Empowering Regions:

Strategies and Tools for Community Decision Making

MONOGRAPH SERIES
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Table of Contents

Foreword

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Imagine a world where citizens and decision makers have access to visual displays of geographic information on their personal computers that help them see the impact of different policy choices on the place where they live. Imagine a world where 3-D graphic representations of neighborhoods could simulate different choices and show you different futures. Imagine a world where you could easily find information on the fiscal impact of different alternatives.

The tools that allow you to do all those things and more already exist. Why doesn't every region have access to those tools? How can we make sure that citizens can use them in making better community decisions? This monograph addresses these questions.

Before the digital revolution, information was a closely held commodity. Regional leaders and citizens had to make do with the limited information available to them. Technical experts had access to most of the data and therefore usually had the last word in community decisions. No wonder neighborhood leaders and citizens, who were not part of the process, often challenged it. And then came the revolution.

Today, we live in a world of instant communication, where information flows freely along electronic networks. It is time, as Neal Peirce said, to "democratize the planning process." The keepers of the data—especially the federal, state, and local government agencies that collect information—must join us in transforming the way we use information in community decision making.

Progress has begun with the work of groups such as the Aurora Partnership, Partnership for Regional Livability, California Center for Regional Leadership, Association for Better Community Design and Decision Making, and Tools for Community Design and Decision Making. At workshops around the country—including an initial meeting in Chattanooga in 1998—an informal network is promoting the use of information and decision tools.

Now is the time to move from invention to implementation. The Alliance for Regional Stewardship is a national learning network of regional leaders. The Alliance represents an important "user perspective." This monograph explores the issues involved in applying these tools in regions, shares principles of effective public dialogue, and provides key regional examples and national resources. We need to connect the demand and the supply sides and create a vital market for tools. This monograph can help promote critical connections between the users and the tool makers.

Introduction

How do regional stewards facilitate community decision making?

How can effective public dialogue engage citizens?

How can new information and technology tools improve civic engagement?

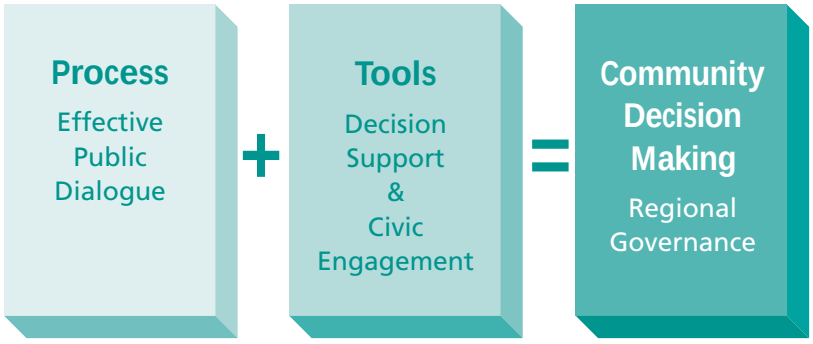
Beyond the excitement that naturally comes from introducing a new technology, the real opportunity is in how regional stewards can use new tools to improve decision making in their communities. Information and civic engagement tools have the potential to change the way we govern ourselves.

Regional stewards are leaders committed to the long-term well-being of their regions. As regions grapple with complex issues such as economic development, environmental quality, social equity, and governance reform, regional stewards must help their communities make thoughtful, informed choices about their collective future.

Closed decision-making processes led primarily by technical experts can now become more open processes with wider involvement of diverse leaders and residents. This change requires better information to make choices about the future. It also requires greater civic engagement. New tools can help involve the public in making difficult choices. Regional stewards who understand this power can use tools with a full appreciation of what the tools could mean for their regions.

The role of information in making regional decisions has increased as a result of new tools. As John Seely Brown, the former director of Xerox PARC, says in *The Social Life of Information,* there is "no text without context." We must always see tools in their social context. The basic challenge is to understand governance and decision-making processes and how tools can enhance or detract from these processes. The fundamental question for a regional steward is not whether to use information and decision tools, but how to use them most effectively.

Think of this monograph as a "user's guide" to tools for community decision making. In the final analysis, both an effective process and useful tools are essential for civic engagement to work. It is important to understand not only their potential to share information and make more informed decisions, but also their power to transform the way we govern.



Empowered Regions: A Framework for Community Decision Making.
Regions must align their process and tools to meet community needs.

Regional Governance for the Twenty-First Century

Governance is how people come together to address common problems. Governance is more than government. At the regional level, it involves citizens, businesses, nonprofit organizations, educators, as well as government working in various ways to set directions, solve problems, and take action.

Regional Governance Challenges

Regions face a number of governance challenges as they enter the twenty-first century:

- **Scale**: As city-regions grow in geography, they continue to expand beyond traditional political jurisdictions. Many city-regions now encompass multiple cities, towns, and counties. Dealing with this increasing political fragmentation in the face of growing geographic boundaries is a challenge for most city-regions.
- **Speed**: The new economy is based on speed. Governance institutions are having trouble keeping up with the pace of change. Few institutions have learned how to operate on "Internet time," but they are expected to respond more quickly to economic changes.
- **Effectiveness**: In the end, what matters is how well regional institutions respond to the changing needs of the region. Fragmentation of responsibility and the increasing pace of change have made it difficult for institutions to meet those needs. Worse, a lack of effective regional governance leads to conflict and competition among jurisdictions and between the public and private sectors, which leads to gridlock.
- **Participation**: How much civic engagement is possible in regional governance today? The scale and speed challenges, combined with residents' lack of trust in ineffective institutions, discourage participation in regional governance. On the other hand, without civic engagement, regional governance will not be responsive to residents' needs. According to Robert Dahl, a leading thinker on democracy, "Scale, complexity and greater quantities of information impose ever-stronger demands on

citizens' capacities. As a result, one of the imperative needs of democracy is to improve citizens' capacities to engage intelligently in political life."

- **Accountability**: How are public and private leaders working in a variety of public-private partnerships and hybrid institutions held accountable to residents for outcomes? If new regional organizations that are not directly elected by the people increase in number, how is the leadership in these organizations selected and replaced?

