

STRUCTURED EXPERIENCES: A NEW TECHNIQUE FOR PLANNERS

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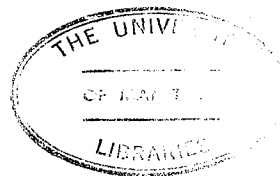
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Master of City Planning

by

Richard Jaromir Harbeck

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**"STRUCTURED EXPERIENCES: A NEW TECHNIQUE FOR PLANNERS"**

by

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**A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of**

**MASTER OF CITY PLANNING**

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## ABSTRACT

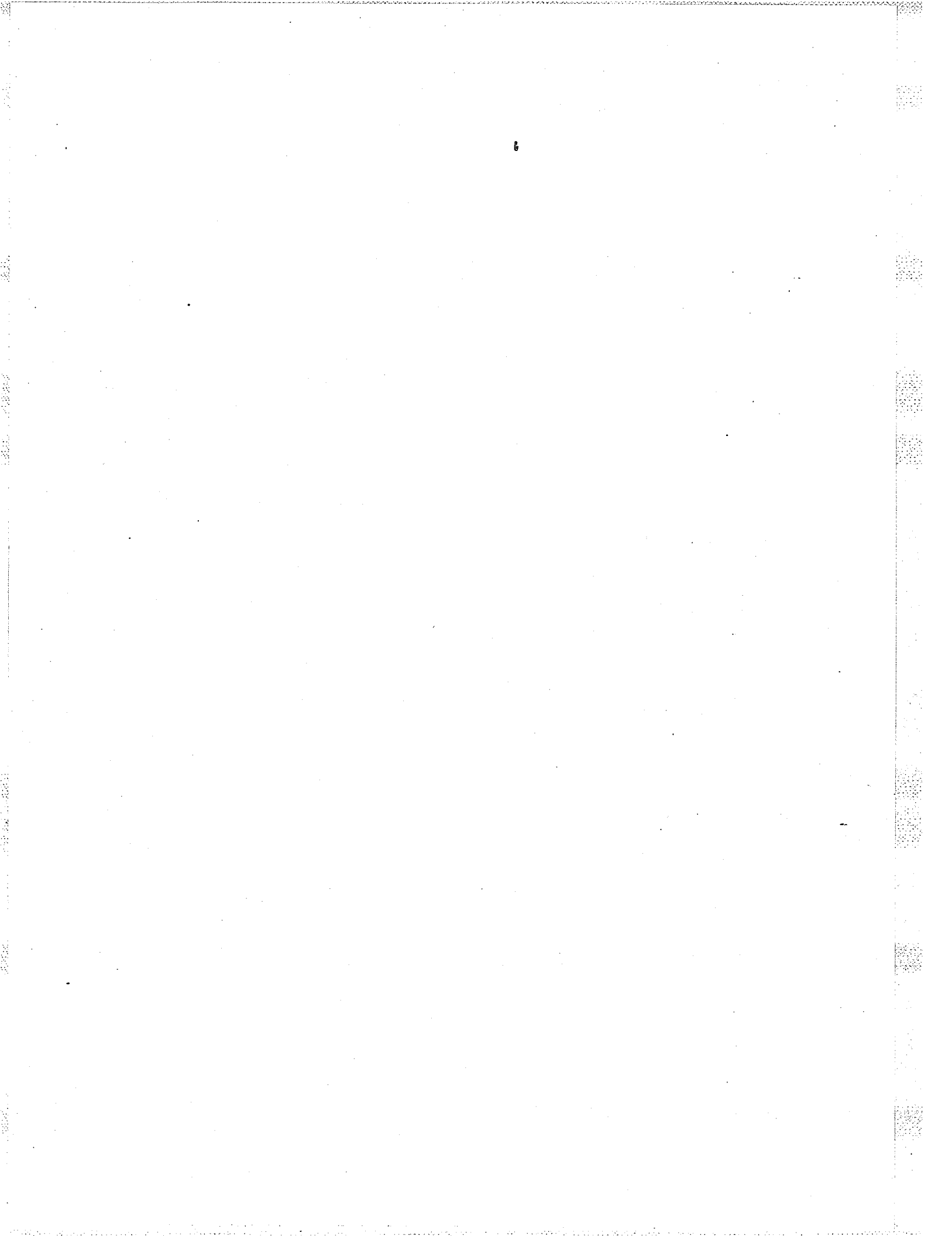
A new planner role as facilitator of public participation is postulated.

Section One: Stresses the values of public involvement in planning. The Human Resources Model and current educational practices are held out as possible ways to revitalize an alienated public.

