Likely Tradeoff?

Focusing on community preservation could mean that we never have the "amenities" of larger communities and it could also mean fewer job opportunities.

COMPARING THE APPROACHES

Riding the Technology Wave

The technological revolution is the key to the community's future. In order to secure a brighter future the community needs to be transformed into a high-tech oasis that would grow and attract entrepreneurs.

What Can Be Done?

- Make significant investments in information technology (IT) infrastructure such as broadband internet access and wireless.
- Invest heavily in IT education in public schools.
- Focus economic development on "growing" local microenterprises through programs such as small business incubators with an IT emphasis.

In Support

- Many IT jobs are high paying.
- 100 companies employing 5 people each is better than 5 companies with 100 in terms of economic stability.
- This kind of local culture speaks directly to the issue of retaining the community's "best and brightest."

In Opposition

- This approach is too youth oriented; we are an older community.
- The high-tech approach requires large investments with no guaranteed payoff.
- High-tech is very unstable. Look at all of the internet startups that have failed.

A Likely Tradeoff?

Transforming the community through technology investments could significantly alter the community's character and could increase the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Focus on Our Social Infrastructure

Focusing on *community* itself is where we must begin in discussions about the future. Improving the overall level and quality of civic involvement, fostering collaboration, and developing our human resources will improve the community more than anything else.

What Can Be Done?

- Invest more in education and opportunities for youth.
- Focus more on community participation in education, government, and civic associations.
- See that local governments work collaboratively with each other and with other sectors, putting community ahead of jurisdiction.

In Support

- This would help improve government - citizen relationships.
- Cooperation between jurisdictions and between government and the private sector could help increase resources as well as make existing resources go farther.
- A community can accomplish a lot more than single individuals.

In Opposition

- This approach is too slow. The community needs jobs now.
- The Town and County are different. There is a we/they mentality that cannot be overcome.
- Most people aren't willing to be involved.

A Likely Tradeoff?

Focusing on the community's social infrastructure may mean that people have to let go of long held biases and become more open to different points of view.

Strengthening the industrial base, bringing in new jobs and new people, is the key requirement for a prosperous future for this community. Industrial growth leads to a better quality of life. With new jobs come the employment opportunities, population growth, amenities, and tax revenue needed in order for the community to progress. Given high local unemployment rates, this approach says that to ensure a good future, the place to start is job creation. Attracting new industry to the area will result in significant job creation.

The National Association of Manufacturers reports that every million dollars in final sales of manufactured products supports 10 manufacturing jobs as well as six jobs in other sectors such as services, construction and agriculture. This is called a multiplier effect. It says that 100 new manufacturing jobs actually means 160 total new jobs in the community.

This approach to the future envisions significant growth and development for the community. The community would grow to become a hub of industrial activity with many new manufacturing firms located in the industrial park. The community would also become a center of warehousing and transportation because of the community's strategic location and access. Progress Park would be filled with a diverse mix of businesses and

the community would finally realize the growth that was predicted decades ago when the interstates were built. With the population growth would follow many new amenities such as shopping malls, movie theaters, and other recreational opportunities.

In this view, a bright future for the community depends on a strong local industrial base. In short, the community cannot thrive if people don't have jobs. Thus, the place to start in shaping the future is attracting industry in order to get more jobs.

Supporters of approach one would generally favor the following measures:

■ Invest in traditional forms of infrastructure such as roads, water, gas, and electricity to support and attract industry.

■ Offer tax and other incentives for new businesses.

■ Invest in industrial parks and other facilities designed to attract industry.

■ Emphasize workforce development programs tailored to meet the demands of incoming employers.

Supporters of approach one would point out:

■ More jobs mean more opportunities for youth to stay in the community.

■ More employment means less need for social services and more working families to pay for amenities that people want (recreation programs and better schools, for example).

■ Diversified growth (meaning we won't put all of our eggs in one basket) avoids the risk of relying on one industry, or worse, having no industry and seeing the community die

APPROACH ONE: INDUSTRIAL GROWTH IS THE KEY

■ This approach helps to fill a need for jobs for less prepared and/or qualified citizens. In other words, lower wage jobs at factories or truck stops are better than unemployment.

■ New jobs puts more money into the local economy and in turn creates more jobs.

Opponents of approach one would point out:

■ This approach subsidizes new growth at the expense of providing services to existing residents.

■ Industrial growth negatively impacts the natural and human environment in terms of (at least) air quality, loss of prime farmland and scenic beauty in general, and increased traffic.

■ Growth doesn't necessarily equal improved quality of life. With growth comes more crime, more congestion, and less civility.

■ Heavy growth puts a major strain on existing resources (i.e. schools, roads, utilities). Who will pay?

■ Not all jobs are equally good. Many new jobs are part-time and low-wage without benefits.

Tradeoffs: This approach, as any other, requires tradeoffs. Supporters of approach one, therefore, would support focusing primarily on attracting new jobs **even if**

■ it means our limited tax dollars go to support new industries (meaning less for education and other services).

■ we lose prime farmland and scenic beauty ... our "rural character."

■ it means more traffic, more congestion, more pollution, and possibly more crime.

■ it creates a strain on infrastructure (schools, emergency services, water and sewer).

■ it means that we are a manufacturing community.

ACCORDING TO...

the National Association of Manufacturers, manufacturing is the largest contributor to economic growth.
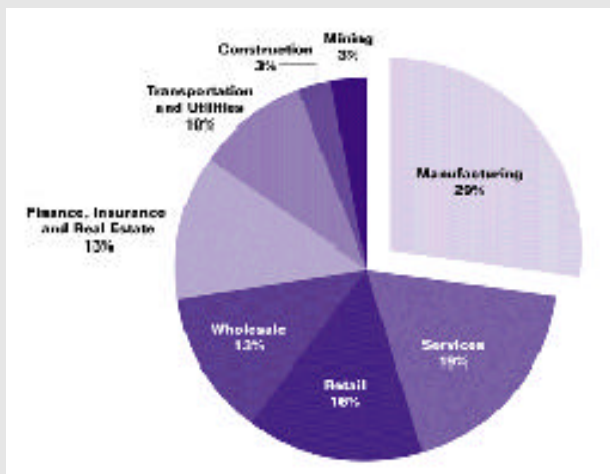
Further Reading:

■ National Association of Manufacturers, www.nam.org

■ "Infrastructure: Foundation for Development," *Appalachia* (May-August 2000)

■ http://www.arc.gov/infopubs/ appalach/mayaug00/infrastr.htm

The community's rural character and scenic natural beauty are what make it a special place in which to live. In a world of big box retailers, expressways, and traffic jams, an attractive community and area are priceless assets. Supporters of approach two say "let's keep the good things we have — the beautiful scenery, our cultural heritage, our small town way of life."