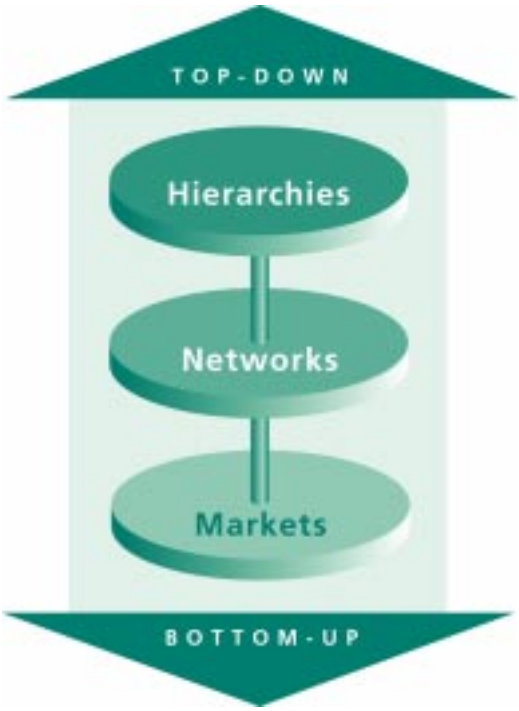
Alternative Approaches: Networked Governance

A variety of institutions can address the governance challenges of city regions as we move into the twenty-first century. Just as regional economies have been changing, so too must our institutions for regional governance change. As Dahl says, "Perhaps our institutions created in democratic countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are no longer adequate. If this is so, then democracies will need to create new institutions to supplement the old."

Oliver Williamson and other institutional economists have outlined alternative types of institutions that are appropriate for different situations. Williamson believes that institutions seek ways to reduce transaction costs either within an organization or in relationship with other organizations. His work and that of others lead to three alternatives:

- **Hierarchies**: In stable environments, hierarchical forms of organization make sense because they can internalize transaction costs through vertical integration.
- **Markets**: In environments of uncertainty, market forms of organization make sense because transaction costs can be reduced through external contracts.
- **Networks**: In environments where speed is critical, networks make sense because they reduce transaction costs by combining flexibility of markets with the trust relationships of hierarchy.

Between top-down hierarchy (or bureaucracy) and bottom-up markets (or laissez-faire) are networks. According to Francis Fukuyama, author of *Trust,* a "network is a group of individual agents who share informal norms beyond those necessary for ordinary market transactions." In other words, networks are markets with memory.



Alternative Governance Approaches. While hierarchies represent top-down governance and markets represent bottom-up governance, networks connect the two.

Camille Barnett, former city manager of Austin, Texas, has likened today's regions to a complex system of overlapping, interrelating jurisdictions—a Net. But how does one govern a Net? Focus on facilitating flows—of resources, information, ideas, and power.

Net Governance is more facilitation and less control. Net Governance means bringing together disparate parts and repairing

broken connections. Net Governance means crossing boundaries and including diversity. Net Governance is constant openness to experimentation and the search for better outcomes. Net Governance is distributed governance.

Information Is the Glue

For distributed governance to be effective, regions need to have the informed participation of their citizens. Whereas information was limited to policy experts and planning professionals in the past, information technologies now allow specialized knowledge to reach people throughout the community. Making this information transparent to residents empowers them to participate in the decision-making process that will ultimately determine the future of their communities.

Regions can encourage civic participation by closing the information gap between experts and residents. But the process doesn't end there. In addition to providing the necessary information and tools to help people make decisions, leaders must create a process that incorporates and values their choices. Policy makers must open up the planning process and allow citizens to lead.

Democratizing the Planning Process

"Too many people are spectators, not participants, in planning their region. What's the cure? We nominate the people—citizens working to assure a sound, shared future. Regions need a shot of democracy into their planning process."

—Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson, Citistates Group

The Limitations of Traditional Public Participation

At the turn of the twentieth century, as a reaction to political cronyism and the Spoils System, the progressive movement tried to take politics out of government by putting community planning in the hands of objective, expert policy professionals. Today, power and decision making still reside with these experts—whether they are planning commissions, transportation boards, or government officials—rather than with residents or civic leaders.

However, the rational bureaucratic model of community decision making that was appropriate for centralized government is no longer adequate for a model of distributed, networked governance. With the population becoming more diverse and the community issues becoming more complex, no one single entity—government, business, or education—can solve regional problems by itself. The whole community has an important role to play in finding the solution and committing to action.

Public managers must engage in public dialogue because the decisions that they make must represent the values and preferences of residents. If public managers focus only on analyzing a situation and implementing an "optimized" solution, they risk losing a significant amount of time and resources toward achieving a result that may be neither publicly supported nor valued. And they would miss a significant opportunity to engage residents.

New Forms of Social Learning

A critical challenge for regions is to foster social learning that will help residents adapt to change and contribute to regional solutions. In *Governance Through Social Learning,* Gilles Paquet notes that "in times of change, organizations can only govern themselves by becoming capable of learning both what their goals are and the means to reach them *as they proceed.* This is done by tapping the knowledge and information that active citizens possess and getting them to invent ways out of the predicaments they are in." Thus, democratizing the planning process requires that we look to an open, adaptive model of social learning.

Scott Bernstein, in *Learning to Do It Together,* examines the changes in how we approach social learning. Many of our institutions—including our schools, government structures, and business organizations—operate on the traditional, linear model of learning. This model may be appropriate for hierarchical, bureaucratic, and authority-driven institutions, but it is less appropriate for learning in distributed, networked governance.

An alternative model is the "ecological" approach to learning that emphasizes self-organized, webbed interactions that are adaptive and nonlinear. This new learning model is more suited to rapid

changes in complex systems. Bernstein describes the differences in learning approaches described in the chart below.

The challenge of governing in the twenty-first century requires that regions rethink their old models of community decision making. To govern effectively in a distributed, networked world, they must provide good information, encourage strong public participation, and use tools to facilitate open, adaptive forms of social learning.

