

**Linking the Communicative Turns in Democracy,  
Learning, Planning, and Resource Management:  
Toward a Conceptual Framework for Environmental Planning  
and Decision Making**

By  
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Natural Resources Management

Natural Resources Institute  
Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of the Environment, Earth, and Resources  
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## ABSTRACT

There is wide agreement that our current patterns of resource use and environmental management are unsustainable. In democratic societies the norms which define the range of acceptable actions, including those regarding resource use and environmental management, are in part developed and articulated through planning and decision making that is presumed to reflect public opinion and will and to be in the affected public's best interest. However, justifying this presumption in diverse societies is problematic given their inherent plurality of value orientations, perspectives, and perceived interests, and this is especially difficult when confronting environmental issues that are typically characterized by complexity, uncertainty, often obscure interdependencies, and which frequently provoke intense conflicts. The liberal-democratic model of decision making, guided by aggregating the preferences of private citizens, has often exacerbated conflicts, left various publics voiceless in the process, and produced ecologically irrational decisions. As well, critical theory argues that existing democratic institutions often obscure hegemonic flows of power in society that are steered by economic and administrative imperatives and serve to advance the interests of established power-holders at the environment and public's expense.

In response to these perceived limitations, a communicative turn has emerged throughout the social sciences, much of which builds on Jurgen Habermas' description of the ideals of discourse. This turn assumes that individuals may, through discourse on a topic, come to understand one another across their various differences such that their knowledge and perspectives are enlarged and enriched with understandings they had not previously appreciated. Preferences and interests are thus developed out of learning through discursive interaction, which may be transformative, and so diversity and difference are not obstacles to be overcome, but rather are vital resources for achieving reasoned agreements.

Building on this communicative turn, this research begins with a critical review of the literature on deliberative democracy, transformative learning, communicative planning, resource and environmental management, and ecological democracy. From this a solid theoretical basis is established for an inclusive, deliberative approach to planning and decision making in environmental contexts that holds the potential to: develop and articulate legitimate public opinion and will; steer governmental and administrative processes in the direction of the general public interest; create new social linkages that build social capital and solidarity and carry the potential to transform existing patterns of social relation; educate and inform through the collective presentation and critique of diverse knowledge claims and perspectives, which may lead to transformative learning; cope effectively with the complexity and uncertainty characteristic of environmental problematics; and produce plans and decisions that are qualitatively fairer and more rational than traditional liberal-democratic approaches.

Based on this theoretical understanding, a generalized conceptual framework is developed that describes the structure, positioning, procedural norms, and characteristic tone and disposition of communicative environmental planning and decision making that is considered best suited to achieve the potential just described. In this framework, a communicative planning and decision making process (CPP) is described situated between, interpenetrating, and joining together public and administrative spheres such

that, by adhering to the communicative procedural norms outlined, it can provide for the deliberative transmission of outcomes of public discourses into administrative decision making. As well, by directly connecting the CPP to emergent public and administrative spheres that arise in response to particular environmental problems or issues, the process can be directly attuned to the contextual variables, significantly including the alignment of power, that frame the problem at hand and condition appropriate responses to it. The framework is idealized, and areas are identified where a certain de-idealization is necessary in order for it to be applied to real planning and decision making contexts. Finally, some approaches to applying, testing, and refining the framework are explored, and suggestions are made for additional disciplinary perspectives that could be brought to bear on this analysis in future research aiming to build upon it.

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I would also like to acknowledge the many scholars whose work this thesis is based on. It was a privilege to learn from the many lively conversations in the various literatures, and without their courage to publish their ideas, to critique and be critiqued, academic learning would not be possible.

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# CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

Planning theory in the Western world has, since the eighteenth century, generally proceeded from the premise that scientifically based knowledge can be successfully applied to improve society (Friedmann 1996). As such planning exercises have traditionally been rooted in instrumental rationality from a positivist epistemological position, and planners have been regarded as detached experts who measure and collect objective data, collate and analyze it, and then pass it on to those empowered to make decisions – essentially a process of speaking truth to power (Innes 1995; 1998; Healey 2006). Hence plans and planning decisions are considered rational insofar as they make instrumental use of objective knowledge to achieve some desirable outcome in society. But Healey (1993, 233) describes how the Enlightenment thinking underlying this conception of planning entrusted its espoused socially progressive and democratic ideals to “administrative machineries” that joined science and freedom with industry and commerce all based on a “narrow and dominatory scientific rationalism.” The end result of this has been growing social inequalities, class divisions, environmental degradation, and market fluctuations and collapse, all of which conditions rational-scientific planning was supposed to have foreseen and deftly steered society clear of (Healey 2006).

As well as failing to achieve desired outcomes, the rational-scientific planning model is also inherently undemocratic. Planning that is driven by experts working with objective information immediately implies that it is outside the purview of the general population as they lack the specialized knowledge and skills to participate (Friedmann 1996). Plans achieve democratic legitimacy according to the extent to which the decision

makers who enact them represent and promote the public interest, but the planning process itself is necessarily detached from the messy and subjective world of society itself. However, as critiques from postmodern and critical theory perspectives have argued, this notion of democratic legitimacy clothes the hegemonic flows of power in society, which serve to advance the interests of established power-holders, in the guise of advancement of the general public interest (Foucault 1980; Brookfield 2005b; Ranciere 2006).

These twin deficiencies, of process and of outcome, are in fact interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Planning and decision making rooted in objective and instrumental rationality is inherently exclusionary, and absent meaningful input from diverse sources decision processes lack the alternative perspectives and understandings necessary to more fully appreciate and appropriately address the complex issues facing society.

In response to this there is a move within planning and deliberative democracy theory that, rather than rejecting the Enlightenment hope that we can marshal rationality to improve society, has sought instead to redefine and enlarge our conception of rationality such that it becomes fundamentally democratic (Healey 1993; Innes 1995; Habermas 1996b). Much of this work is rooted in Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative action. Habermas has posited that embedded in the very nature of human communication is a desire for and a process to reach mutual understanding in the form of intersubjectively agreed upon provisional best judgments reached through a dialogical presentation and critique of arguments and supporting evidence. This moves beyond objective-instrumental rationality, where knowledge is sought primarily through manipulative subject-object interactions, to subjective-communicative rationality, which

seeks knowledge as the understanding achieved in the intersubjective relation among speaking and acting subjects (Habermas 1998a; Brookfield 2005a).<sup>1</sup> A deliberative approach also allows space for the inclusion of subjective values (e.g. moral or spiritual beliefs, aesthetic appreciation) and alternative epistemologies (e.g. tradition, intuition, constructivism) that are excluded from objective-instrumental rationality but which nonetheless are vital components of how individuals and groups come to know and understand their world and their place within it (Ingold 2000; Umemoto 2001).