Approach two looks to keep what is good, and not risk losing it to ambitious plans for economic growth that may not work. Historic preservation and keeping a sense of permanence have value for everyone. Scenic locations are attractive to tourists, and outdoor recreation like hiking, mountain biking, and camping are creating opportunities for new small business. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in Southwest Virginia and "ecotourism" is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry worldwide.

This approach isn't so much *anti*-growth as it is *smart*-growth. The emphasis is on sustainable growth which is concerned with protecting environmental and cultural amenities unique to this place.

Virginia has some notable examples of historical preservation. Colonial Williamsburg, created through the generosity of John D. Rockefeller, is a world-famous example of how appealing historical preservation and restoration can be. But even though Williamsburg cannot be copied, there is much that a town can do to capture the spirit of Main Street before suburbanization. A starting point for exploring the possibilities is the Virginia Main Street program of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, which offers technical assistance to communities who join the program. Eighteen towns and cities in

A Guide to Rural Preservation

Saving America's Countryside: A Guide to Rural Conservation (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) is an excellent resource for further exploration of the preservation approach. The authors explore the diversity of issues incorporated in a preservation approach and identify many differentin hand. Downtown revitalization, tourism, and heritage area development are ways a community might move forward. Preservation of farmland, scenic areas, and greenways, as well as historic and cultural resources are discussed. Concerns shuch as economic vitality and property rightes are addressed along with innovative solutions to such concerns. For example, there are many voluntary techniques for protecting property conservation easements. There are also numberous ways preservation and economic vitality can go hand in hand. Downtown revitalization, tourism, and heritage area develompment are among the strategies rural communites are using to move foward without giving up that which is irreplaceable.

Virginia, including Radford and Marion are currently members of the Virginia Main Street program.

Preserving open space and rural landscape requires serious commitment and thoughtful planning on the part of local communities but is well worth the effort. Many localities across the country are enjoying success with bicycle and hiking trails that promote active use and enjoyment of the countryside. Greenways (protected

corridors of open space) serve to protect scenic beauty and wildlife habitat as well as provide recreational access. Many studies have shown that land values along greenways appreciate more than land farther away.

Finally, agriculture is also often used as part of a strategy to improve local quality of life while preserving community character. Farmer's markets and community-supported agriculture ventures, for example, are thriving in many communities throughout the U.S. Programs such as these help local farmers stay in business as well as encourage farmland preservation.

Supporters of approach two would generally favor the following measures:

■ Invest resources in the community's existing natural, cultural, and historic infrastructure. Examples include the restoration of the Training School and the preservation of the Big Survey.

■ Increase support of *local* agriculture and other *local* business.

■ Become a "destination" for tour

ists, taking advantage of recreational and cultural/historical opportunities already here.

■ Market the community as a good place to retire.

■ Utilize land use planning tools such as zoning and conservation easements to prevent sprawl and preserve open space.

Supporters of this approach may point out:

■ Preservation requires less change and expense.

■ Our community is a nice place to live. Let's not give that up.

■ People come here for the rural character and natural beauty of our community.

■ The character of the people here is special — friendly, not rude — we need to preserve that.

■ We already have quality entertainment (such as golf country club, restaurants, etc.) and outdoor recreation.

Those opposed to approach two may point out:

■ Young people don't stay. How does preserving what we have help that?

■ This approach doesn't adequately address our unemployment problem.

■ "Preservation" makes it harder to make a living.

■ There is nothing for young people to do — no bowling, skating, etc.

■ There is a lack "amenities," here that bigger communities enjoy.

■ I don't want my property to be over-regulated.

APPROACH TWO:PRESERVE COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND NATURAL BEAUTY

Tradeoffs: Supporters of approach two would support focusing primarily on *preservation*, **even if**

- it means fewer job opportunities.

- it means shopping downtown and no new malls or big stores.

- it means there is less money in the community.

- it means more regulation

- the community doesn't have as many entertainment opportunities as bigger cities.
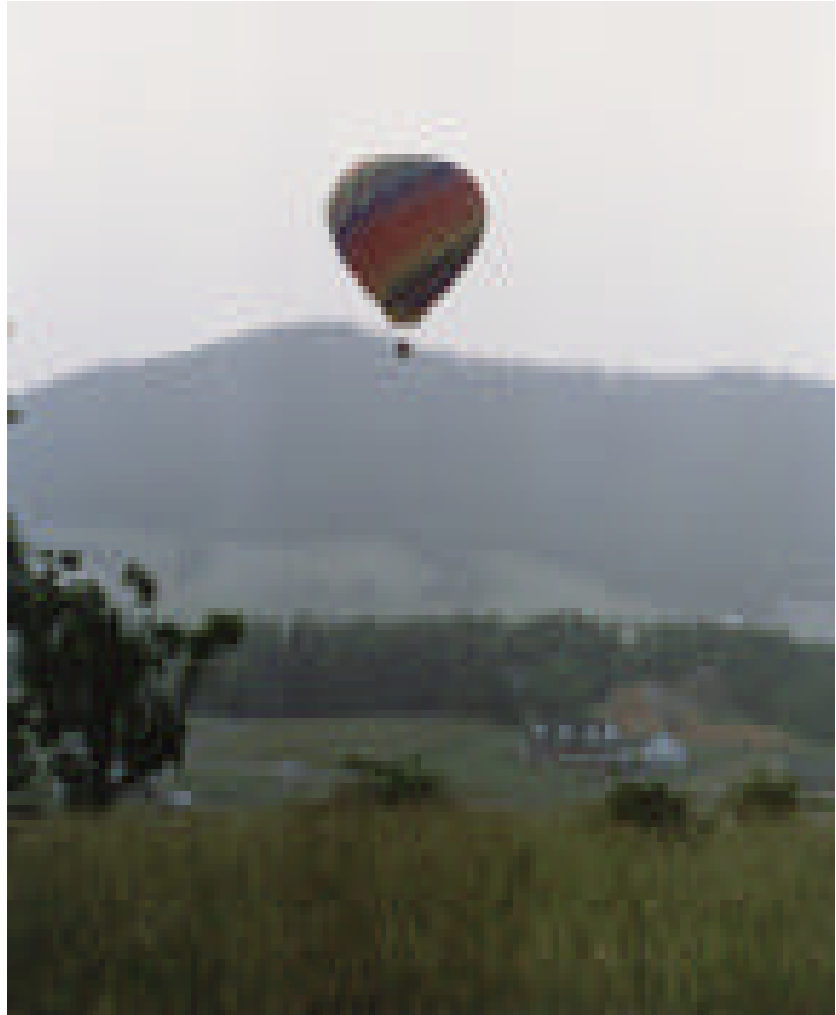
Further Reading:

- Sustainable Community Network, www.sustainable.org

- National Trust for Historic Preservation www.nationaltrust.org

- Virginia Main Street Program, http://www.dhcd.state.va.us/cd/crd/msp/mspindex.htm

- Applachia article on ecotourism (May-August 2001) http:/www.arc.gov/infopubs/appalach/m/ayaug01/ecomain.htm

The community needs to take advantage of the technological revolution. A different kind of infrastructure needs to be developed in order to transform the community into a high-tech oasis that would attract entrepreneurs. A goal would be to become fertile ground for locally "grown" information-based microenterprises, such as those that would produce research, software, hardware or technological advances in medicine and biology. Jobs in information technology can be high paying and clean and are the center of the "new economy."

Advocates of this approach point to what happened once businesses downtown were able to hook up to Wytheville's fiber loop. Existing businesses have flourished and the old Leggett building was filled within months, primarily with expansions of existing businesses. Close by, the town of Abingdon is receiving national recognition for its innovative electronic government system. *Yahoo Internet Life* magazine has already called Abingdon "the most wired small town in America." The town's electronic village has established a fiber-optic network providing high-speed Internet access for businesses and homes. And the town, for example, has assembled a geographic information system available over the Internet.

Information technology may enable the area to attract so-called "lone eagles" — successful entrepreneurs, who would rather live and work in a quite, rural setting with access to outdoor recreation. Advances in information and transportation technology make telecommuting possible and attractive for those who prefer a rural lifestyle.

The high tech potential in the region stretching from Roanoke to Abingdon includes several key sectors: fiber optics and wireless technologies; engineering; software development; and the life sciences, with a heavy emphasis on biomedical sciences. Other businesses could include database management, reservations operations, polling firms, directory assistance centers and technical support services for the information technology industry. Each business attracts others to complement it.

Another avenue of possible development would be leadership in distance learning and telemedicine programs. A combination of Network Virginia and LMDS wireless technology is being used in adjacent counties in the area to deliver classes and health services.

The Southern Technology Council advocates "technology-driven economic development." Where communities focus on technology in education and infrastructure development, there is potential for *growing* local businesses. High technology development counters the "brain drain" problem of seeing the community's best and brightest leave after high school and never return.

Supporters of approach three would generally favor the following measures:

- Invest heavily in high-tech infrastructure (i.e., broadband access and wireless technologies).

- Also invest heavily in education, particularly technology training.

- Focus "economic development" resources in technology business incubation (support start-

up microenterprises).

■ Market the community as a high-tech, information age community.

Supporters of approach three may point out:

■ Many information technology (IT) jobs are highly paid.

■ 100 companies employing 5 people is better for the community than 5 companies employing 100.

■ These jobs would attract supporting businesses.

■ IT jobs do not consume much space and resources and are environmentally friendly.

■ It's the future and would help eliminate the "brain drain" problem.

■ We already have the necessary training base (VT/RU/WCC).

■ These jobs require a strong work ethic that this community has.

■ The community is well located within reach of major universities, colleges, and community colleges.

Those opposed to approach three may point out:

■ This is too youth oriented; we are an older community.

■ Many of the "high tech" jobs turn out to be lower paying than once thought (i.e., call centers).

■ This requires career ladders and lifelong learning, which may not "fit" our community.

■ IT jobs require tremendous investment in human resources and infrastructure with no guaranteed payoff.

Overcoming the Digital Divide

A recent report by Virginia Tech researchers titled "Creating the Cyber-South" finds significant evidence of a growing "digital divide" between those able to fully participate in the new information age and those who are not. The digital divide speaks to issues of access to technology, computer and information literacy, and availability of content. The authors argue that this divide has serious implications for the long-term well being of individuals and communities. The report also identifies numerous initiatives aimed at bridging the divide. These include primary and secondary education programs, efforts to improve infrastructure and service provision, community access and workforce initiatives, and public-private partnerships. Virginia's 'Digital Opportunity' program is cited as a noteworthy example in the report. For communities seeking to take advantage of the new information age, bridging the digital divide is a significant issue. However, as the Cyber-South report illustrates, there are many resources, both public and private, to draw on in this effort.

■ We do not currently have the workforce base for these jobs.

■ We have not yet attracted investment from the large educational enterprises that are close.

APPROACH THREE: RIDING THE TECHNOLOGY WAVE

■ High tech is very unstable. Many entrepreneurs start up three or four businesses just to sell them.

Tradeoffs: Supporters of approach three would say we will focus primarily on *targeting growth in IT* **even if**

■ there is some risk involved.

■ not all IT jobs are environmentally friendly (e.g. biotech waste)

■ this approach would create a wider gap between the haves and the have-nots.

■ it would take huge investments in infrastructure and education.

■ the community character is changed by "outsiders."

■ a large percentage of the population is left out or need intensive training (that costs money) to acquire new skills.

Further Reading:

■   Southern Technology Council www.southern.org/pubs/stc/stcpubs.shtml

■   "Creating the Cyber-South" http://www.southern.org/pubs/stc/cybersouth.PDF

■   "Launching Technology Jobs," *Appalachia* (January-April 2000) http://www.arc.gov/infopubs/appalach/janapr00/launch.htm

If the community is going to guide itself to a bright future it must look inside itself and strengthen its stock of social or civic capital. Harvard professor Robert Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organization, such as *networks*, *norms*, and *trust*, that facilitate *coordination* and *cooperation* for mutual benefit." In an extensive study over several decades of newly created regional governments in Italy, Putnam found that regions with strong traditions of civic engagement—measured in terms of such things as voter turnout, newspaper readership and membership in choral societies, literary circles, civic and athletic clubs—were marked by better governance and economic development. In other words, the level of overall community involvement was found to be a pre-condition for success in terms of economic development and effective government.