OLD LEARNING	NEW LEARNING
Closed Inputs are carefully controlled.	**Open** We have a rich variety of inputs ("immersion").
Serial Processed All learners are expected to follow the same learning sequence; learners learn only one lesson at a time.	**Parallel Processed** Different learners simultaneously follow different learning paths; many types of learning happen at the same time for individual learners.
External Referent and Design Both knowledge and the learning process are predetermined by others.	**Self-Referent and Emergent** Knowledge is created through the relationship between the knower and the known. The outcome cannot be known in advance.
Controlled The "teacher" determines what, when, and how we learn.	**Self-Organized** We are active in the design of curriculum, activities, and assessment; teacher is a facilitator and designer of learning.
Discrete, Separated Disciplines are separate and independent; roles of teacher and student are clearly differentiated.	**Messy, Webbed** Disciplines are integrated; roles are flexible.
Static Same material and method applied to all students.	**Adaptive** Material and teaching methods vary on the basis of our interest and learning styles.
Linear Material is taught in predictable, controlled sequences, from simple "parts" to complex "wholes."	**Nonlinear** We learn nonsequentially, with rapid and frequent iteration between parts and wholes.
Competing We learn alone and compete with others for rewards.	**Coevolving** We learn together; our "intelligence" is based on our learning community.

Approaches to Social Learning (excerpted from *Learning to Do It Together,* Scott Bernstein)

Process: Principles of Effective Public Dialogue

"How can we engage more American's in serious public deliberation? Holding meetings will not be enough. Discussions must link to some tangible actions—voting, calling on officials, forming groups to work in schools and neighborhoods—to have enough meaning to bring busy people to participate."

—Derek Bok, *The Trouble With Government*

Effective community decision making starts with good public dialogue. Dialogue goes beyond facts and information; it also draws heavily on feelings and values. Effective public dialogue is about creating safe spaces for community members to share their perspectives and concerns. It is about building trust and relationships that can guide shared solutions.

The trap that many regions fall into is that they become more focused on developing the technology tools than on the process of dialogue. But without a good process, tools alone do not guarantee a successful outcome. Ruth Ann Bramson of Suffolk University in Boston, Massachusetts, has extensively researched how communities around the country engage in productive public conversations. In her paper "Cultivating Productive Public Conversations," she shares the following principles of effective public dialogue:

Focus on the Garden, Not on the Tools

Bramson likens public conversations to a garden and its tools. We need to make sure our tools support the garden, not overwhelm it. Communication technologies are tools—like hoes or shovels, which are of value only when they are in service to the garden. If our communities are to benefit from new technology tools for civic engagement, we must start not with the technology but with the community—with the garden. And we must be sure that our technology does not drive or overwhelm the participation process. (You may not need a tractor in the backyard garden.)

In this garden, community building begins with bridging differences and building trust and relationships through good conversation. We need fertile and nurturing environments in the form of safe civic space for public conversations. Low-tech tools such as a

framework for asking the right questions and good meeting design and facilitation are, like hoes and shovels in a garden, basic to public problem solving. High-tech computer-based technology, when appropriate, can greatly aid in the process as well. But, most of all, we need lots of knowledgeable and committed gardeners, regional stewards, and others, with the skills to build community and enable democracy.

Avoid "Top-Down" Talk

One sure way to hinder public dialogue is to treat it as a one-way, top-down model of communication. Daniel Yankelovich, in *The Magic of Dialogue,* calls this type of communication "top-down talk." He describes the communication gap that can occur between policy professionals/planners and the public when the former group approaches public dialogue with a solution already formed. Top-down talk assumes that it is up to the professional or expert to solve the problem and convey the message to the public. It expects citizens to understand and support the conclusions, but leaves little room for citizens to have substantive conversation or take part in shaping the solution.

In her research, Bramson found that many public managers face the will/skill deficit when facilitating public dialogue. Many managers lack the will to engage citizens in public deliberation because they believe that public participation too often imposes enormous burdens in terms of how much time it takes, without yielding any particular benefit. At the same time, many have not developed the facilitation skills, group-process skills, and conflict-resolution skills that are necessary for effective civic engagement. One California manager said, "People are fearful and they are not trained. Most city managers don't have anyone on their staff with the right skills to help them."

Involve the Community in Naming and Framing Issues

The hardest part of involving citizens in community problem solving is often in deciding what the problem is. Usually, powerful tensions exist among the multiple, often conflicting, definitions of problems and their solutions. As a result, consensus is rare about whether a problem exists and, if so, what it is and how to respond to it effectively. The choice of an issue definition has far less to do with data and scientific analysis than with values, mental models, and personal experience.

Too often, residents believe that decisions have already been made before they are invited into the process. When an issue is framed in technical or legalistic language, little public space remains for the individual citizen to engage in meaningful dialogue on the issue. For example, we hold public meetings to review the proposed elements of the comprehensive land use plan rather than inviting citizens to talk about how growth is changing our community and what our options are for addressing growth issues. We take a substantial risk when we attempt to frame issues without the involvement of community members. People are resentful, and they believe that leaders are attempting to characterize issues in particular terms in order to influence the outcome.

Create Safe Public Space

Every public conversation takes place in an environment that has physical, or external, dimensions as well as internal, or mental and emotional, dimensions. In other words, public space has both visible and invisible boundaries. Creating safe space for deliberative dialogue involves creating an environment for public conversations, both in terms of physical setting and in terms of how people interact with each other.

When community members and public officials do not talk with or listen to one another, often the missing ingredient is not just their individual effort but a setting where it is possible to hear one another and speak safely together. An environment in which people feel safe about holding conversations creates the fertile soil in which public participation can thrive. If people do not feel safe, they will not share their stories, offer up their personal experiences, or participate in finding solutions to community problems. They will continue to feel angry and cut off from leaders and government.

An innovation in public dialogue is the practice of bringing dialogue into existing community hubs, rather than making residents attend a town hall meeting in an unfamiliar location. Regions, such as Silicon Valley, have experimented with school-based and workplace-based civic engagement. Residents appreciate it when they can participate in a convenient, familiar space.