Applied to planning, acknowledging communicative rationality would suggest that planning processes be inclusive, dialogical, and highly participatory because the more perspectives and arguments that are brought forward and passed through the crucible of intersubjective validation, the more rational and comprehensive the plan will be. Communicative approaches also better account for and gain strength from the rich diversity in our modern societies and so, rather than the divisiveness so often characteristic of democratic decision processes, they can increase social cohesion, build

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<sup>1</sup> Rationality is obviously a highly contested concept. Throughout this text, unless otherwise specified, I use the terms “rational” and “rationality” with reference to the concept of communicative rationality as discussed more fully in section 2.2. Briefly, this notion considers rationality as an orientation in discourse (or in self-dialoguing following the template of social interaction) towards explaining and supporting one’s positions by offering good reasons that satisfy implicit validity claims to propositional truth, normative rightness, and authenticity or honesty (Habermas 1998a; 1998c). This is both fallibilistic, in that it is based on individuals’ knowledge and perspectives that may change over time, and anti-foundationalist, in that it rejects authority and supposed self-evident truth as bases for determining what is rational. Thus rationality is contextualized and hence somewhat relative, yet the requirement of satisfying validity claims enables individuals to take a critical stance regarding the rationality of any claim made or position taken. A further distinguishing characteristic of communicative rationality is that it eschews all forms of force (e.g. bribery, trickery, threats) in reaching agreements regarding validity claims, and through this egalitarian process of coming to mutual understanding with others, individuals’ particular perspectives and understandings are enlarged and rendered more universal, which is at the heart of arguments that such a conception is especially suited to democratic processes. Thus when I, for example, refer to a statement as being ecologically rational, I mean that in the given context and given the present state of ecological knowledge on the matter at hand, there are good reasons that can be/have been offered to support the truth, rightness, and authenticity of the statement that are/would be convincing to those engaged in discourse on the matter. This all clearly contrasts with the Modernist scientific understanding of rationality as the definitive and acontextual apprehension of the one true claim that can be made on a matter, and which once perceived is essentially incontestable.

civic capacity, and enlarge the understanding of everyone involved (Young 1997). As such, plans and planning processes rooted in communicative rationality will be more democratic, reflective of the public interest, sensitive to societal needs, and should lead to more rational outcomes that better meet those needs (Innes 1995; Healey 2006).

In cases where uncertainty and controversy are relatively absent, the objective-instrumental approach may be generally acceptable, but as knowledge and information about the issue under consideration are less certain and/or serious conflicts of value are involved a communicative approach is more appropriate (Innes and Booher 1999; Healey 2006). Environmental and resource planning and management are typically characterized by high degrees of uncertainty, knowledge gaps, and fundamental value conflicts, and so would seem particularly well suited to a communicative approach (Baber 2004; Parkins and Mitchell 2005). The deliberative discourse component at the heart of such an approach ideally engenders transformative learning among participants as they come to see deficiencies and unfounded assumptions in their own meaning perspectives while appreciating the merits of others' frames of reference (Sinclair and Diduck 2001; Diduck and Mitchell 2003; Mezirow 2003). As well, it is argued that participatory communicative planning and decision making can lead to the more general social learning necessary to confront environmental dilemmas and achieve sustainability in modern democracies (Webler, Kastenholz et al. 1995; Schusler, Decker et al. 2003; Keen, Brown et al. 2005). Further, this approach contains an emancipatory potential to the extent that it meaningfully includes the perspectives and knowledge of individuals and groups marginalized in the traditional top-down, expert-driven model of environmental planning and decision making, and as such it can empower and build capacity within civil

society and minority communities (Furman and Gruenewald 2004; Jucker 2004; Andrew and Robottom 2005). Finally, if resource and environmental planning are to arrive at sustainable outcomes they must be ecologically rational, and it has been suggested that this requires deeper and stronger forms of democracy than currently obtain in Western societies (Baber and Bartlett 2001), and the enhancement of democratic practice is a commonly cited benefit of communicative planning processes.

Indeed, resource and environmental management contexts are increasingly seeing participatory and communicative strategies applied and even legislated, but so far with mixed results (Parkins and Mitchell 2005). While the arguments supporting the emancipatory, learning, democracy building, and sustainable outcome potentials of such an approach are compelling, analyses of actual attempts to apply it reveal that greater understanding of the dynamics of participatory processes is needed and that there are many complex difficulties and barriers to be overcome before this potential is realized (e.g. Campbell and Marshall 2000; Petts 2001; Diduck and Mitchell 2003; Petts 2004; Sinclair and Diduck 2005; Wiklund 2005). Parkins and Mitchell (2005) have concluded that while the field of resource management routinely supports democratic and participatory planning and decision making, in practice such processes are most often poorly applied and in fact can result in inhibiting democratic participation and arriving at unsustainable outcomes. These failings are attributed in no small part to a theoretical disconnect between the disciplines of deliberative democracy and resource management, which has resulted in resource management often proceeding without a sound and coherent theoretical basis, especially regarding the workings of democracy. More recently there are some within resource management making linkages between particular

aspects of that field and both democratic theory (e.g. Wiklund 2005; Fitzpatrick, Sinclair et al. 2008) and learning (e.g. Sinclair and Diduck 2001; Keen, Brown et al. 2005), and some communicative planning work (which links directly to deliberative democracy theory) also makes reference to resource and environmental decision making (e.g. Innes and Booher 2004; Healey 2006). Nevertheless it is clear that these linkages demand further exploration and that work is needed to further clarify and elaborate a generalized conceptual understanding of resource planning and management processes that are communicative, democratic, and learning-based.

Toward this end, a set of ideal characteristics or best practices of participatory and communicative planning and decision processes can be gleaned from the literatures on deliberative democracy, communicative planning, natural resource management, ecological democracy, and transformative learning. As well, these literatures put forward and defend certain normative assumptions, especially regarding knowledge claims and the nature of human communication and social organization, which provide theoretical grounding for their articulations of the ideal characteristics and best practices referred to above. By critically examining the assumptions and ideal characteristics identified in the literatures of these various disciplines, and by drawing them together in a mutually supporting narrative structure, it is possible to begin to conceptualize a generalized conceptual framework for democratic communicative planning in resource and environmental management contexts that creates space for the learning implied in democratic deliberation.

## **1.2 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES**

The primary purpose of my thesis is to develop and support a comprehensive and generalized conceptual framework for resource and environmental planning that is founded upon communicative presuppositions which foreground deliberation and learning. I provide an answer to the question of how people in society can engage in discourse together such that ecologically rational and democratically legitimate plans can be developed and decisions reached regarding environmental problems that affect them. In accomplishing this I have pursued the following objectives:

- (1) To critically review the relevant literatures on the theory of communicative action, transformative learning, deliberative democracy, communicative planning, ecological democracy, and resource and environmental management.
- (2) To develop and thoroughly describe a conceptual framework for resource and environmental planning and decision making based on and reflecting the normative assumptions, ideal conditions, and best practices identified in the literatures considered in objective 1.
- (3) To make recommendations regarding future practical application and empirical testing of the conceptual framework.

## **1.3 METHODS**

The research for my thesis was primarily literature-based. The works critically reviewed in accomplishing objective 1 were selected so as to follow the threads connecting resource and environmental planning to a basis in Habermasian deliberative democracy theory<sup>2</sup>. As described in section 1.1 above, this included an examination of

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<sup>2</sup> There are numerous versions of or approaches to deliberative democracy, all holding minimally to some concept of public reasoning and viewing political legitimacy as reaching decisions that all those affected

literature on: Habermas' theory of communicative action, which serves as the (often implicit) basis for all that follows; transformative learning theory, which elaborates the learning implied in communicative action; Habermasian deliberative democracy, which describes a generalized normative model for collective decision making; communicative planning, which articulates elements of communicative action and deliberative democracy in the context of the planning discipline; communicative resource and environmental planning, which is a subset of the resource and environmental management literature taking up various aspects of some or all of the preceding fields; and deliberative ecological democracy, which interrogates the ways in which deliberative democracy can successfully lead to ecologically rational solutions to environmental problems.