Numerous studies of rural community development have demonstrated that "a vigorous network of indigenous grassroots associations" can be as essential to development as physical infrastructure, appropriate technology, or other economic factors. Professor Cornelia Flora has found that "entrepreneurial social infrastructure" is a "necessary ingredient for successfully linking physical resources and leadership for community development." Entrepreneurial communities have strong networks of cooperation that facilitate the flow of information and resources so that the community can rely on its own resources and act proactively to solve its own problems.

The focus here is on the human and social dimensions. The vision of the future is one of a strong *community* of citizens who work together to make things happen, regardless of existing or potential opportunities or threats. The place to start building a better future is in the people themselves and their relationships with one another. Developing an entrepreneurial social infrastructure, or improving the community's stock of social capital requires a multi-faceted approach to reinvigorating the civic culture of the community.

Approach four, therefore, looks to restore the central role of civic, religious, and service organizations in the community. It

The Heritage Trail

In 1973, the Dubuque (Iowa) county plan called for the public purchase of an abandoned railroad right-of-way should the opportunity ever arise. When the opportunity was presented, however, the county faced financial constraints that made purchasing *and* developing the corridor into a recreation trail impossible. But with the help of a group of volunteers that formed the non-profit Heritage Trail, Inc., the community was able to acquire and build the Heritage trail over a seven year period. Over half of the cost of the trail was paid for by local businesses and over 1,200 individuals. Over 45,000 hours of work were also donated by local volunteers. After the project was completed the county took over operation and maintenance of the trail. Today over 100,000 people use the trail each year, providing a significant boost to the local economy. Perhaps more important though is that the Heritage Trail is a source of community pride, demonstrating how collaboration between citizens, government, and business can benefit the community in significant, lasting ways.

APPROACH FOUR: FOCUS ON OUR SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

It emphasizes greater family and community involvement in education. It also emphasizes collaboration across jurisdictions, as well as across different levels of government. Collaborations between the public, private, and non-profit sectors is also a critical element of this approach. In short, this approach is about restoring civic pride and strengthening the community's ability to collaborate.

Supporters of approach four would generally favor the following measures:

■ More investment in education, including civic education.

■ A focus on parental/community involvement in schools.

■ Initiatives to stimulate public involvement, beyond "not in my backyard" participation.

■ Focusing more on youth in general. Increasing the importance of civics classes and community

service.

■ More partnerships between jurisdictions, public/private entities, etc. A commitment on the part of community leaders to collaborate more and think "community" over "jurisdiction"

Those in support of approach four would point out that this approach:

■ encourages the next generation to stay here.

■ creates a higher public self-esteem (community pride).

■ increases public confidence in government (particularly local) and improves government-citizen relationships

■ may make the community more willing to improve.

■ In addition, using this approach may increase resources or make resources go farther if there were more public/public and public/private cooperation.

■ Finally, people *are* willing to tax themselves when it goes to education, according to the 1997 County Survey.

Those opposed to approach four would point out:

■ Many citizens feel they don't have power.

■ This approach may lead to more government bureaucracy.

■ This approach is too slow ... we need jobs now.

■ Some may feel that education is not neces

APPROACH FOUR: FOCUS ON OUR SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

sary or is too expensive.

■　Apathy will keep people from being involved.

■　Jurisdictions just can't get along. There are even some legal incentives that go against cooperation.

■　The Town and County are different. There is a we/they mentality.

■　We want to be better but we are not willing to change.

Further Reading:

■　Civic Practices Network, www.cpn.org

■　National Civic League, www.ncl.org

■　*Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert Putnam, 2000 (see www.bowlingalone.com)

Trade-offs: Supporters of approach four would support focusing primarily on community development and social infrastructure even if

■　it means raising taxes.

■　I have to be involved, which means more meetings or speaking up.

■　it means disagreeing with someone I know well, or working with people with whom I may not particularly like to work.

■　it means waiting longer to see the "fruits" of this approach (a better quality of life in terms of economic opportunity).

■　I have to let go of some long held biases and be open to other points of view.

APPENDIX D:

PROJECT UPDATE NEWSLETTER

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Project Update

Institute for Policy Outreach   **Winter 2003**

Forums Foster Involvement of Youth

by Andy Sorrell

In order to include the youth in the visioning process, forums were scheduled the last week of October in government classes at George Wythe High School. These forums reached the entire senior class and provided forum facilitators with new insights and ideas that will be a great help in drafting a vision statement that includes the input of the community's youth.

Each of the four government classes spent an entire week engaged in the visioning forums and the students raised several concerns and innovative ideas. Students expressed concerns that the community has to weigh projects that have quick returns with ones that provide long-term stability, such as providing stable jobs as opposed to taking any jobs offered.

The students listed improving the job situation as one of the most important things the community needs. Raising such questions like, "should the community be selective about employers?" "Do we take whatever compa-

> One student stated that there was not anything better to do than "hang out in the K-Mart parking lot."

nies that will bring in jobs regardless if they fit our community?" "How do we keep the youth and people already employed from leaving?"

Another important issue that the students found important was the need to keep the community's natural beauty and its rural character in place. Students suggested that instead of developing new areas why not use what has been developed? There are plenty of

vacant buildings and empty spaces that can be reused or renovated. The community should focus its efforts on redevelopment rather than developing new areas.

Students also raised the need for increased educational opportunities. The youth of the community see this connected to the improvement in job opportunities. In addition, the students all agreed there needs to be better entertainment options around town. They feel that there are not enough things for young people to do. As one student stated, there was not anything better to do than "hang out in the K-Mart parking lot. "

Students also suggested that the level of community involvement needs to increase. They feel

Wytheville's Future Needs a Vision

by Bill Gilmer

Truth be told, I got involved in the visioning process with my own axe to grind: I thought I knew where our community should be heading, and I wanted to help formulate a plan to get us there. It's been a real eye opener for me, to hear the heartfelt concerns of so many and such diverse people, to realize that the process of deliberation itself is so valuable, that the insights of the many, shared creatively, are more powerful than the insights of the one.