Exhibit: The Basic Questions in Public Deliberation

In her research, Ruth Ann Bramson of Suffolk University finds that public deliberation is built around four basic questions, regardless of the issue. Generally, the first two questions elicit stories and personal experiences from people in a dialogic process. The last two questions engage people in deliberation. They are oriented toward making decisions. The questions are intended to help people straddle public and private worlds—to elicit personal experiences and opinions and then help participants move from the personal to a larger community perspective.

1. How does this issue touch you personally?
2. What are the different ways of seeing this issue?
3. What are some approaches for addressing this issue and the pros and cons of each approach?
4. What are we willing to do as individuals and as a community to address this problem?

1. How does this issue touch you personally?

The most useful question for beginning any discussion of a community issue is, "What experiences have you or people you know had with this issue?" Asking an "I" question that calls upon people to share their stories and relate to the issue in a personal way opens the door to dialogue. This question also gets at the reason why making decisions on community issues is so difficult—namely, that all the options are rooted in issues that people care deeply about. In the course of the deliberative process, participants move beyond the realm of personal experience, but the most effective learning experiences begin there.

2. What are the different ways of seeing this issue?

This question can take a variety of forms as long as it prompts people to think about conflicting motives. Tensions among various approaches are inevitable and unavoidable, but deliberation helps participants to recognize that the conflicts are shared moral struggles about what is best and right. Recognizing this commonality helps people to work through the strong emotions that are part of any major decision (Kettering,1998). When an issue framework has been developed before the dialogue session, the

group considers the provided options and suggests any others that are missing. If an issue framework has not been developed beforehand, the group needs to generate the differing perspectives itself.

3. What are some approaches for addressing this issue and the pros and cons of each approach?

Once people have worked through their resistance to dealing with an issue and considered different perspectives, they are ready for the hard work of sorting through the options for action. This stage is easy for policy makers to understand because it is very similar to the process they go through when they are doing policy analysis. They develop an array of options, think through and discuss their costs and consequences, and make a choice. The argument for public deliberation asserts that, at least on some issues, the public must take part in a similar process. An advantage of engaging citizens in choice work is that it is an excellent way to transfer ownership.

The single best mechanism for advancing public deliberation is to give people real choices to mull over. Presenting choices gives people a systematic way to consider the consequences of alternative solutions so they can weigh solutions against one another. This process means that public officials must give up their use of a double standard, which has traditionally meant presenting options to one another but presenting only single solutions to the public.

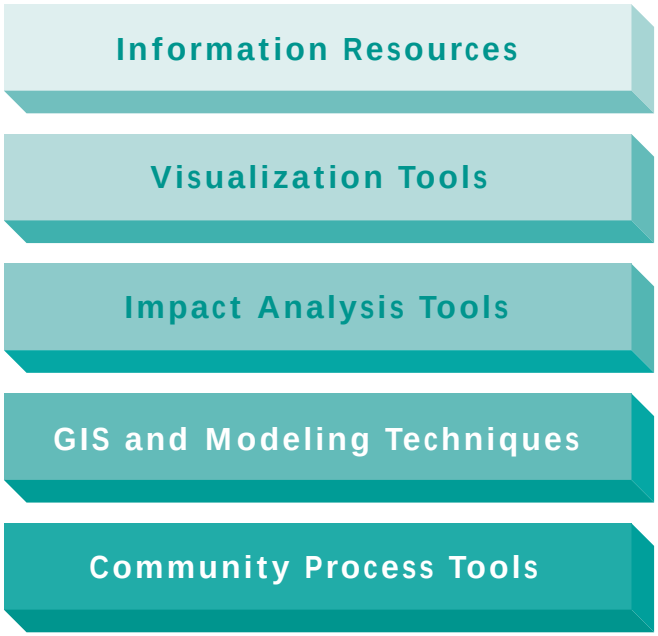
4. What are we willing to do as individuals and as a community to address this problem?

After making it clear at the beginning of the process that the objective of public deliberation is to work toward a decision, the facilitator or individual participants may ask questions from time to time to move the discussion toward a decision or to test where agreement is.

It is at these last two stages of the deliberative process that computer-based technology seems to provide the greatest potential for aiding public participation by facilitating brainstorming, prioritizing, decision making, and helping participants to visualize different options.

Tools: Decision Support and Civic Engagement

Supported by a robust process and appropriate tools, regional stewards can connect civic engagement to community planning. Once an effective public dialogue process has been designed, the right technology tools can greatly facilitate it. Tools can help citizens imagine the possibilities for their community. They can help citizens understand the costs and trade-offs of different alternatives. And they can provide a medium for expressing preferences and reaching consensus.



Tools for Community Decision Making. Generally, five types of tools are available to help regional stewards connect civic engagement to community planning.

Information Resources

Information resources can include all forms of media—such as newspapers, websites, and e-mail—that provide individuals and organizations with the information they need to make regional decisions. This type of tool is an important foundation for developing an informed population.

Local communities, with support from federal agencies, are exploring the promising concept of Regional Resource Centers to provide a physical place to connect information resources to residents. The Regional Resource Center would be a place in which the local community can develop, assess, and visualize how it will grow. Equipped with both technical and nontechnical decision support tools, these Centers would enable ordinary citizens to visualize and evaluate alternative growth scenarios and help integrate resource efficiency and sustainable design into community development strategies.

Case Study: Chattanooga

Chattanooga's Riverfront/Downtown Planning and Design Center is a collaborative public partnership whose role is to provide excellence in planning, design, and development for a prosperous and livable downtown. The unique concept of the Design Center grew out of the community's desire for University of Tennessee architecture students to focus their work on design projects in Chattanooga.

Chattanooga's Riverfront/Downtown Planning and Design Center has been catalytic in positioning that city as a leader in quality of life and sustainability. The Center's scale models, maps, and architectural renderings serve as a vibrant orientation to Chattanooga's urban design vision. Students and the Center's staff serve as a resource for the community, providing design guidance and coordination for various development projects along the river and in Chattanooga's downtown. The Center is in Miller Plaza, which is the focus of an early downtown redevelopment project spearheaded by the Center.