Section Two: Case Studies illustrate current attempts to involve people in planning decisions that affect them. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation is used as a measure of the extent of public involvement.

Section Three: Illustrates the potential value of seven structured experiences ideal for use by a planner facilitator. A Case Study shows the results of an application of these techniques.

To Joan  
Christopher  
and Kathleen



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....		x
SECTION 1 - THE RATIONALE		
Chapter		
I.	THE OBJECTIVE, DEMOCRACY.....	1
	Introduction.....	1
	The Need for "Democracy".....	2
	The Changing Context for Democracy.....	4
	"Democracy" Defined.....	7
	Conclusion.....	9
II.	REVITALIZING SOCIAL SYSTEMS BY INCREASING PARTICIPATION.....	11
	Introduction.....	11
	A Declining Participation in Society.....	13
	The Need to Renew Our Social System.....	14
	A Cybernetic Consideration.....	15
	To Exclude or Include the Individual?.....	16
	Participating in Urban Government.....	18
	Can More People Be Involved in Municipal Government.....	20
	Should All People Participate?.....	22
	The Psychology of Participation.....	22
	Conclusions.....	25
III.	WHO SHALL PLAN?.....	27
	Introduction.....	27
	The Human Relations Model.....	28
	The Human Resources Model.....	30
	Defining the Task of the City Planner.....	33
	Allocative Planning and the Public.....	35
	Planning is Politics.....	39
	Planning and Power.....	41
	The Ideal Leadership Role for Planners.....	42
	The Difficultues of Effective Leadership...	43
	Conclusions.....	46
IV.	THE PLANNER AS TEACHER.....	48
	Introduction.....	48
	The Parallel between Teachers and Planners.....	49
	Planners As Teachers.....	52
	Developing Attitudes Toward Learning.....	53

The Process is the Message.....	54
Recognizing the Value of Current Educational Practices.....	58
Improving Communications.....	60
Problem Sensing and Idea Generating.....	62
Cognitive and Affective Growth.....	64
Decision Making, Priorizing, Valuing.....	65
Evaluation and Soliciting Feedback.....	67
Conclusion.....	67

SECTION 2 - CASE STUDIES

Introduction to Section 2.....	69
--------------------------------	----

Chapter

V. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING PROCESS - FOUR CASE STUDIES.....	72
--	----

Introduction.....	72
Models of Planning.....	72
An Essential Component of Planning: Who Evaluates?.....	74
An Introduction to the Case Studies.....	75
The Case Studies	
The Setting.....	77
The Planner.....	78
Planning Intervention Rationale.....	79
The Planning Process.....	80
Level of Participation.....	81
Five Models of Participation.....	84
The Information Model.....	84
The Persuasion Model.....	86
The Consultation Model.....	87
The Partnership Model.....	88
The Citizen Control Model.....	89
Conclusion.....	91

VI. A SYSTEMS CHANGE TO ACHIEVE PARTICIPATION.....	93
--	----

Introduction.....	93
Better Representation for the People.....	94
The Decentralized Institution's Performance.....	96
The Provisions for Citizen Participation....	97
Trivia Leads to Boredom and Withdrawal.....	101
Public Participation in Planning.....	103
What Needs to be Done?.....	105
Municipal Leaders are Persons, Not Gods.....	107
A Behavioural Education Program.....	108
Areas Which Require and Educational Program.....	109
Conclusion - A Recognition of the Delicacy of the Intervention.....	111

### SECTION 3 - STRATEGIES

	Introduction to Section 3.....	113
Chapter		
VII.	THE BEHAVIORAL REQUIREMENTS OF PEOPLE IN GROUPS FOR THE PURPOSE OF PLANNING.....	115
	Introduction.....	115
	The Application of an Experimental Model to the Planning Process.....	117
	The Planner as Group Facilitator.....	118
	Definition of a Structured Experience.....	120
	The Benefits and Costs of Applying Structured Experiences to Planning.....	121
	Conditions Which Hinder Effective Functioning of Groups.....	124
	Planning Meetings Where Everyone Can Win...	126
	Conclusion.....	128
VIII.	DESIGNED STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES APPLIED TO PLANNING.....	130
	Introduction.....	130
	A Model of Structured Experiences for Planning.....	132
	A. NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE - Identifying the Problem.....	133
	General Overview.....	133
	Goals of Nominal Group Technique As Expressed by the Designers.....	134
	Goals of Nominal Group Technique As Particularly Relevant to Planning.....	134
	Typical Group Situations Where the Nominal Group Technique Might Be Used.....	135
	The Process Steps Described NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE.....	136
	The Nominal Group Used to Generate Strategies To Deal With Identified Problems or Issues.....	142
	B. SCENARIO BUILDING - Clarification of Options.....	142
	General Overview.....	142
	Goals of Scenario Building As Expressed by the Designers.....	143
	Goals of Scenario Building as Particularly Relevant to Planning....	143
	Typical Group Situations Where Scenario Building Might Be Used.....	144
	The Process Steps Described SCENARIO BUILDING.....	144