So far in the process, I've learned two important lessons, and I've realized two chief concerns.

The first lesson is how des-

perately we need a visioning process in our community. As issues arise – prison, power line, Wal-Mart, livestock market, school budget, taxes, zoning – we seem to reinvent and restate the same arguments over and over again. Such debate has not seemed particularly useful, nor has it helped define who we are as a community; if anything, it's been divisive. Wouldn't it be more constructive if we could prioritize our collective values -- so that in the heat of the argument over current issues, we could keep our eyes focused on the long-term welfare of our community? The desire for some sort of prioritization – expressed by citizens from all areas of our community – has fueled this visioning process. This has been

the goal: through deliberation, to discover and to articulate a common vision of where we want to go.

The second lesson has been a growing awareness of the intense concern most of us feel for the future of our community. Without exception, every person who's attended a forum has expressed keen appreciation for Southwest Virginia's unique features, for the quality of life we all enjoy. We live here because we want to, because we love this land; and we want to do whatever it takes to make our community even richer and more productive for our children. Indeed, almost everyone who's been involved in the visioning process so far has expressed the same core values: an apprecia-

Project Update
By Rick Morse

It has been eighteen months since the Wytheville/Wythe Horizons citizens committee was first formed. At that time (summer of 2001) the committee was given two related but different charges. First, to serve as the official local advisory committee for VDOT's I-77/81 Location Study. And second, to be the focal point of a community visioning effort designed to help the community at-large deal with the broader question of "which way do we want to go as a community?" that became amplified with the presence of VDOT's location study.

The basic idea was that the community needs a clear vision of what it wants to be in order to speak to specific questions such as "what should be done about the road?" Prior to helping assemble the committee (whose membership, by the way, has been and continues to be open to any interested citizen); I had the opportunity to interview dozens of local "stakeholders." I was struck by how often I heard expressed a feeling that the community lacks direction. I'm not talking about political direction in terms of public officials and leadership. No, it is a sort-of bottom-up, sense of community direction that goes beyond individual people, a direction that public officials could use as a road map to help guide them. Examples of other big issues such as the prison or Duke Energy or the livestock market were often cited.

The community visioning process was initiated as an effort to develop this bottom-up sense of direction. Credit must be given to Wayne Sutherland and Mayor Trent Crewe of the Town of Wytheville for their vision and leadership in making the project possible. They recognized early on that, "politics as usual" wouldn't suffice in the face of the location study and that a strong community voice was critical. In contracting with the Institute for Policy Outreach, they made possible a public involvement effort that goes well beyond the "usual suspects." Credit also goes to the leadership of Wythe County for joining the

Vision
continued from page 1

tion for our quality of life and a desire to preserve it; an awareness of the need for jobs, for economic growth; a desire to keep our young people involved in the community, to prevent the "brain drain" where so many of our best and brightest leave after graduation; a love for our natural environment, our open farmlands, our mountain ridges, our clean air and water; the need for continuous improvement in our educational systems; an awareness of how important tourism is to our prosperity.

The challenge, of course, is to discover how these various values can work together, how they can fit into a plan that can be implemented and refined in the years to come.

Which leads to my first concern: in developing a vision statement, how tempting it will be to simply put all our various values into the same pool, give them more or less equal value, and try to please everybody. This won't work. As one of our local government leaders pointed out early in the process, "There's got to be something at the top of the pyramid." If we try to do everything, we'll accomplish nothing. A vision

> "A vision for our future needs to be focused; it needs to clearly define our top priority; and it needs to establish just how our other various values will work together to support this common goal."

for our future needs to be focused; it needs to clearly define our top priority; and it needs to establish just how our other various values will work together to support this common goal.

My second concern is the obvious one: implementation. So we go to all this trouble, all this planning, all these forums, we solicit input from as many people and groups in our community as possible; we develop a vision, we actually articulate some guiding principle for our economic and social development – so what? Will anybody pay it any heed? Will our Town and County planners be guided at all by this vision we've developed? Or will we continue to lurch issue to issue, reinventing and restating the same arguments again and again? (The answer here is clear: the people who will be guided by this vision

are those who participated in its development; and the challenge to the Visioning committee is to involve as many citizens as possible in the process, including our elected leaders and appointed planning commissions.)

This first step of the visioning process – framing the issues and holding the forums and listening to all the points of view – is taking energy. The next step – articulating a focused vision statement – will take wisdom. And the final step – implementing our vision in the days and years to come – will take courage. I am optimistic: I think that we as a community have the energy, the wisdom, and the courage to embrace a vision, and to use it creatively to insure our collective prosperity.

Bill Gilmer is a local businessman who's served on the Visioning Committee since its inception, and has participated in forums with the Wytheville-Wythe-Bland Chamber of Commerce, the Joint Governing Bodies of Wythe & Bland Counties, the Historic District Neighborhood Association, the Roundtable on Poverty, the Chamber's Industrial Subcommittee, and a general public forum.

Community Forums Held
by Andy Sorrell

The approach taken to gather citizen input in the vision process has been different then politics as usual. Rather then holding a handful of public meetings where individuals state their preferences, this project is about stimulating a public conversation, allowing citizens to create some common ground and deliberate or weigh difficult issues and trade-offs together. Over the last several months, members of the citizen's committee along with researchers from IPO went to community groups to facilitate community-visioning forums. Forum hosts include a local company (Longwood Elastomers), George Wythe High School, a neighborhood group, church group, and other community groups. An additional community-wide forum was hosted by the Wytheville Enterprise and the Wythe County Com-

munity Hospital and the Chamber of Commerce will host another community-wide forum on February 20th.

These forums have been a way to see what the community and what citizens together feel must be included in the community's vision. The discussions follow the four approaches as outlined in the visioning booklet: industrial growth, preserving community character, riding the technology wave, and focusing on social infrastructure. Several overarching themes seem to be emerging.

First, a major theme is evident in competing values of growth versus population. Across all of the forums, citizens raised concerns about the economic and job conditions in the community, but also felt strongly about preserving the community's character. Relating to these

issues, there is a strong desire for zoning in the county to help accomplish these goals. However, some question the need for zoning due to the restrictions it will bring.