(See http://www.chcrpa.org/riverfront_downtown_planning_and.htm)

Visualization Tools

These tools enable citizens and public officials to see how new land-use patterns or other policies can change their built environment. Residents can express their preferences based on visual images and pictures. It is important to note that visualization tools can be both high tech (computer imagery, digital photography) and low tech (cardboard replicas, boxes). In fact, the most effective tools are the ones that allow citizens to interact with media to design and choose their desired community.

A great example of an effective low-tech tool is Box City, a visioning and learning exercise for communities. Using cardboard boxes, construction paper, scissors, and glue, participants construct three-dimensional models of selected sections of their neighborhoods. Because Box City uses universally familiar kindergarten-type art supplies in the visioning process, people—young and old—feel more comfortable expressing themselves, identifying what they would like to keep and what they would like to change in their community. The process starts people talking to each other, empowering participants to become active in implementing their newly created community vision.

Case Study: New Jersey

In a New Jersey community, Jim Constantine of Looney Ricks Kiss Research used interactive computer kiosks to help local government measure citizen support for a proposed main-street redesign. The kiosks, placed in a range of public locations, enabled respondents to compare scenes of the town's present rundown main street with photo-enhanced alternatives. One showed buried power lines; another showed better lighting and signage; a third had buildings pulled up close to the sidewalk.

After selecting their preferences, citizens were then asked how much they would consider paying in additional taxes for the improvements they saw on the screen. Ultimately, more than 10 percent of the town's citizens weighed in on the question, giving local elected officials the confidence to raise taxes to pay for the program. In this situation, technology helped to generate a positive outcome. The visual nature of the computer screen was appropriate to the questions; citizens found the voting process informative and even fun. Elected officials were able to proceed with a clear mandate.

(Excerpted from Peter Katz's article "the 70 percent place" in *Government Technology*)

Impact Analysis Tools

These tools quantify a range of performance measures associated with different transportation and land-use strategies, such as travel times, emissions, land consumption, and energy use.

It allows communities to understand the consequences of alternative development choices so that they can make informed decisions about trade-offs that are most important to them. Often, it is in the conversation about trade-offs that core values emerge. Another benefit of impact analysis is that it allows citizens to consider the systemic effects of a proposed development or plan and helps them realize the interdependences of their community assets.

Case Study: San Diego

San Diego's Euclid Avenue Trolley Station area used PLACE^{3}S (Planning for Community Energy, Economic, and Environmental Sustainability) to evaluate several development scenarios. PLACE^{3}S is a land-use and urban design method that quantifies energy impacts and clarifies the trade-offs a community must make among its various goals by providing a common yardstick for measuring them.

Studies by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) indicated that the region would run out of developable land in less than ten years and that higher density, inward-directed growth was critical in preserving resource lands to sustain economic growth. The planning process for the area employed PLACE^{3}S. Using PLACE^{3}S, SANDAG measured traffic, housing and employment, energy use, energy costs, air pollution, and other critical factors that contributed to the realization of the community's vision and values.

San Diego found that the region could save $1.5 billion during its 15-year planning horizon by emphasizing energy efficiency in its development plan. The energy-efficient plan would also create 5,000 new jobs and prevent a half-million tons of air pollution. The county was so enthusiastic that it created one of the nation's few county energy offices to work on capturing these benefits.

(Excerpted from ABAG, the Association of Bay Area Governments, http://www.abag.ca.gov/)

GIS and Modeling Techniques

Geographic information systems (GIS) represent a variety of software packages that help the user collect, store, manipulate, view, and analyze information that can be geographically referenced. This information is usually displayed in map form on a computer screen and can include all types of data, including open space, water quality, population growth, and social indicators. GIS helps communities visualize futures, conduct impact analysis spatially, and model the impacts of policy decisions.

Creating a GIS system is a data-intensive and time-consuming process that requires significant resources and expertise. Although third-party vendors have made the GIS technology broadly available, developing the underlying data and models requires significant investment. Communities that are planning to build a GIS system should consider collaborating with other local or regional entities to distribute the costs and increase the system's functionality.

Case Study: Vermont

Ascutney, Vermont, like so many rural small towns, faces the dilemma of how to grow. Should it continue with its present zoning that tends to produce sprawl, or should it adopt policies that would encourage the expansion of the existing village center? To support the community decision-making process, the Orton Family Foundation helped develop CommunityViz, a suite of integrated GIS extensions that help users view, project, analyze, and understand potential changes to their community.

Ascutney has used 2-D and 3-D databases to model the demographic profile of the people who would want to live in a compact community, the jobs created, the savings in infrastructure operating costs, and the appearance of an expanded village center. The 3-D visualizations have helped citizens fine-tune the design of the village center. For example, rejecting the standard practice of uniform lot sizes, the village center lots will vary like the lots of traditional Vermont villages. Although CommunityViz is just a tool, not a solution, the citizens see its potential for reaching consensus on Ascutney's future.

(Excerpted from Peter Katz, "New Tools for Community Design & Decision-Making," http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/toolkit/TCDDM/)

Community Process Tools

These tools are designed to facilitate public involvement and community decision making. They allow greater numbers of people to be involved in a more effective and efficient process by providing electronic meeting rooms for same-time/same-place meetings or computer conferences for different-time/different-place communication. When combined with effective public dialogue processes, these tools allow citizens to be truly part of the community problem solving.

Case Study: District of Columbia

Early in his term, District of Columbia Mayor Anthony Williams searched for a way to keep his campaign promise to revitalize city management and make local government accountable to citizens. He turned to technology, partnerships, and two mass citizen summits to engage residents in city planning through a Neighborhood Action Initiative.

The mayor launched the initiative with a one-day Citizen Summit in November 1999, using Option Technologies (wireless polling keypad technology) and CoVision, Inc (networked laptop computers). To ensure that the Citizen Summit reflected the diversity of the Washington community, Neighborhood Action partnered with hundreds of nongovernment partners that included private-sector organizations, nonprofits, faith-based and advocacy groups, and advisory neighborhood commissions.

At the summit, 3,000 residents gathered around tables in groups of 10 to12 with a trained facilitator. Once tables reached consensus on issues, they could immediately use their laptops to send in their vote. Polling keypads allowed the mayor and the summit's moderator to poll citizens throughout the process on questions ranging from demographics to policy priorities. Poll results were instantly flashed on large screens at the front of the room. As a result of this real-time use of technology, 94 percent of all participants polled said they had the opportunity to "fully participate."