The rationale for these choices was to address the aforementioned disconnect between resource management and democratic theory by tracing and making explicit the linkages such that management processes can be appropriately informed by and understood as instances of democratic practice. The specific literatures reviewed were selected by first undertaking a summary reading of the resource and environmental management literature, which revealed the promise of a communicative approach and the need for enriching it with a deeper consideration of the theoretical bases that support it. After a period of critical reflection on my readings and following consultation with my committee and other colleagues, the above described set of literatures emerged as

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could reasonably assent to (Bohman 1998). While I do draw on insights and critiques from other theorists, I focus on Habermas' model of deliberative democracy, as outlined in *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas 1996b), to the exclusion of other explicit models articulated in the literature. This choice was in part a matter of maintaining a manageable scope for the literature review, but was primarily made so that I follow a coherent line from Habermas' communicative action theory to democratic procedures for decision making regarding public matters. Thus when I refer to "Habermasian deliberative democracy" I simply mean an understanding of deliberative democracy that starts from the basic premises of Habermas' procedural model.

necessary to accomplish the goal of providing a thorough foundation for developing a theoretically robust conceptual framework for communicative resource and environmental planning and decision making. Within each literature specific writings reviewed were selected by first identifying contributions from major academics in each field and then moving out to consider works which critiqued, interrogated further, and built upon them.<sup>3</sup> In this way my review is dialogic – identifying and following the communicative interactions within each field, creatively constructing an interpretation of the various communities of discourse, and inserting myself within those conversations by critiquing and creatively joining together the themes and ideas expressed (Montuori 2005; Silverman 2005).

Given my stated intent was to explore the “communicative turn” in the various literatures, it is important to specify that I have adopted Habermas’ notion of communicative action as the guiding theory for my research. Thus the works selected as well as the themes and ideas within them that were deemed most significant, and thus most thoroughly explored, were steered towards those that build upon and/or interrogate the implications of the theory of communicative action within their various disciplinary contexts (Torraco 2005). In developing and critiquing these themes I have employed an interpretive, hermeneutic approach, using analytic induction to infer which concepts were most fruitful in establishing connections among the works considered (Jones 2004). Traditionally a primary function of the literature review is to guide data collection and analysis (Marshall and Rossman 1995), but in my case the review process was the data collection, and analysis and critique of that data takes place within the review as well. As

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<sup>3</sup> The first section of my review, on Habermas’ theory of communicative action, is somewhat of an exception as it consists more of a straightforward articulation of the theory, which serves as the guiding theory for the entire review.

such my aim was not to provide an overview of the literature, as might have been accomplished for example through a content analysis of representative works, rather I have sought to interpret, critique, and develop meaning from the literature that is relevant to my research purpose and question, and that comments, critiques, and builds upon my guiding theory of communicative action. Rather than the metaphor of providing a snapshot of each of the literatures, I prefer to think in terms of constructing a map where I have selectively highlighted a path through the theoretical landscape relevant to the specific subject of my research (Montuori 2005).

I have followed the principles of an integrative review where the emerging topic of communicative resource management is holistically conceptualized through a synthesis of concepts from relevant literature in the various disciplines considered key to lending it theoretical support (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Torraco 2005). Thus my review, having a transdisciplinary orientation, also addresses the issue of disciplinary fragmentation as I have integrated insights from the selected fields and interrogated the implications of viewing them as a whole (Montuori 2005). As an integrative review of the range of literatures I have undertaken has not been published to date, this approach has enabled the generation of new knowledge in the form of a theoretically supported preliminary conceptual framework (Montuori 2005; Torraco 2005). My review is structured in a roughly narrative format in that I connect relatively isolated theoretical developments from various fields into a continuous account where, while individual components and the relationships among them are analyzed, the significance of each element considered is best understood in reference to the whole (Jones 2004; Elliott 2005). This approach has further helped me to identify themes and ideas in the literature

that serve to strengthen and enrich the story I have developed in my review, and so adds to its dialogical character.

As already mentioned, developing a new or modified conceptual framework is a common outcome of an integrative literature review (Torraco 2005), particularly when the review is conducted as a process of creative inquiry (Montuori 2005). In accomplishing this (objective 2), I have employed critical analysis and synthesis together, as “[n]ew knowledge about previous research is created through critical analysis; synthesis builds on this to create new perspectives on the topic as a whole” (Torraco 2005, 363). This creative potential was strengthened by my employment of an inductive analytic approach, which enables the modification of concepts and the relationships among them as it both tests existing theory and generates new theoretical insights as well. Given the narrative structure of my review and the coherent line of development throughout, the conceptual framework I present is a logical conclusion of my analysis of the literature. In my literature review, starting from the guiding basis in communicative action, I have identified and interrogated the linkages among the various disciplines so that the conceptual framework was built following a developmental path from the more abstract and general theoretical work of deliberative democracy, through the fields of transformative learning and communicative planning, to the more concrete, specific, and empirically based resource management literature, and finally returning to the more theoretically imbued literature on deliberative ecological democracy. As well, in the final review section on ecological democracy I have responded to some of the persistent and thorny criticisms regarding the capacity of a communicative approach to deal rationally with ecological problematics, and have explicitly integrated the main themes developed

throughout the review. As a result, the conceptual framework that emerges retains a focus on and a sound basis in communicative democratic theory while being tailored specifically for application in resource and environmental planning contexts. But most importantly it is founded upon the main themes and ideas identified as significant and developed throughout the review, reflects my critical analysis of those themes and ideas, and represents their creative synthesis into a holistic perspective.

The conceptual framework is presented both written and diagrammatic form in section 3.3., and the accompanying discussion articulates the foundational assumptions and procedural considerations of the framework. Further description of the framework was developed by examining its key components and their interrelationships to identify areas where additional attention and elaboration will enhance the readers' comprehension of it.

All of the above activities assisted me in developing recommendations for how future environmental planning and decision making initiatives could be informed and improved through reference to my conceptual framework (objective 3). As well, I briefly explored some ways in which the framework could be empirically tested through research in specific environmental planning and decision making contexts.

Regarding the validity of my conclusions, while the literatures reviewed do not always acknowledge their theoretical antecedents, they were all selected in part because they are broadly based on presuppositions consistent with the theory of communicative action. As such there is a danger that my review could be construed as an echo chamber where apparent inter-disciplinary support for particular concepts is in fact merely the inevitable outcome of examining works by scholars who share fundamental theoretical

commitments – who are essentially delivering the same message in different disciplinary languages. However, this fails to acknowledge that the various literatures considered, despite their obvious connections, often proceed with little reference to one another and so rather than parroting each other are more or less independently working to explore the consequences of applying a communicative approach within their diverse fields. As well, the transformative learning, communicative planning, resource management, and, to a lesser extent, deliberative democracy literatures all include a wealth of empirical research supporting their theoretical bases. With this in mind, I think it is fair to consider the conclusions reached within each discipline on their own merits and so to regard commonalities among them as being mutually reinforcing rather than as uncritical reflections of one another's ideas. Further, I have maintained a critical attitude throughout my review of the literature by keeping a sharp focus on the logical coherence and degree of accordance with supporting evidence of the claims made within each field as well as the ways in which they may (inadvertently) critique claims made in other disciplines. Where appropriate I have identified and further explored concepts that are insufficiently supported, logically incoherent, or significantly challenged by work in other fields.