C. SYNECTICS -	
Generating Creative Strategies.....	147
General Overview.....	147
Goals of Synectics	
As Expressed by the Designers.....	148
Goals of Synectics As Particularly	
Relevant to Planning.....	148
Typical Group Situation	
Where Synectics Might Be Used.....	149
The Process Steps Described	
SYNECTICS.....	150
D. OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT -	
Assessing Strategy Consequences.....	154
General Overview.....	154
Goals of Outcomes Assessment	
As Expressed by the Designers.....	155
Goals of Outcomes Assessment As	
Particularly Relevant to Planning....	157
Typical Group Situations Where Out-	
comes Assessment Might Be Used.....	157
The Process Steps Described	
OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT.....	159
E. POLICY NEGOTIATIONS -	
Collective Decision Making on Policies..	163
General Overview.....	163
Goals of Policy Negotiations As	
Expressed by the Designers.....	164
Goals of Policy Negotiations As	
Particularly Relevant to Planning....	165
Typical Group Situations Where Policy	
Negotiations Might Be Used.....	165
The Process Steps Described	
POLICY NEGOTIATIONS.....	166
F. MINI-DELPHI TECHNIQUE -	
Predicting Future Events Related	
To the Problem.....	170
General Overview.....	170
Goals of the Mini-Delphi	
As Expressed by the Designers.....	171
Goals of Mini-Delphi As	
Particularly Relevant to Planning....	172
Typical Group Situation Where the	
Mini-Delphi Technique Might	
Be Used.....	172
The Process Steps Described	
MINI DELPHI.....	173
G. CONCEPTUAL MAPPING -	
Public Review of Strategies and Impacts..	175
General Overview.....	175
Goals of Conceptual Mapping	
As Expressed by the Designers.....	175

Goals of Conceptual Mapping As Particularly Relevant to Planning....	176
Typical Group Situations Where Conceptual Mapping Might Be Used.....	178
The Process Steps Described CONCEPTUAL MAPPING.....	178
Conclusion.....	182

Chapter

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ENRICHMENT - A CASE STUDY.....	184
Introduction.....	184
A Park Is Born.....	185
The Major Concerns of Residents.....	186
Park Design Begins.....	187
A Meeting Held at the Gateway Community Center.....	188
The Nominal Group Technique Applied.....	190
Public Meeting #1.....	195
The Formation of a Jury.....	196
Jury and Designers Meeting #1.....	197
Public Meeting #2.....	200
Jury and Designers Meeting #2.....	203
Conclusions.....	209
X. A NEW ROLE FOR PLANNERS: THE FACILITATOR.....	212
A Conclusion.....	212

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BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	217
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## LIST OF FIGURES

1.	The Human Relations Model.....	30
2.	The Human Resources Model.....	31
3.	The Planning Process As an Educational Experience.....	66
4.	The Paradox of City Planning.....	71
5.	The Classical Decision Model of Allocative Planning.....	73
6.	Unicity, Winnipeg Community Committee Structure.....	95
7.	Unicity, Winnipeg Citizen Participation Structure.....	99
8.	A Model of Structured Experiences for Planning...	132b
9.	Flow Chart of the Nominal Group Procedure.....	138
10.	Nominal Group Task Statement Form.....	140
11.	Nominal Group Tally Sheet.....	140
12.	The Scenario Building Process.....	152
13.	Directed Originality--The Synectics Process.....	153
14.	A Model of Structured Experiences for Planning (Specific Functions).....	156
15.	Outcomes Assessment Process Flow Chart.....	158
16.	Distributing "Strategy and Problem Cluster" to Groups.....	159
17.	Cost Benefits Sheet.....	161
18.	Across the Board Assessment.....	162
19.	The Basic Impasse Frame.....	177
20.	An Example of A Loaded Impasse Game.....	180

21.	A Summary Table of the Structured Experiences Model.....	183
22.	Live Questionnaire, Positive Points.....	202
23.	Live Questionnaire, Concerns and Potential Problems.....	202

## PREFACE

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the viability of a new role for planners. The postulates offered in the following chapters are intended to be positive and constructive. The driving force for making such suggestions emanates from the author's experience and commitment in the profession of teaching.