Second, there must be better ways to get community members involved. Each forum highlighted the notion that approach four, focusing on community relations, is necessary for any of the other approaches to work. Citizens need to feel they can make a difference.

Third, and tying in with all four themes, is the concern regarding the departure of youth from the community. Youth do not see a future in the community. Most of the best and brightest leave for college and never come back.

The community needs to find a way to keep its best and brightest. These themes illustrate a great deal of common ground in the community. However, they also

Longwood Employees Discuss Community's Future

by Joe Freeman

In the six months or so that we have been doing community visioning forums, we have come to realize that certain segments of our population are notably under-represented at our meetings. Among these are the men and women who are employed by industries in Wytheville and Wythe County. This group is significant in number and contribution, and, because the best vision for our community is one that includes all perspectives, we decided to reach out to them.

In late October and early November, Longwood Elastomers in Wytheville set aside two days for their employees to participate in forums. Managers, engineers, production operators and maintenance personnel met at noon each day for a company-provided lunch, then spent a couple of hours discussing our community's future with forum facilitators.

The experience was a good one. "It feels good that someone wants to know my opinion," said one employee; "It makes me want to be better informed so I can add more to the discussion." Most of the participants say they definitely would attend future forums, and several employees who did not attend the meetings have asked where and when other forums will be held. Interestingly, employees who live in neighboring counties attended the forums because they recognize the importance of working for a future that protects their livelihood.

Many were surprised by some of the statistics comparing our community to others in the state. Others observed that they heard opinions expressed by their co-workers that surprised and pleased them; apparently the facilitators did a good job of involving individuals who are normally not outspoken. Most participants were happy to see that something is being done to improve the future of Wythe County. One employee summed up a common concern: "Everyone I know who has moved away from here would like to come back, but they can't afford to."

The Longwood forums exposed one very important opportunity for improvement for our committee: despite our efforts to involve all the people in our community, many people still are not aware of what we are trying to accomplish. We need to touch our businesses and industries, our churches, our civic groups, and our schools to impress on them the urgency of planning for our future. The first message everyone needs to understand is that change will come and that we can influence its direction. Just in the past year, we have had many decisions to make, on a personal and a community level: interstate highways, railroad passenger service, natural gas pipelines, high-voltage power lines, and new and different types of industry. We – all of us on the committee – must continue to encourage the citizens of our area to participate in these decisions, and to teach them that our deliberative approach is far more productive than the confrontational approaches we see too often.

Joe Freeman is Plant Manager at Longwood Elastomers and a board member of the Joint Industrial Development Authority. He has served on the Visioning Committee since its inception.

Update
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visioning process, which added additional substance from the greater Wythe community.

Credit is also due to the many citizens who have answered the call and who have given their time, energy, and in many instances, money to add to the project's legitimacy and give it momentum. The early committee work spanned several months and lead to the eventual publication of the "Shaping Our Community's Future" forum discussion booklet. Local businesses donated approximately $1000 to help cover publication costs in addition to Wythe County's contribution of $3000. WordSprint has done all project-related work at cost and The Wytheville Enterprise and WYVE have contributed significant promotional help. The hospital and community college have also been important project partners. And I could go on. The point here is that what was initiated and sustained by the Town has evolved into a collaborative effort that underscores the promise of community.

Since the booklet's publication in May, 2002 we have held forums and other meetings throughout the community in a variety of different venues to stimulate public discussion about the community's direction.

And as Andy Sorrell's column points out, some strong themes are emerging. As one who has attended every forum so far, I think we are hearing in the dialogue the main components of a community vision emerging. Difficult tensions remain though and must be worked through. There is a need to improve the community economically-- as unemployment and underemployment are serious issues. At the same time, there is general agreement that no one wants the community to lose its identity as a rural, small-town. In other words, we are finding a lot of common ground in the forums, but difficult tradeoffs persist.

So what's next? As this phase of the project concludes, we continue to invite your comments and involvement. But the time for moving to the next phase is approaching. In late February and March, the committee will be reconvened and will be asked to work through some of the tradeoffs, build on the common ground we have identified, and draft a community vision statement. We also would invite anyone else interested in this process to join this group, particularly those who have discussed these issues in a forum or other setting.

The vision statement development will be hard work and take at least three sessions. It is crucial that the group be broadly representative of the community at large, be committed to sticking it out through the process, and most importantly, be committed to collaborating and finding common ground around a community vision. Crafting the community vision will be about identifying a direction for the future based on synthesis and creativity rather than compromise or political horse-trading. It is not about winners or losers but about working through conflict in a win-win fashion. While the forums have highlighted real and valid tensions (such as the apparent jobs – preservation tension) I think they have also pointed to the real possibility that there is enough common ground, enough community, to work through them.

It has been terrific to hear your many voices throughout the forums. I particularly enjoyed my most recent experiences at the high school and at Longwood. If you haven't participated thus far, I encourage you to do so in some way, even if it just means picking up the phone and chatting with someone who has. And again, I'd like to remind everyone that we can accommodate a large group in the vision statement drafting sessions. After the statement is drafted, made available for additional public comment, then finalized, the group will consider specifics in terms of how to make the vision a reality. This will likely include the formation of some working groups and the initiation of some community projects.

As most know, the VDOT location study has been temporarily suspended while the Commonwealth entertains various proposals for I-81 expansion. Thus, the "road issue" is temporarily on the backburner. However, one of the original intents of the visioning remains, to develop a community voice that speaks to the question of the Interstate. In the near future, the community will need to provide input on this major transportation planning issue. The location study will resume in some fashion and community input will again be necessary. In the context of the Interstate issue and any other issue that may arise in the near future, the community will be in a much stronger position because it will have a vision, a shared sense of direction for the future.

In addition to serving as an IPO project manager, Rick is a PhD candidate at the Center for Public Administration & Policy at Virginia Tech.

High School

the community should come together and develop a "will" to change as a community, then they would have much more control over their future.

The students also listed possible trade-offs that would accompany change in the community. First, if the community is to grow then it will be faced with loss of its natural beauty and its rural character. Though the youth expressed a strong desire not to lose the community's natural beauty and rural character, they agreed that economic improvement is necessary. In other words, the need for quality jobs is clear yet a major character change in the community and in its natural beauty would be an unacceptable trade-off.