Validity was further ensured through triangulation and critical reflection. For my purposes I have taken triangulation not as confirmation of a specific conclusion through identifying multiple overlapping data points, but rather as a process of employing multiple lines of sight or perspectives over a general landscape (Berg 2004). Here the landscape was that of communicative democratic processes, and the lines of sight were the various literatures reviewed. In this way the likelihood of arriving at questionable or

unjustified conclusions was greatly reduced. Creating time and space for critical reflection is also vital to the validity of interpretive analyses (Jones 2004). Critical reflection together with others has helped to uncover unacknowledged biases in my own thinking while providing opportunity to consider interpretations from others' perspectives, and critical self-reflection has allowed me to consider my own learning throughout the research process as it is "one way to open the door for psychological insight and transformation in the context of academic work" (Montuori 2005, 390). Critical self-reflection, by identifying and exploring my own implicit assumptions and how they are modified through the learning process of conducting research, has also served the function of safeguarding against unjustified insertions of my own predispositions into the communications of others, and hence has increased respect for the autonomy of the texts used (Jones 2004).

#### **1.4 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE**

My thesis makes three primary contributions to knowledge. First, it draws connections among a set of literatures that often are not explicitly made, if they are made at all. Most often authors in one of the disciplines I have explored may make reference to one or two of the others, but not the entire range I have considered (e.g. Healey (2006) connects planning with Habermas' theory of communicative action, but not to his deliberative democratic theory nor to the transformative learning or resource management literatures). Making the relationships among these literatures explicit will allow future work in any of the fields to be enriched by demonstrating how alternative disciplinary perspectives can be brought to bear on the problems and issues under consideration. In this way some of the extant barriers between these academic fields are overcome and a

more holistic vision can emerge, especially regarding resource and environmental planning.

Second, the conceptual framework I have developed itself contributes to our theoretical understanding of: deliberative democracy, as it describes the working of democracy from the perspective of resource management, which is largely absent in the deliberative democracy literature; transformative learning, in that it explicitly grounds learning in communicative action and describes its role in both democratic functioning and resource planning; communicative planning, particularly as it situates planning as nested within deliberative democratic practice and frames it in the context of resource management; resource management and planning, since by explicitly founding such planning on Habermas' communicative and democratic theories the observed disconnect between resource management and democratic theory is addressed; and deliberative ecological democracy, as it helps consolidate the various strands in this emerging field and provides a sound theoretical basis for it.

Finally, my work also has direct practical implications as articulated in my recommendations regarding the application of the conceptual framework, which provides guidance to improve the process and outcome of future planning endeavours. As well, my comments on how the framework could be tested suggest new opportunities for further academic research.

Overall, by identifying and assessing theoretical concepts from the literature this work further refines our understanding of deliberative democratic processes and communicative planning. It also helps to clarify the utility of and provides guidance in better applying such processes in the field of resource and environmental planning, a

need often cited in the literature (e.g. Baber 2004; Parkins and Mitchell 2005; Sinclair and Diduck 2005; Wiklund 2005). As well, my work furthers our understanding of the role of transformative learning in communicative planning and decision making processes.

The results of my research are communicated through this thesis and, under the guidance of my advisor, at least one article will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal. In addition I will seek out opportunities to present my findings at relevant academic conferences and to appropriate government agencies and environmental and other non-governmental organizations involved in resource and environmental planning processes.

## **1.5 THESIS ORGANIZATION**

Chapter 2 of my thesis meets my first research objective by providing a review of the literature relevant to communicative, participatory planning and decision making and focuses on deliberative democracy, communicative planning, ecological democracy, resource planning and management, and transformative learning. The second objective is addressed in chapter 3 where I discuss the development of my conceptual framework and present it together with a detailed description and explanation of its component parts and their interrelations. The final chapter consists of a discussion that reflects on how my objectives and research question were met, summarizes my conclusions, and articulates my recommendations for the practical application and testing of the framework (my third objective).

## **CHAPTER 2 – COMMUNICATIVE ACTION, LEARNING, DEMOCRACY, AND PLANNING: FROM HABERMAS TO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND BACK**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the first part of this chapter I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of a communicative approach to democratic planning and decision making. This entails the investigation of: Habermas' theory of communicative action (section 2.2) as providing a normative basis for understanding social relations and structures; transformative learning theory (section 2.3), which interrogates a key component implied in communicative action; and deliberative democracy (section 2.4) where the implications of communicative action are developed into descriptions of normative democratic principles. My understanding of how communicative planning processes could best function is based primarily on Habermas' notion of deliberative democracy, and so that section receives the most detailed attention in this review. I then look to communicative planning theory (section 2.5) and communicative resource and environmental planning (section 2.6) to explore the appropriateness and implications of a deliberative approach in these fields and to draw out key issues involved in applying the model of deliberative democracy in environmental planning and decision making contexts. Finally, I consider communicative ecological democracy where I deal with some of the prominent criticisms of Habermas' discourse ethic as being fundamentally anti-ecological, and consider a variety of ways that it can be seen as appropriate for confronting ecological problematics. This final section concludes with a brief integration of the key concepts and themes considered throughout the review. The aim of this chapter is to provide a rationale for a

communicative approach to resource and environmental planning and decision making processes and to elucidate the fundamental elements characterizing such processes. I also endeavour to bring to light and interrogate some of the problematic assumptions of this theoretical approach as well as some of the difficulties that need to be kept in mind in practical applications. This chapter forms the basis from which I subsequently develop a conceptual framework describing the positioning, components, structure, and operation of communicative planning and decision making processes in resource and environmental management contexts.

## **2.2 THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY**

Communicative action is as simple as two or more persons sincerely striving to dialogically come to mutual understanding, but Habermas argues that the implications of such interactions are far reaching and indeed form a foundation for the democratic processes through which we may create more humane and just societies (Habermas 1996b; Brookfield 2005a). Habermas' social theory interrogates the possibilities for freedom and justice inherent in our everyday social practices and aims to develop standards for evaluating and potentially transforming existing social institutions and structures, and it is in this sense that he is a critical social theorist (Cooke 2001). These possibilities and standards take shape as he foregrounds communicative action as the appropriate basis of social relations and explicates the rational potential, in the form of an orientation towards validity claims, of such linguistic interactions. In light of the compelling postmodern epistemological critique that points out the contingency and ultimate indeterminacy of knowledge and truth, and in particular its rejection of logocentrism, the belief that there is some core of discoverable meaning inherent in

language, such a grounding of rationality in language use may appear incomprehensible. As well, more pessimistic readings of critical theory's unmasking of the ubiquitous presence and domatory, distorting tendencies of economic and administrative power in public discourse would almost suggest that, barring a fundamental transformation of the present order, justice and emancipation are illusory aims. Yet despite this, Habermas holds to the Enlightenment belief that humans can marshal reason to foster emancipation and create an objectively better world (Habermas 1997; Brookfield 2005b). He rejects the dark privatism implied in the unknowable Other of postmodernism together with the certitude of Modernist instrumental reason and the oppressive power it unleashes in favour of the intersubjective co-relation and rationality implicit in communicative action, which can produce social solidarity and develop and articulate public interests (Habermas 1996a).