Two years committed to the study of planning at the graduate level seem hardly enough to prepare one to suggest to hardened veterans in the planning field that they need to reconsider their practices. These same two years, however, have shown the author such numerous parallels between the dynamics of the teaching process and the planning process that the urge to transfer the attitudes and skills of teaching to the processes of planning is irresistible.

The crucial link between teaching and planning is of course the relationship of each to people, each professional tries to help people to live more happily. Again, the contention is that just as teachers cannot make people learn by simply exposing them to information, so planners cannot effect change based on what they perceive as needs simply by manipulating the environment around people. The successful direction in teaching practices is to involve the learner in process and experience that teaches. This thesis will

advocate the need to similarly involve that relevant group of people affected by a decision, that changes their environment; in this way they may learn more and eventually make good decisions about their environment, and also may understand the consequences of their individual and collective actions in that environment. The need is also to recognize the vulnerability of people to manipulation by "experts." Efforts must be made to achieve attitudes and practices that are not manipulative but rather to achieve a vital social state. On the other hand, members of the public need to be strengthened so as to minimize manipulation by officials.

This thesis expresses the author's belief that North American society is faced with an increasing number of problems for which the leaders, elected or appointed, are given, or take upon themselves, the responsibility to find solutions.

The problems of our society are often described and defined in tangible terms as: population levels and use of natural resources are out of control; societal breakdown is imminent and manifested in increased strikes, crime and apathy, and in continuing economic inequities. These certainly are serious concerns but are symptoms of a deeper, less tangible but basic, problem that needs to be recognized for what it is. The primary problem is one of attitudes held by leaders and those that are led; attitudes that are reinforcing and enlarging the problems.

An example will serve to illustrate this contention that the problem is affective and attitudinal in nature.

Why do people not react to the growing shortages of natural resources with a conscious personal tightening of their belts? Rather, the opposite reaction inevitably occurs in the face of shortages; there is, in fact, a mad rush to consume what remains. The author believes that this attitude is born mainly out of a long conditioning by leaders, and a reinforcement by the media, that these problems will be taken care of by those who are trained and skilled to do just that--"the experts." It is further believed, that there are two distinct approaches to such problems; the first type is a manipulative solution that prescribes corrective adjustments to the physical functioning of the system, basically allocative; the second type of solution faces up to the social attitudes that are the basis of the problem and recognizes them.

The latter approach is the basis of this thesis. Many will argue that to achieve attitudinal change on a broad social level is impossible and also manipulative. This thesis will contend that attitudinal change be achieved without manipulation or coercion. When people learn or grow more aware of certain relationships in their environment attitudes change naturally and spontaneously.

Can the human condition be improved through increased individual awareness and understanding? The author believes this to be possible especially in the area of improving the human condition through education. But, this strategy does not contemplate an approach in which some select members of society will become even better problem solvers with deeper

understanding and awareness while the remainder go about life uninvolved in the social dynamics; this is an inherently unstable situation.

Strategies exist, that the author believes, can improve the situation. The argument is directed at planners, who as professionals would do well to include teaching strategies and attitudes in their traditional role. Planners have frequent chances to work directly with representative public groups, other than teachers few professionals have this opportunity. This contact directly with the public should be utilized in furthering public awareness and learning.

Planning meetings have so far earned an unflattering reputation; however, richly deserved. New communication and group technology has emerged for maximizing the effectiveness of these meetings. In fact, these new developments could make planning meetings an important creative and idea generating component in the planning process rather than the present strained and conflict prone exercise in public relations. Needless to say the technology to make groups function well requires special personal skills and competence; for instance, knowledge of the pathology of group interactions is important.

This thesis proposes that what is optimally required is a new category of planner who is personally prepared to put aside such tools as questionnaires and statistical reports and instead utilize the collective resources of public groups. A multiple benefit can be claimed will result: the contribution of fresh ideas to supplement those generated by "experts"



and officials; a greater perception by the planner of issues, problems and alternatives; a positive relationship between officials and the people they serve; and the beginning of a public awareness of environmental issues.

For planners "change" is the raw material which provides them with their reason to exist. Planners and other officials do not, however, have exclusive rights to deal with change. The time has come to recognize that a greater number of people need to be involved in determining the dynamics and direction of the physical and social environment in which all live.

In the past decision making the determining of social values, priorities and policies was exclusively the domain of those delegated and appointed by society. There is increasing evidence to support the value of the trend to involve a wider cross section of people in such decisions. Can it be claimed that plans and decisions have been improved by the present practices that involve the public? In all fairness, it can be stated that this is rarely so. When public input achieves results that are positive it is often after vicious running battles and conflict with officials. In general, what is now considered public participation is actually an invitation to be informed about pending decisions and to formally approve them.