Increased levels of pollution, crime, and traffic congestion would also be unacceptable trade-offs. This raises the question, "should the community restrict certain types of new industry?" When discussing trade-offs, the question of zoning also was raised. Students debated if it was needed and if so would it mean sacrificing some freedoms in order to preserve the natural beauty, history, and "down home" feel of the community. Also, in order to preserve the community's character, costs may rise and taxes may increase. Is the community willing to accept these costs in order to preserve the rural character of the community?

The senior class at GWHS clearly has many thoughtful insights and ideas into how the community can become a better place for all its current and future residents. Throughout the discussions, students expressed long-term thinking and a concern for future generations. Not only were the students excited and enthusiastic about having a part in bettering their community they also felt like they had a stake in making it a better place to live.

In the end, it is the youth that have the greatest stake in the community's future. Based on their involvement in the visioning forums the community's future is in good hands.

To hear more of what GWHS students have to say, tune into the radio program Thursday, January 30th at 7 pm on AM 1280 WYVE or FM 95.3 WXBX.

Andy Sorrell is a master's student in Public Administration. He holds a graduate research position with the Institute for Policy Outreach and has an interest in historic preservation.

Weighing decisions is important.

Upcoming Events Calendar...

January 30th 7:00 pm — Radio Forum on AM 1280 WYVE / FM 95.3 WXBX with GWHS students.

January 31st 11:00 am to 12:30 pm — Wytheville Community College Forum held in Grayson Commons of Grayson Hall hosted by the Alpha Delta Beta Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa & the Technology Occupation Program Division of WCC

February 20th 5:15 to 7:00 pm — Community-wide forum held in conference room B of the Municipal Building. Sponsored by the Wytheville-Wythe-Bland Chamber of Commerce, The Wytheville Enterprise, and WYVE. Please RSVP at the Chamber, 223-3365 or email chamber@wytheville.org. Light refreshments provided. *be sure to use side-door entrance.

February 27th 5:15 to 7:00 pm — Committee and any interested citizens meet in 220 Carroll Hall at WCC to begin drafting Community Vision Statement; please R.S.V.P. to Rick Morse (see phone & email address below) if you plan to attend, so we can plan for the right size crowd!

It is not too late for to host a forum!

- No cost to you or your group;
- 2-3 members of the IPO Staff will facilitate your meeting;
- We will bring booklets and supplies;
- We will spend 60-90 minutes facilitating discussion in your group about your community's future.

If your organization is interested in hosting a forum in February, please contact Rick Morse, Bill Gilmer, or Jennifer Jones today!

We Want to Hear From You!

If you would like to get involved or have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us or visit the projects web page.

Project Manager: Rick Morse   Phone: 540-231-3979
                               E-mail: rmorse@vt.edu

Local Contacts: Bill Gilmer   Phone: 228-6608
                               E-Mail: Bgilmer@wordsprint.net

            Jennifer Jones   Phone: 223-3356
                               E-mail: jennifer@wytheville.org

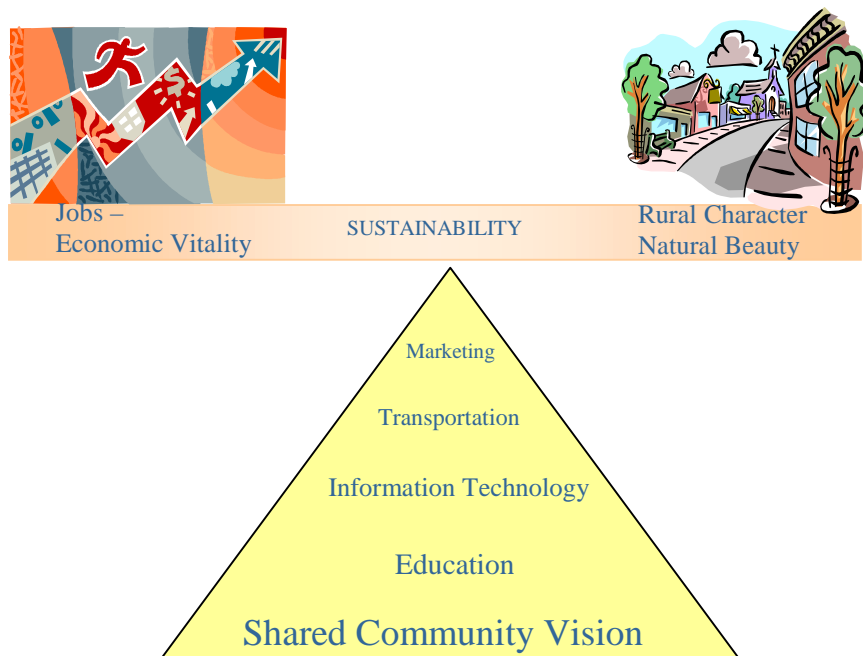Project Web page: http://www.cpap.vt.edu/ipo/horizons

Wytheville-Wythe Horizons

A Community Vision

We, the people of the Town of Wytheville and Wythe County, desire to shape our future and enhance the quality-of-life that makes this a special place to live. Ensuring a high quality-of-life for the future rests upon a principle of dynamic balance between two values the community has consistently identified as its core vision:

- The availability of good jobs and economic vitality, and

- Preservation of the community's rural character and natural beauty.

We realize these values can create tensions for one another, that some industries may damage our natural heritage and that preservation can place limits on job opportunities. We believe, however, that these values can be balanced so that the results represent the quality-of-life that the community wants. This balance represents the achievement of a sustainable community, one that is economically diverse, vital, and self-sufficient. This will be a community that enjoys prosperity for generations to come. It is sustainable because it achieves economic and social success without trading off our rural character and natural beauty that is for us a key component of quality-of-life and economic success. We realize that many people choose this community for its rural appeal and that destroying this heritage would destroy our ability to prosper. Thus, quality-of-life is viewed as a sustainable equilibrium between jobs, growth, and preserving rural character.