In our increasingly diverse and complex societies there is an inescapable need to find ways of coming to collectively acceptable decisions on matters of general social concern. Habermas has convincingly pointed out that given the postmetaphysical character of our societies, where comprehensive worldviews and collectively binding ethics have largely disintegrated, such decisions must be based on mutual understandings achieved through communicative action, which is fundamentally democratic. Without this approach Habermas suggests we are left with only recourse to the violence of coercive and authoritarian structures, which are inimical to democracy (Habermas 1996b; Brookfield 2005b). If this is true then communicative action ought to form the basis of any instance of collective planning and decision making in democratic societies, and as such is worthy of further exploration.

Habermas considers dialogue as the central point of language, and reaching mutual understanding as its inherent *telos* (Habermas 1998a). He acknowledges the contradictory character of language as being at one and the same time both an already agreed upon system of mutually understood meanings necessary for any communication to take place, and an opaque, slippery, and subjective bearer of uniquely personal perception and understanding (Habermas 1998a). It is precisely this tension that is worked out in and through the intersubjective relation of individuals joined in a quest for mutual understanding as their use of language individuates and socializes in one act – participants in dialogue on an issue come to a greater appreciation of their shared understandings and of how they themselves understand differently.<sup>4</sup> This conception of communication contrasts sharply with much of the formal and informal speech in our society where speakers are motivated by egoistic calculations of individual success and hence use language strategically to coerce and dominate others or to justify a system that legitimizes and perpetuates such domination. But, according to Habermas' contention that the appropriate purpose of language is to reach mutual understanding, such speech must be considered fundamentally distorted and irrational (Brookfield 2005b).

For Habermas, rationality does not consist in holding to beliefs that are based on supposed objectively true judgments as is the case with the instrumental objective rationality championed by Modernity. He suggests that this concept of reason is fundamentally dishonest as it fails to acknowledge the partial, contingent, and fallible nature of human perception and understanding. He further accepts a Marxian based

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<sup>4</sup> This dual action implicit in communicative action is what creates a space for the learning, discussed in the next section, necessary to improve communicative competence and to develop perspectives that are functionally superior in bringing meaning to our personal and shared experiences, which meaning then guides our individual and social actions.

critique of Modernist reason as being compromised by its alliance with and support for established power-holders in capitalist society and the hegemony of the technocratic ideology they espouse, which simultaneously entrenches and strives to mask social inequalities and oppressive flows of power (Brookfield 2005b). Habermas argues that rationality instead be considered an orientation in dialogue towards explaining and supporting positions presented, because clearly the rationality of a speech act is dependent on its potential justification (Habermas 1998c). This justification takes the form of satisfying the criticizable validity claims that he sees as implicit in every linguistic utterance. “A person expresses himself rationally insofar as he is oriented performatively toward validity claims: we say that he not only behaves rationally but is himself rational if he can give account for his orientation toward validity claims (Habermas 1998c, 310).”

The validity claims Habermas sees as raised (at least implicitly) and in need of adjudication in every speech act are claims: (a) to the *comprehensibility* or intelligibility of the utterance (i.e. its grammatical correctness, choice of words with best chance of being understood, internal consistency, etc.); (b) to its propositional *truth* (i.e. it represents some recognizable state of affairs in the world, or makes correct existential presuppositions); (c) to its normative *rightness* (i.e. the utterance is appropriate in the particular context given prevailing norms and values - the speaker is “entitled” to make it, it “fits” in time and place); and (d) to its *authenticity* (i.e. the speaker is fully honest in expressing his or her beliefs, intentions, desires, etc.) (Habermas 1998d; Cooke 2001; Niemi 2005).<sup>5</sup> Since all linguistic interaction depends on raising and responding to these

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<sup>5</sup> Comprehensibility is obviously a precondition for any communication to occur at all and so is not a validity claim in the same sense as the others, in fact the potential for vindication of the validity claims (b)

validity claims, Habermas can derive a notion of social order as reproduced through communicative action whereby a network of relationships of mutual recognition inhere between speaker and hearer. These relationships are both cooperative, in that each takes on a commitment and responsibility to behave in certain ways on which the success of their interaction depends, and rational, in that the speaker is obligated to provide reasons for the validity of claims raised while the hearer either accepts or challenges them based on reasons of their own (Cooke 2001). As well, these claims make apparent that speech itself invokes and joins together the objective, subjective, and intersubjective worlds in claims to truth, authenticity, and normative rightness respectively (Niemi 2005).<sup>6</sup> The important point is that, considered in this way, the very nature of human communication with its teleological aim of mutual understanding integrates our experienced world and implies certain characteristics of appropriate social relation and organization.

Remembering that rationality, understood communicatively, consists in critically assessing the validity claims raised in the speech *of* others while simultaneously orienting our own speech toward satisfying its validity claims *for* others, communicative action and rationality provide a standard and a means for identifying and evaluating distorted (and undistorted) forms of communication. And since “those aspects of validity that undergird speech are also imported to the forms of life reproduced through communicative action” (Habermas 1996b, 4) we can adapt the validity criteria introduced above to assess the rationality and legitimacy of democratic processes (Habermas 1996a). With this in mind, certain democratic norms implied in communicative action can be distinguished: first,

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through (d) presupposes the utterance’s comprehensibility. As well, the final validity claim, ‘authenticity’, is sometimes referred to as ‘truthfulness’.

<sup>6</sup> Or as Habermas initially termed them the worlds of external nature, internal nature, and society (Habermas 1998c).

that coming to understanding must be uncoerced, hence we must seek out and neutralize power imbalances among participants; second, coming to understanding proceeds from the truthful or authentic giving of reasons for positions advocated; and third, coming to mutual understanding means that participants reach agreement, in the form of intersubjective recognition of validity claims, regarding the validity of utterances (Brookfield 2005a). In parallel with this Habermas argues that the rules for discourse derived from communicative rationality are also the basis of democratic practice, and stipulate that we “strive to ensure that (a) all relevant voices are heard, (b) the best of all available arguments, given the present state of our knowledge are accepted, and (c) only the non-coercive coercion of the better argument determines the affirmations and negations of the participants” (Habermas 1992 quoted in Brookfield 2005a, 1161-1162). Hence in an ideal democratic discourse full inclusion, equality, and freedom will prevail and all those affected by the issue under consideration will contribute their knowledge and understanding from their particular perspectives, and will also articulate their particular interests and action preferences. From this basis, through engaging in communicative action and employing communicative reason, a mutual understanding will emerge that reflects the best arguments presented, is in the affected public’s best interest, and articulates what can properly be considered the public’s opinion and will (Habermas 1996b; Brookfield 2005a).

Obviously this is idealized and any results must be considered provisional best judgments as new knowledge, perspectives, or arguments raised in the future would need to be discursively considered and may result in changes to the outcome. As well, in real situations time constraints may require a decision before discourse is complete (which in

a sense it never really is). And perhaps most importantly, not all participants may cooperate in setting aside egoistic aims, in refraining from coercive power plays, in being prepared to modify or change their own perceptions, or in sincerely striving for mutual understanding. This last point emphasizes that for communicative action to function each participant must accept the basic rules of discourse and further be prepared to critically examine their own positions and perspectives for distortions, to change them so as to root out the distortions and discard what cannot be justified, and to incorporate new insights gleaned from others. Without this any discursive process cannot be said to be communicatively legitimate, for it cannot claim to be founded on an authentic commitment to work for mutual understanding. Indeed it has been suggested that learning to do just this sort of critical reflection and perspective transformation is *the* central adult learning task, and that it is fundamental to practicing democracy (Brookfield 2005b).