(Excerpted from HUD Best Practices, http://www.hud.gov/)

Exhibit: Why Are Regions Not Using Tools? Key Barriers to Adoption

In 2000, the California Center for Regional Leadership commissioned a study, *Informed Regional Choices,* to understand how California's regional organizations are applying planning and decision tools to their communities. The report found that although regional organizations had the need and the desire to use tools, many faced organizational barriers to adoption. These barriers included:

- **Awareness of and readiness to use technological tools, both in the organization and among constituents**. Some regions were well aware of the full range of tools available for their use; some were actually using several tools. But for the majority, the expressed need was to find out more about the tools available, how they could be tailored for their regions, and what would be necessary to use them effectively. A web site is effective only if the citizens of the region are connected to the Internet and use it. The development of an integrated regional information system is possible only when a critical mass of partners and board members truly understand the power of such a system and develop and allocate the resources to build it.
- **Resources to enable use of tools, at a moment in time and sustainably over time**. Some of the regions showed tremendous creativity in building partnerships and leveraging partner assets to build information systems jointly, but most expressed the need for more funding in order to develop further their information systems and their capacity to use them.
- **Feedback systems to improve choices and uses over time; internal learning systems and peer-to-peer systems**. The perceived lack of expertise in how to apply these tools at the local level was by far the limitation most commonly expressed by California's regions. The regions should be able to learn from one another.
- **Technical readiness**. Some Internet-based solutions can require a telecommunications infrastructure that is not yet in place in the state's rural areas. Until states have the necessary infrastructure and use of the Internet in these areas is greater, some Internet-based applications will not be practical.

- **Feedback to suppliers for continuous tool improvement.** Tools need to be easier to use; systems and software need to be designed to allow easier integration and interoperability; standards need to be set.

Empowered Regions: Successful Practices in Action

The following in-depth case studies demonstrate innovative regional efforts to empower residents, local institutions, and leaders to envision and determine their future. They provide examples of how an effective process, coupled with appropriate tools, can lead to community decision making and a new form of regional governance.

Envision Utah

Formed in January 1997, Envision Utah is a public/private community partnership dedicated to studying the effects of long-term growth in the ten-county Greater Wasatch Area of northern Utah. Envision Utah's purpose is to develop and help implement a publicly supported growth strategy that preserves Utah's high quality of life, natural environment, and economic vitality during the next 50 years. Its hallmark is its emphasis on voluntary acts. The Envision Utah process strives to effect change through the willful acts of the region's residents. The process uses education and public participation to promote regional thinking.

The Envision Utah partnership is sponsored by the Coalition for Utah's Future and includes approximately 140 partners representing a cross-section of the community, including businesses, developers, state and local government, conservationists, landowners, academicians, church groups, and general citizens. Vital to the success of Envision Utah's efforts has been substantial input from the public. Meetings, surveys, and open workshops have been held throughout the region and continue to occur as Envision Utah works toward implementing the Quality Growth Strategy.

The first phase of the Envision Utah process was the development of a broadly supported strategy to guide the future of the Greater Wasatch Area. During the first three years, Envision Utah directed an in-depth values study, a baseline analysis, more than 100 public workshops, scenario development and analysis, a million-dollar public-awareness campaign, and the development and analysis of a Quality Growth Strategy.

The second phase of the Envision Utah process, which began in January 2000, is the implementation of the Quality Growth Strategy. Since then and continuing through 2003, Envision Utah will work with its influential and diverse partnership to provide needed tools, training, and resources to local and state government and private-sector planners to help implement quality growth strategies throughout the Greater Wasatch Area. Specifically, the implementation of the Quality Growth Strategy includes:

- Visiting 89 cities and towns and ten county commissions around the Greater Wasatch Area to introduce the Quality Growth Strategy to local officials across the region
- The development of a Quality Growth Strategy Implementation Toolbox that includes specific urban planning tools to assist local governments in the implementation of quality growth strategy principles
- Host Implementation Toolbox workshops for elected local officials, planning commissions, and professional planners
- Launch of three Quality Growth Demonstration Projects, working with willing and enthusiastic local governments on a series of specific area plans demonstrating the feasibility of implementing quality growth principles (2000 and 2001)
- Continue promotion of the Quality Growth Strategy throughout the Greater Wasatch Area through public awareness efforts, demonstration projects, and providing tools and resources to assist private- and public-sector planners in implementing strategies identified by Envision Utah.

A variety of important lessons have been learned during the Envision Utah process that may have relevance in other regions, particularly those regions that want to replicate the voluntary model:

- In a setting like Utah, quality growth cannot be created by appointing some sort of regional growth czar. The public will not accept a top-down model. Instead, quality growth must evolve from the local level, using education and common sense to promote a regional backdrop for decision making.
- The state's mantra is "local responsibility, state leadership." Under the leadership of Governor Michael Leavitt, who is the honorary co-chair of Envision Utah, state government provides leadership, coordination, information, technical support, and financial resources. Local government has responsibility for land-use regulations. What used to be called "local control" is now "local responsibility," emphasizing that local governments have an obligation to make sound land-use choices.
- Inclusion and public participation provide the foundation for Envision Utah's work. Drawing from an aphorism of Neal Peirce, Envision Utah strives to "make the table bigger and rounder." This type of framework forces a balancing of interests and recognition of trade-offs. The Envision Utah process has demonstrated that choices have consequences, and regions cannot have it all. Moreover, better decisions are made as people with diverse interests come together and find common ground. As a general guideline, the Envision Utah process has demonstrated that to make progress, you must be willing to sit in a room with people whose positions make you uncomfortable.
- Finally, the Envision Utah process has demonstrated that quality takes time. Regional visioning efforts are large undertakings that require many years of work. Vigilance is key, and change happens incrementally.