No public official can in all fairness be condemned on the basis of the above inequalities evident in involving people into decisions that affect them. Only now in isolated

instances is; the worth of investments of time and energy into public participation at all visible; and as yet few people have the skills to provide group leadership and facilitation to enable the public meeting to be effective.

In the Rationale, Section One, of this thesis a plea will be made to apply the democratic model to all human endeavors. The planner, it will be pointed out, is in a unique position to facilitate social strengthening, renewal, and enrichment. The means of achieving these social goals lies not only in the democratic model, but by improving participation and learning through greater involvement of people in the decision making processes that involve them. The Human Resources Model will be presented as a major attitudinal goal for decision makers to adopt; as such it will be contrasted to the Human Relations Model which today represents current attitudes toward participation in planning and urban decision making. Section One concludes with a drawing of parallels between teaching and planning. The purpose of this comparison is to investigate current attitudes to social leadership. Leadership will be pointed out to be necessary and positive, and if correctly practiced, not manipulative. Using educational models, a major change will be proposed in the planner's role; specifically to act as facilitators at planning meetings, to improve problem sensing and solving, to develop evaluative techniques that will give a more viable and creative feedback into decision making and planning processes.

Section Two will present case studies of planners in four planning processes that are seen to be in harmony with the advocated attitudes needed to overcome the problems described in the Rationale. A special case study will conclude this section by presenting the difficulties involved in legislating participation. The stress is in regard to the visible sharing of input into the process of planning as to who ultimately has the power to shape the future of a particular environment. Throughout this section five models of citizen participation are used to evaluate existing participation practices and the sharing of "power."

Whereas, the first two sections of this thesis are concerned with an analysis of existing attitudes and problems of participation in planning, Section 3 offers planners techniques to achieve a strengthening of planning and decision making processes. A series of interlinked group processes that are referred to as "structured experiences" are delineated. The purpose of offering such structured experiences will be to provide ways of intervening into existing group processes associated with planning. The intervention, felt necessary, takes the form of a set of specific instructions that itemize steps of activities and tasks which will allow a group to focus on purposeful goals rather than on typically counterproductive and destructive behaviour.

To conclude, a report is presented of an application to a planning situation of the structured experience approach.

This thesis owes its existence to the support, time and energy of many individuals. In particular I would like to thank Prof. T. F. Carney, Department of History, University of Manitoba, for his many constructive suggestions, and for introducing me through experience to the bulk of the ideas expressed in this thesis. My thanks also to Prof. B. Rottoff who patiently advised me in the preparation of this thesis and to Prof. K. Gerecke who also read the draft and advised me in the final preparation.

To Mr. D. Paterson, Lombard North Group, I wish to express my thanks for his support not only in acting as a sounding board for my ideas concerning planners, but also in asking me to act in the capacity of facilitator of participation in the N.E. Park Master Plan preparation.

All of this would not have been possible had it not been for the Sabbatical Leave of Absence accorded to me by the Seven Oaks School Division and the granting to me of a Fellowship by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation; I am deeply grateful for the support from these two groups.

Finally, my thanks to my colleague Mrs. Gwen Krindle who patiently taught me much about the written form of expression as only she could, and to Mrs. Diane Walton for the hours she has sacrificed at the typewriter on my behalf.

This thesis is dedicated to my family who have patiently waited for me to finish this piece of work.

Richard J. Harbeck  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
April 1976

**SECTION 1**  
**THE RATIONALE**

## CHAPTER I

### THE OBJECTIVE, DEMOCRACY

#### Introduction

This thesis, as has been mentioned in the introduction, is based on several assumptions and beliefs. Of these assumptions, two are key to this thesis: first, that in the '70's vast challenges are evident to our social and environmental systems; and, second, that recent developments in modern knowledge about the dynamics of human systems, we can offer valuable strategies to begin to cope with these challenges. Underpinning these beliefs is a faith that a truly "democratic" society and its corresponding style of life can withstand any and all difficulties. "Democracy" is a term easily stereotyped and it is to be emphasised that use of the term here does not contemplate a 'permissive' or 'laissez-faire' state but a dynamic system of values--"a climate of beliefs governing individual, group, professional and institutional behavior, which all of the above are internally compelled to affirm by deeds as well as words."<sup>1</sup>

This study will focus on the role of the city planner in revitalising "democracy" and our social frameworks. The human system discussed deals by choice with the scale of urban

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<sup>1</sup>Bennis, W. G. and Slater, P. E. The Temporary Society. New York: Harper and Row. 1968. p.4.