### **2.3 TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING**

Transformative learning theory addresses precisely the sort of learning described above. The development of the theory has been led by Jack Mezirow, who interpreted and applied Habermas' theory of communicative action into the context of adult learning while also drawing on an array of insights from diverse disciplines (notably developmental and cognitive psychology) and empirical research. From this basis Mezirow began to articulate transformation theory, which he intends as a generic, universal theory of the dimensions and processes of adult learning, and he has continued to refine his ideas in lively dialogue with scholars ever since.<sup>7</sup> From the beginning the

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<sup>7</sup> For Mezirow's early articulation of transformation theory see Mezirow (1978; 1981; 1991a), for his responses to critics see Mezirow (1989; 1991b; 1996; 1998b; 1998c; 2004), and for overviews

theory has had a fundamental critical dimension in that a primary aim is to outline the learning processes whereby individuals can be freed from unjustified elements uncritically assimilated into their internal meaning-producing mechanisms. These problematic components of people's meaning structures serve to constrain their freedom and block their exercise of authentic human agency by compelling them to act based on psychological distortions or externally defined understandings (Mezirow 1981). As such, Mezirow is concerned with assessing the justification of underlying and often implicit assumptions that condition how we understand our world and hence act in it, a task very well aligned with Habermas' emphasis on vindicating validity claims in communicative action.

Transformative learning theory starts from the constructivist assumption that new knowledge and understanding are created by individuals based on mental schemata developed through prior life experiences and heavily influenced by socialization processes; when we encounter a new experience it is interpreted and made meaningful for us according to what we already know, understand, and believe (Merriam and Caffarella 1999). If our existing meaning structures are unable to interpret a new experience or if the meaning they ascribe to the experience is contradictory or in some way unacceptable, we are faced with the threat of chaos as our meaning structures, and along with them our understanding of our self and our world, are called into question. In response to such a situation we may choose to accept explanations offered by tradition or authority figures, we may resort to uses of force to validate our understanding, or we may dishonestly reconstruct the present and/or past experiences after the fact in order to render the present

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demonstrating the breadth of perspectives on and approaches to transformative learning see Merriam and Caffarella (1999, chapter 14), Mezirow & Associates (2000), Cranton (2006, chapters 2 and 3), and Taylor (1998; 2007).

dilemma comprehensible to us (Mezirow 2000). But such responses either strip us of our freedom by placing us in a position of dependency, bullishly ignore the underlying crisis of meaning, or resign us to a life of false consciousness and self-delusion, and so they ultimately fail to serve as reliable guides for future understanding and action (Mezirow 1985).

Mezirow suggests a third response to dealing with personal crises of meaning.

The essence of transformative learning is

learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (Mezirow 2003, 58-59).

Becoming aware of and critically reflecting on our meaning structures and the assumptions embedded in them is key to the process of transformation. Through critical reflection we seek to identify unjustified elements of our meaning structures that have distorted our perception and so led us to construe meaning contrary to our expectations, or put another way, to expect meaning at variance with our experience of it (Mezirow 1998a). As problems are identified we need to make corrective refinements to what we have or to adopt something new and better justified to direct our meaning-making activity, and we need some sound basis from which to assess the validity of any changes we make so as to ensure progress towards beliefs and ways of understanding that are more justified. Mezirow, again following Habermas, suggests that this is the necessary role of critical discourse (Mezirow 1994).

In the context of transformative learning this notion of discourse is in essence a socially mediated process of constructive critical reflection. Through discourse we each

advance claims to knowledge with supporting reasons, mutually attempt to understand the other from their perspective, collaboratively assess the validity claims inherent in their and our utterances, and identify and critique the often unacknowledged assumptions and expectations undergirding the beliefs, values, and feelings each has articulated (Mezirow 2003). As we encounter the perspective of the other in the quest for mutual understanding we engage in perspective taking, or provisionally suspending judgment and “trying on” the other’s perspective to explore its consequences and justifications (Mezirow 1978). As a result of this process of collaborative critical assessment we are able to arrive at a provisional best judgment regarding a more valid and dependable way of understanding, that is, we identify a superior meaning perspective.<sup>8</sup>

When we adopt the new perspective or incorporate new insights so as to modify elements of our existing perspective and then apply this in our lives, we have engaged in transformative learning. The learning will be more or less profound, and hence the consequences more or less far-reaching, depending on the level within our meaning structures where the transformation has occurred (Mezirow 2000). The transformation of a point of view on a specific issue will effect changes in action and understanding in that context, while the transformation of a basic premise undergirding our overall perspective will result in changes that are deeper and resonate throughout our perceptual systems. Regardless of the level, the resultant transformed perspective can be considered superior insofar as it meaningfully encompasses a wider range of experience (including vicariously sharing in the experiences of others through discourse), is more differentiating, recognizes its own contingency and so is more open and responsive to

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<sup>8</sup> This is not meant to imply that we necessarily identify a wholly new perspective that must replace our own, but simply that a meaning structure where even a small distorting element has been replaced with a better justified one is now a “superior perspective.”

new experiences and reflective insights, and as a result is more dependable for guiding future action. These are appropriate characteristics of superior meaning perspectives precisely because they have been extrapolated from the principles of discourse, which is itself predicated on universal principles embedded in human communication (Mezirow 1998a). As we develop increasingly functional frames of reference we also nurture our capacity to negotiate transformations and improve our competence at engaging in the communicative action so central to the process, and so transformative learning is considered as a self-reinforcing iterative process concomitant with adult development (Mezirow 1994).

Transformative learning theory describes discourse as an essential tool in achieving transformations, but in our diverse societies when engaging in critical discourse on contentious issues following the guidelines of communicative action we will often encounter perspectives and meanings as understood by others that resist our efforts at understanding from within our existing meaning structures. While it may be that after consensual validation our pre-understandings remain intact, we must be prepared and capable to change given the new input. We cannot expect to come to mutual understanding in dialogue when our perspectives are and remain fundamentally distorted, when we hold to positions that cannot be justified, or when we refuse to listen openly to differing views, and these are all addressed through transformative learning. In essence transformative learning focuses in on one key component of communicative action – namely it seeks to describe how we are able to progress towards better justified positions and understandings through discursive interaction with others, which is at the heart of the argument that decision processes based in communicative action lead to qualitatively

superior outcomes. Considered this way, transformative learning and communicative rationality are essentially homologous processes that presuppose and reinforce one another; transformative learning relies on the power of communicative rationality in order to identify superior perspectives through discourse, while communicative rationality could never be achieved without the ability of individuals to transcend their initial particularistic ways of understanding. As such, I would argue that creating a space and fostering opportunities for transformative learning should be considered a necessary component of any decision or planning process founded in communicative action.

Based on Habermas' rules of discourse and characteristics of an ideal speech situation, Mezirow has outlined the ideal conditions for fostering transformative learning. They stipulate that in discourse all participants have: the most accurate and complete information; freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception; openness to alternative points of view; the ability to assess evidence and arguments objectively (i.e. on their own merits); awareness of the context of ideas, especially reflectiveness on assumptions, including their own; the equal opportunity to take on the various roles of discourse; and a sincere commitment to seek understanding and to accept the resulting best judgment as valid until new perspectives, evidence, or arguments are presented and discursively validated as yielding a better judgment (Mezirow 2000).