For more information: http://www.envisionutah.org

Florida House Institute

In 1990, as a result of a proposed building moratorium, developers, environmentalists, public officials, and individual citizens met in a series of discussions convened to explore long-term solutions for meeting Sarasota County's water needs. The participants conceived of and committed to creating a place, the Florida House Learning Center, that would demonstrate the principles of sustainable development.

Florida House serves as an economic incubator for green building, connecting consumers to entrepreneurs, and offers self-guided tours of the model home and landscaping, featuring environmentally friendly materials and methods. It teaches citizens ways to conserve our resources by demonstrating energy efficiency, water conservation, healthy home concepts, and recycled products. The Florida House Learning Center has attracted more than 60,000 visitors from around the world since it first opened in April 1994, and, according to a University of Florida survey in 1998, more than 70% of these visitors have implemented a feature or features at home. The Learning Center was the first of its kind and has inspired similar demonstration projects in other states.

Since the successful launch of the Learning Center, the Florida House Institute (incorporated as a nonprofit agency in 1992 through a unique public-private partnership of the Cooperative Extension Service for Sarasota County, Sarasota County Technical Institute, and the Southwest Florida Water Management District) has expanded its services and demonstration products to support Sustainable Community Development in other regions. These services and products include:

- **Sustainable Development Tool Kit**. With the support of the MacArthur Foundation and the U. S. Department of Energy, Florida House Institute developed a Sustainable Development Tool Kit based on real-world experience with facilitating collaborative processes to support vision-based planning and community development. The tools work in conjunction with GIS and place-based planning and decision support tools to aid communities in developing and implementing consensus-driven sustainable development.

- **Urbaculture /Florida Farm Learning Center**. Developed on an 18-acre brownfield site in a low-income neighborhood in Sarasota, the Urbaculture Project will create a working agriculture incubator and demonstration—"Florida Farm Systems"—for the twenty-first century. It will teach, research, and demonstrate interdisciplinary sustainable agriculture practices and support ranchers, farmers, urban gardeners, students, and entrepreneurs in developing long-term sustainable urban/rural enterprise activities. It will seek to increase the economic value for agricultural lands and develop markets for urban waste. The Urbaculture site has received funding under the EPA Brownfield Program, and the Institute is currently engaged in site assessment and mitigation planning.
- **Regional Civic Learning and Design Centers**. With 30 years of experience in coalition building, community organizing, and sustainable development, the Florida House Institute has recognized the opportunity to define and create a network of regional and local civic learning and community design centers. A Civic Learning Center is a place to convene the community over time, providing the community access to innovative decision support tools like GIS, indicators software, and facilitation processes. Through its leadership on sustainable development, the Institute is beginning to connect existing community and neighborhood organizations, foundations, and local government initiatives around this concept.

For more information: http://www.i4sd.org

Chicago's Common Ground

Common Ground is a community-based regional planning process that will coordinate with the regional transportation plan and several civic planning efforts in the greater Chicago region. Created in response to the public search for a compelling vision, clear goals, and coordinated regional action, Common Ground is a partnership of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) and other regional civic organizations such as Chicago Metropolis 2020 and the Center for Neighborhood Technology.

Throughout the region, interest is growing in both the public and civic areas for regional cooperation that is comprehensive, farsighted, and sustainable. Common Ground provides a process to develop a regional plan that is place-based and crafted by the participating communities. The strong support for Common Ground is based on NIPC's commitment to facilitate a regional planning process that includes the 270 municipalities, six counties, and 1,100 other government units.

The commission's first step in undertaking Common Ground was to invite representative leaders to attend one of a series of workshops in February and April 2000 to help define the major issues to be addressed at the Electronic Town Meeting to be held late in the summer. Each of the workshops attracted between 75 and more than 100 participants representing not only the commission's traditional constituencies, such as local planning departments and city and village officials, but also developers, youth groups, community colleges, community action agencies, environmental groups, arts organizations, and other civic voices.

Using decision-support technology, the workshops began to identify a regional planning agenda around key issues in five categories:

- Community development
- Economic development
- Transportation and other infrastructure
- Environment and natural resources
- Quality of life

Common Ground will launch later in 2001, when as many as 3,000 public officials, business leaders, community leaders, and citizens will join together in a regional Electronic Town Meeting. The Town Meeting will consist of a series of same-day regional forums that will be linked by video teleconferencing and other communication technologies.

The technology—including keypad polling, groupware computers, interactive GIS, and web-based conferencing—provides new, essential tools for the broad-based and large-scale participation that is at

the core of Common Ground. Democratic participation in neighborhood and project planning is well established, and the technology will assist in taking community-based regional planning to scale for this major metropolitan region.

After the visioning and goal setting this year, Common Ground will begin to model place-based regional future scenarios. The scenarios will identify the critical choices that define the preferred land-use patterns for the region.

For more information:
http://www.nipc.cog.il.us leadership_workshops.htm

Denver's MetroVision Resource Center

The metropolitan Denver area population is forecast to grow by nearly 1 million newcomers by the year 2020. This unprecedented growth has created an urgent need for collaboration among local decision makers to address complex regional issues ranging from increased traffic congestion and environmental degradation to the continuing loss of open space and the inequitable distribution of economic resources.

To address this need, a core group of organizations—including the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, the Metro Denver Network, the Center for Regional and Neighborhood Action (CRNA), and the University of Colorado at Denver—has partnered to form the MetroVision Resource Center (MVRC). Federal agencies supporting the partnership include the U. S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

The MVRC is designed as a one-stop shop offering the data, tools, and services to facilitate informed growth management decision making. Through the MVRC, a pooling of resources and data not available from a single source will be possible. These resources and data will be integrated into a single system supporting local elected officials, business leaders, planning officials, and other decision makers as they strive to achieve MetroVision, the region's long-range growth framework.

Once fully operational, MVRC products and processes will include:

- **Interactive web site**—enabling regional connectivity and collaboration, also a necessary foundation for employing decision tools
- **Visualization and simulation tools**—allowing citizens and public officials to see changes that new land use or other policies will have on the built environment
- **Spatial analysis**, **including geographic information systems (GIS)**—presenting data and research on alternative growth, land use, and transportation scenarios
- **Groupware and collaboration tools**—offering more efficient and effective civic learning and engagement
- **Research services**—enabling the development of knowledge and understanding with respect to regional decision making
- **Interactive group process services**, **including facilitation**, **mediation**, **and alternative dispute resolution**—enabling dialogue and resolution of policy alternatives among decision makers and their constituents.