Jobs –
Economic Vitality

SUSTAINABILITY

Rural Character
Natural Beauty

Marketing

Transportation

Information Technology

Education

Shared Community Vision

15 April 2003 rsm

Jobs and Economic Vitality

The vision for jobs and the local economy is one of diversification. A "good job" means different things to different people. Retaining the community's "best and brightest" often means having white-collar "professional" jobs available so that those that go off to college know there are quality jobs in the community. On the other hand, there is a need for blue-collar "technical" jobs that are stable and provide a decent wage. In order to achieve the proper balance though, and to raise the overall quality-of-life, there needs to be a greater emphasis on creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurialism. The vision of the future is of growth and stability with some larger scale employers, various tourism-related jobs, and many small "microenterprises." Technology is a key component as is a culture that encourages small, locally "grown" business. With the world shrinking, thanks to information technology, the community will see more telecommuters, young professionals working out of their homes, living in our community because of the high quality-of-life. The economic diversity of the future—a mix of telecommuting professionals, local microenterprise, tourism, and community-friendly industrial employers—will ensure a sustainable, prosperous local economy.

Rural Character and Natural Beauty

Located in the heart of the Blue Ridge Highlands, our "mountain home" is blessed with tremendous physical assets. Wytheville has a wonderful downtown and the surrounding area is dotted with farmland and picturesque natural beauty. Throughout the community are beautiful mountain viewsheds, unspoiled land and water, and cultural and historical gems. The community in the future will not only still enjoy this natural and cultural heritage, but will have taken steps to improve what is already here. Preserving the rural character means having a vibrant, beautiful downtown area, preserving scenic vistas and prime farmland, keeping the community free of pollution, and taking steps to enhance the community's attractiveness. Actions involved with this value include land use planning to manage growth, preserving greenspace, actively supporting and promoting the downtown, and seeking ways to improve the aesthetics of the gateways into the community.

How We Will Achieve This Balance

The proper balance is realistic, achievable, and rests on a fulcrum made up of five interrelated components. These components are: (1) a shared community vision; (2) education and life-long learning; (3) information technology; (4) transportation; and (5) marketing. Achieving the community vision of a high quality-of-life requires the community to focus its collective efforts on these strategic areas.

Shared Community Vision

People have observed that out of nearly 30,000 people in the county there is a group of around 200 that participate in decision-making. They are the ones that sit on boards and commissions, and are actively involved in community affairs. In order to make any vision a reality, this circle must widen. *This vision* must be a *shared* vision

among public officials and citizens. A broad range of community stakeholders must take an active part in implementing the community vision. People need to realize that they can make a difference. They do not have to be a public official to make substantive contributions to the community. The community needs to seek new ways to work together. Partnerships should grow and flourish. Civic education must be viewed as a critical part of education. Coming together as a community is not all about politics either. Chautauqua and other community events are important for the health of the community. The community must value and invest in developing recreational opportunities. Parks, sports fields, and playgrounds help weave the social fabric that makes the community strong and able to achieve its vision.

Education and Life-Long Learning

Quality education must be the foundation of the vision of a sustainable future that balances prosperity for all and rural preservation. Education is inter-connected with everything else in the community. Education is a lifelong process and includes K through 12 schooling, higher education, and adult education and training. We must raise our expectations of what we can do. We must expect exceptional teaching in our schools, and students that can compete nationally. We must expect a high level of parental involvement. We need to compare our education system against state and national standards and seek ongoing improvement. The vision for our community includes community pride in educational excellence, as well as athletic success. Investments of money, time, and energy in educational efforts are investments in the community's future.

Information Technology

Information technology will be a critical community asset in the future. Access to broadband technologies enable the growth of microenterprise, telecommuting, and other economic developments in a way consistent with preserving rural character and generating quality jobs. A focus on technology includes having affordable, reliable broadband access throughout the community (not just in business areas). It includes training programs, incubators, start-up funds, and other programs that create a welcoming climate for technology-based business. It contributes to a sound educational system. We think that local businesses, local governments, and other community institutions must also utilize information technology and move toward a rural "electronic village" concept so that citizens with broadband access can access rich local—as well as global—content and services.

Transportation

The community's location at the intersection of two major interstates represents an important strategic asset for the community. Access to the many travelers is important in terms of developing the local tourism industry as well as making the community attractive to other employers. Similarly, the interstates provide relatively quick access to Radford and Virginia Tech, as well as the Triad in North Carolina to the south, opening the door for telecommuting and even satellite business locations. Major

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changes to the interstates are a near-term reality given the demands of traffic. It is crucial that the community have a strong voice in the process, that access is easy and safe, and that changes contribute to the realization of the community's vision of balance.

Marketing

In order to succeed in enhancing quality-of-life through a dynamic balance between quality jobs and preserving rural character, the community will need to do an even better job of marketing itself. When people think of "great small towns", they ought to think of Wytheville. Recent efforts such as the www.visitwytheville.org site are a good start. Nevertheless, more needs to be done. Information technology is part of the answer. In the future, we would like to see someone searching the internet for recreational opportunities--and find Wytheville. Travelers will see the community as a great destination and not just a stopover. The new community center will always be booked with conferences. Local tourism will flourish. The world will know what a great place this is and the community will reap the benefits of this reputation.

To these ends, we propose this to be the long-range vision for the Town of Wytheville and County of Wythe.

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APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

<u>FOCUS GROUP</u>
The Community Visioning Project
Reflections and Next Steps

1:00   Welcome
        Presentation of dissertation research

1:30   Comments, feedback, questions about dissertation research

1:40   Specific Questions for Focus Group

- having been to multiple forums, in addition to the committee work, what are your impressions about what was learned?
- to what extent do you all feel that the steering committee represented the primary stakeholder groups of the community?
- who was missing? what could have been done better to involve an even broader range of people?
- beyond the documents produced, what do you see as the "outcomes" of the project so far?
- have you seen any changes in the relationships at the level of the "community field"?

- one of the biggest issues for any kind of community intervention project is sustainability. this is what I tried to understand better, at least conceptually, in the dissertation with the distinction between community learning and the learning community. to be a learning community I suggest that the processes need to be institutionalized in some way, that "forums for interaction" are established in some way that continued learning, coordination, and collaboration can happen. What would it take for this to persist in some way here in Wytheville and Wythe County? What would it take for the vision to truly be implemented?
- Town moving forward with comprehensive plan, innovative approach. Can this be coordinated at all with other mechanisms of community planning (IDA, Chamber, County, public housing, etc.?)
- what are the impediments for such coordinated effort?
- what would it take to overcome those impediments?

- other general feedback? highlights? what could have been better?