Mezirow's articulation of transformative learning has received persistent criticism for attending too little to issues of power and how transformation is linked to social action and change (Collard and Law 1989; Pietrykowski 1996; Inglis 1997; Taylor 1998; 2007). This is considered especially troubling given that he bases his ideas on Habermas' theory of communicative action, which fundamentally aims at describing how we may act

collectively to change our world for the better. As well, since I am claiming that transformative learning has a powerful role to play in democratic planning and decision processes it is inherently problematic if the theory cannot account for such social action.

These critiques generally stem from perspectives that regard emancipation from oppressive social relations as the ultimate goal of adult learning, but Mezirow insists that transformative learning occurs first and foremost within the individual.<sup>9</sup> This has led some to suggest that after undergoing a transformation individuals are left to integrate themselves, with their new ways of understanding, into a society whose oppressive ideologies may go unquestioned and hence unchallenged (Taylor 1998). But this fails to acknowledge two points on which Mezirow has been rather clear. First, not all transformations are in response to socio-culturally induced distortions and may instead be attending to psychic distortions related to relatively unique personal experiences (Mezirow 1989). Second, if the transformation was attending to perspectival distortions stemming from socio-cultural ideologies it is difficult to see how the individual could, after identifying and internally correcting the distortion, reintegrate themselves into society without either questioning and challenging the dominant ideology or coming to realize that their transformation regarding that distortion was incomplete. Insofar as a transformative process is confronting broadly shared socio-cultural distortions, it is fundamentally a process of ideology critique (Brookfield 2001). However, if in such a case taking social action were to precede this sort of critical learning there is a threat that the emancipatory intent of the action would be blunted by being framed within the constraints of the (unchallenged) dominant ideology. As well, individuals who are

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<sup>9</sup> This exclusive focus on locating transformation within the individual is true for most transformative learning theorists. However, drawing on insights from literature subsequently considered in this review, I begin to suggest the outlines of transformative learning functioning at the societal scale in section 2.7.5.

oppressed may have internalized this into their meaning structures, hence normalizing their oppression, in which case they need to become aware of and transform the distortion within themselves before they can engage in any collective action for emancipation (Freire 1970; Merriam and Caffarella 1999). Mezirow also points out that conditions favouring social justice are foundational to the ideal of full inclusion and equality in discourse, and so as we come, through transformative learning experiences, to appreciate the import of striving to foster the ideal conditions of critical discourse we are provided a compelling rationale for being committed to progressive social action initiatives (Mezirow 2003). Hence Mezirow is not ignoring collective action against oppressive workings of power in society, he is simply focusing on the learning that must necessarily precede it.

Transformative learning further links to social action in that while the locus of transformation is within the individual, the centrality of discourse implies, as with communicative action generally, the forging of social relationships. As we negotiate transformations we also come to see that we are not alone, that others share (elements of) our perspectives along with their distortions (Merriam and Caffarella 1999). In cases where we tackle distortions induced by entrenched patterns of social relation we also come to see that others are implicated on all sides of supporting and succumbing to them, and hence that addressing the root of the problem will require collective action in society. Yet, if, when, and how an individual engages in social action against distorted and oppressive flows of power in society is context specific and ultimately their choice, and is not explicitly addressed by transformative learning theory (Mezirow 1989).

Empirical investigations have generally supported this potential for transformative learning to be an effective lever for initiating social action and change towards greater freedom and equality for all (e.g. Inglis 1997; Foster 1998; Mezirow 1998c; Nagda, Gurin et al. 2003; Takahashi 2004). In particular, transformative learning has been found to be a powerful element embedded in the structures and operations of participatory democratic processes designed to address pressing environmental problems and arrive at ecologically rational and socially acceptable decisions about resource use (e.g. Webler, Kastenholz et al. 1995; Sinclair and Diduck 2001; Sterling 2001; Röling 2002; Diduck and Mitchell 2003; Schusler, Decker et al. 2003; Jucker 2004; Lange 2004; Keen, Brown et al. 2005; Sandlin 2005).

As well, Taylor's two comprehensive reviews of the empirical research on transformative learning demonstrate that while the particular context greatly influences the shape and direction of the learning process there is an overall confirmation of Mezirow's ideal conditions for learning (Taylor 1998; 2007). Two other findings are of particular relevance for considering the place of transformative learning in collaborative planning and decision processes. Numerous studies found that the initiation and nurturing of supporting relationships and the provision of practical skills and guidance for applying new understandings in learners lives were of vital importance for fostering transformative learning (Taylor 2007). The latter would suggest that while the context of a decision process itself provides opportunity and some direction for the application of learning there should also be a place for "expert" guidance in, for example, how to translate the group consensus into policy. Regarding the centrality of relationships and solidarity, the theory already implicitly provides for this as mentioned above, but in the

context of a deliberative group where differing views are sought out and discursively evaluated this may be difficult indeed to maintain. However, if participants sincerely strive to hold to the goal of reaching mutual understanding, argumentation will be regarded as something that binds them together rather than dividing and isolating them.

All this serves to confirm that transformative learning has an integral place within democratic processes founded on communicative action. As such Mezirow's ideal conditions for learning and the additional insights mentioned above should be reflected in the structure and practice of such processes.

## **2.4 DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

In progressing towards describing key elements of a conceptual framework for democratic planning and decision making I am first of all assuming that the decisions or plans resulting from it are to be both coercively binding on and acceptable to those to whom they are addressed. They are considered binding insofar as they must be enacted and enforced in order to have practical purpose and meaning,<sup>10</sup> and they should also be acceptable in order to satisfy democratic freedoms and guarantee personal autonomy in that they can be acceded to out of respect for the norms they embody. And since these conditions precisely describe the character of modern law (Habermas 1998b), a democratic political theory can provide the vital normative grounding and legitimacy to such a conceptual understanding of collective planning and decision making. For this I

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<sup>10</sup> It is of course true that the extent of the immediately binding nature of decision outcomes from such collective processes depends on the degree of empowerment they have received from the political system, which may yet need to debate and enact them in policy or legislation before they become actually binding. However, clearly the intent of establishing and engaging in such a process in the first place is to arrive at a decision that can, at least potentially, exist as a binding norm, and so I would argue that this must be considered a fundamental property of outcomes of collective decision processes throughout their development.

will look to a theory of deliberative democracy based on Habermas' theory of communicative action and rationality, which I have argued provide a normative basis for cooperative social interaction that carries a transformative potential for creating more just and rational understandings and collective action plans.<sup>11</sup>

As there are numerous theoretical articulations of deliberative democracy it is difficult to define precisely, but at their core each version includes the notions that collective decisions are made with the participation of all who will be affected by the outcome, which is the democratic part, and that this participation consists in arguments made by and to members of this affected public where all are committed to basic values of rationality and impartiality, which is the deliberative or discursive part (Elster 1998).<sup>12</sup> For some, deliberative democracy conjures up images of a general public assembly, such as in ancient Athens, where all citizens engage in discourse about the issues at hand so as to arrive at consensual decisions, and that given our large populations and immense diversity we must find ways of adapting this ideal if we are to practice deliberative democracy in the present (Dryzek 2001). But one has only to consider the restrictive nature of citizenship in ancient Athens and subsequent democracies to realize that the truly inclusive general democratic assembly is a fiction that has never been historically attained. Ranciere (2006) has argued forcefully that government has always been practiced by a minority on the majority, and that in modern democracies the fact that this minority is elected as representatives has not changed this fundamental oligarchic

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<sup>11</sup> Recall the note in section 1.3 where I explain that while there are other conceptions and models of deliberative democracy, I will be restricting my discussion to an understanding developed from Habermas' model as described in *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas 1996b).