The partnership is progressing through its year-one work plan, which includes development of a jobs-housing analytical model, a regional indicators project, a regional data inventory and integration effort, application of GIS-based community design software in local settings, and establishment of an MVRC web presence. Grants from the EPA and the Orton Family Foundation are augmenting partner investment in MVRC activities. This effort is an example of how institutional collaboration and information sharing can improve community decision making for a region.

For more information: http://www.drcog.org/

National Networks and Resources

Association for Better Community Design and Decision Making (ABCD2)

The mission of ABCD2 is to increase the availability and use of knowledge-based decision support tools that empower citizens to participate in community-based decision making. Currently in development, ABCD2 will create a structure to facilitate ongoing interaction between developers and users of community-based decision support tools. The primary customers include tools providers, tools users, and federal agencies.

For more information: http://www.i4sd.org/FL_Dec2_mtng.htm

Aurora Partnership

The Aurora Partnership is a public/private collaboration to stimulate the development and application of decision-support tools, services, and systems for natural-resource and environmental management. The strategy of the interagency group on decision support is guided by three objectives: improve interoperability, modularity, and transferability of decision-support tools and services, apply decision-science principles to environmental decision making, and incorporate the tools and the decision-science principles into a science-based decision-support framework. Initial tasks include developing a series of demonstration projects, facilitating communication and lessons learned among demonstration projects, and building a science-based decision-support framework based on user needs, decision-science principles, and state-of-the-art technology.

For more information: http://www.ncat.org/comtool/strat.html

California Center for Regional Leadership (CCRL)/ CA Alliance for Regional Information Technology (CARIT)

The California Center for Regional Leadership is a brand-new, statewide, nonprofit organization. Its purpose is to support leaders and organizations that are using innovative regional strategies to address the state's most important challenges and opportunities. The Center is vision driven, value based, collaborative, inclusive, and results oriented. It is committed to fresh thinking, thoughtful action, and active learning and communications. One of the

Center's first initiatives is the California Alliance for Regional Information Technology (CARIT), a proposed statewide learning network whose purpose is to assist regions in their use of technology-based planning and decision tools. Through CARIT, regions will have access to the best planning and decision tools available.

For more information: http://www.calregions.org/home.php

Center for Livable Communities, Local Government Commission

The Center helps local governments and community leaders be proactive in their land use and transportation planning and adopt programs and policies that lead to more livable and resource-efficient land-use patterns. Center programs can help jurisdictions expand transportation alternatives, reduce infrastructure costs, create more affordable housing, improve air quality, preserve natural resources, conserve agricultural land and open space, and restore local economic and social vitality. Especially interesting are Ahwahnee Principles and Economic Development.

For more information: http://www.lgc.org

Partnership for Regional Livability (PRL)

The Partnership for Regional Livability began in 1999 to help civic leaders in regions across the United States address large-scale, intractable problems, such as air pollution, sprawl, poverty, and unemployment. The Partnership delivers technical assistance to regions, drawing on a national network of experts. It organizes a region's access to federal government expertise and resources, with the cooperation of local and state elected officials. It helps develop federal readiness and capacity to work with regions. And it helps regions build supportive relationships with each other, exchange information, and share tools and lessons learned. The Partnership initially selected four regions to work with: Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

For more information: http://www.prlonline.org/index.htm

Sustainable Development Toolkit

Sponsored by the Department of Energy, this toolkit contains a collection of visioning, design, and planning tools to aid in planning sustainable communities. It includes geographic information

system programs, predictive models, impact-analysis programs, visualization programs, and relevant information materials. It is a collection of technical and nontechnical tools and resources, such as community visioning programs, GIS programs, interactive Internet community networks, information resources, and group consensus-building tools.

For more information: http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/toolkit/TCDDM/

Tools for Community Design and Decision Making (TCDDM)

Tools for Community Design and Decision Making is a network of planning professionals from federal agencies, foundations, communities, and the private sector interested in building greater linkages among efforts toward the sustainable development, healthy communities, and civic involvement that are happening in many communities across the United States. The loosely formed partnership consists of the federal Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of Environmental Protection, the Aurora Partnership, the Chattanooga Institute, and various foundations, planners, and activists from around the country. The core mission of the network is to articulate the common ground shared by the different approaches to sustainable development, healthy communities, and civic involvement, recognizing the strength brought by the differences and forging a new commitment to partnership.

For more information:
http://www.i4sd.org/comtools.htm and http://www.sustainable.doe.gov

Recommended Reading

Cultivating Productive Public Conversations, Ruth Ann Bramson, Suffolk University, 2000. http://www.prlonline.org/pdf/bramson.pdf

Informed Regional Choices, California Center for Regional Leadership, 2000. http://www.calregions.org/projects/carit.html

Learning to Do It Together, Scott Bernstein, 1999. http://www.i4sd.org/Paper2.htm

The Magic of Dialogue, Daniel Yankelovich, Simon & Schuster, 1999.

About the Alliance for Regional Stewardship

The Alliance is a national, peer-to-peer learning network of regional leaders who benefit by sharing experiences and working collaboratively on innovative approaches to common regional challenges. The Alliance is for proven leaders who recognize the interdependencies of their regions' economy, environment, and society—and are seeking practical ways to effect change. These leaders can come from business, government, education, or community sectors, but they share a common commitment to collaborative action and regional stewardship.

The Alliance supports regional stewardship by helping leaders learn about best practices from other regions, communicate to state/federal leaders and the media about regional challenges and innovations, and develop new leaders to regional civic efforts.

Alliance activities include:

- Semi-annual leadership forums
- Ongoing communities of interest and web conferences
- Monthly e-newsletter
- Monograph series on key regional topics
- Innovation scans of regional best practices
- Media roundtables to bring regional leaders and media professionals together
- Pathways to regional stewardship projects

For more information about the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, please visit our website at
www.regionalstewardship.org

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