<sup>12</sup> In the literature the terms "discursive" and "deliberative" are both variously attached to "democracy" to indicate such collective decision making processes. While some authors appear to prefer one term over the other and each has his or her own particular conception of how such a democratic process would be structured and practiced, I will generally use "deliberative" to refer to the overall democratic process and "discursive" to denote its foundational dialogic component.

character. Habermas would seem to agree that purely representative democracy is essentially an oxymoron as he insists that democracy implies that those who are subject to laws must also be able to consider themselves as authors of them. He further argues that the public must act as a critical safeguard to the illegitimate encroachment of bureaucratic political systems that have been infiltrated and are steered by predatory forces of money and administrative power (Habermas 1996b; Ranciere 2006).

Deliberative democracy aims to be fully inclusive by recognizing the centrality of a political discourse that all, in principle, have access to. It seeks to outline ways in which discourse in the political system can be structured such that citizens can see that there is opportunity somewhere for the articulation of their preferences through discursive participation to result in their perspectives being fairly considered in arriving at reasoned political decisions. Deliberative democracy thus locates itself between direct democracy via an unachievable general assembly and representative democracy where citizens passively trust that their interests and perspectives are present in the political system via a proxy.

Maeve Cooke (2000) has summarized the principle arguments in favour of deliberative democracy articulated in the literature. Deliberative democracy is seen to have educative power as participation in public discourse imparts new information, develops communicative competencies, and provides opportunities for transformative learning. It also has a community-generating power as discursive work in considering solutions to social problems creates social solidarity, especially as participants are forced to consider what would count as good reasons for others holding different perspectives. As well, the procedure of deliberation is seen to improve the fairness of democratic

outcomes insofar as it requires the fair and rational consideration of all perspectives on issues. Relatedly, some consider that the outcomes of deliberative democracy are qualitatively more rational because there is a cognitive dimension to discourse – it is concerned with collectively constructing the “best” response to issues of public concern by employing standards of communicative rationality to assess arguments raised in discourse.

However, Cooke suggests that while each of these arguments has merit the most convincing claim is simply that deliberative democracy describes an ideal for managing our affairs in common that is most congruent with “whom we are” in modern Western societies. By this she means that our societies hold certain basic normative conceptions that a deliberative model of democracy best accounts for and articulates. These fundamental conceptions include: a rejection of independent authoritative standards for adjudicating claims to validity; the consideration of autonomous reasoning as an intrinsic part of human agency; the view that publicity and transparency are important, especially concerning matters of politics; and the conviction that everyone is deserving of equal respect and treatment as autonomous agents with distinct perspectives (Cooke 2000). From this view deliberative democracy would seem almost an inevitable outcome of the Western socio-historical evolutionary trajectory.

#### **2.4.2 The Discursive Basis of Habermas’ Deliberative Democracy**

Habermas argues that communicative action, and hence discourse, plays a constitutive role in the democratic production and application of legal norms. Law fulfills a socially integrative function as it converts structures of mutual recognition recognizable in everyday communicative interaction into abstract and binding forms and

transmits them onto anonymous interactions among strangers in society. As such it regularizes behavioural expectations and produces symmetrical relationships among individuals, which is immediately recognizable as equivalent to the functional outcome of communicative action as described in section 2.2. It is these similarities between the structures of law and communicative action that Habermas refers to in explaining why communicative action and discourse are fundamental in the production of legal norms (Habermas 1996b).

Further, from the perspective of democratic legal theory laws derive their legitimacy from the idea of the self-determination of citizens. Habermas rejects the explanation of democratic self-determination implied in social contract and social choice theories where social regulation is presumed to emerge from the private free choice of independent individuals; this he sees as both contrary to the reality of human communication and, given the absence of comprehensive worldviews and homogenous moral belief in our societies, as insufficient to provide a basis for a rational and just social order. Instead Habermas again points to a discursive model whereby the legal community constitutes itself through communicative action and so self-determination consists in participation in discursively achieved agreements in society, and it is communicative rationality that secures a reasonable and just social order as a result (Habermas 1996b). In applying this discursive model to the democratic process of self-legislation the communicative presuppositions and procedures of public opinion and will formation implied in the “discourse principle” must be legally institutionalized, that is equitable and inclusive communicative and participatory rights must be legally

established. In this way communicative action and discourse take the shape of a normative democratic principle, that of deliberative democracy (Habermas 1996b).

### **2.4.3 Habermas' Model of Deliberative Democracy**

Returning to my basic definition of deliberative democracy, it is immediately obvious that a theory of deliberative democracy must be able to accommodate both a wide diversity of substantively different perspectives (and hence perceived interests and preferences) and a potentially unmanageably large number of discursive participants, and from this to achieve reasoned agreements. At the same time it must tame the dominy and oligarchic tendencies of institutionalized political systems referred to previously. Habermas proposes a two-track model of democracy where discourse, following the guidelines of communicative action, occurs in a robust and vital public sphere where all may freely participate, and which feeds into the publically visible political discourse occurring within formally institutionalized political structures authorized to refine and enact the discursively formed public will in legislation (Habermas 1996b). His model is fundamentally procedural and so the success of deliberative politics depends not on collective action springing from some shared ethos, but rather on institutionalizing and practicing the procedures and conditions of communicative action (Baynes 2002). Habermas' model addresses the issues of unmanageable scale and diversity in that locating discourse within the public sphere allows for unlimited numbers of participants, and following the rules of discourse and applying communicative rationality in discourses at both the informal (public sphere) and formal (political system) levels converts differences into vital resources for achieving rational outcomes. As well, the criticality inherent in the communicative action of public discourses – together with the formative

linkages established between discursively formed public opinion and will and the legislative actions taken in the political system – acts as a safeguard and corrective for abuses of administrative power and illegitimate incursions of economic imperatives. Each of these responses contains implications and assumptions in need of further exploration in order to see how Habermas' ideal model would best be worked out in actual democratic practice.

Discourse in the public sphere does not contain decision making power, and hence Habermas refers to it as a “weak public,” but rather it serves as a sounding board that picks up and amplifies problems and issues that resonate in the private life histories of individuals (Habermas 1996b). Public discourse is decentered and informal and occurs in conversations at work, at school, at social gatherings, etc. wherever individuals connect and discuss public issues. It also takes place in the various organizations that comprise civil society where individuals come together around more specific issues, interests, or points of view. These multiple forms and instances of public discourse interpenetrate one another and together form an interlocking network of associations, deliberation, contestation, and argumentation that constitute an anonymous “public conversation” (Benhabib 1996). In this way any individual has the opportunity to raise any issue from their own particular perspective and to the extent that their preferences and arguments are consensually validated they become distributed throughout the public sphere. As ideas move through the network of public discourses they are constantly being tested from multiple perspectives and subjected to discursive validation, and so discourse in the public sphere acts as a filter such that only those preferences truly in the public interest together with the best supporting arguments survive. These public preferences and best

arguments are an emergent property of discourse in the public sphere; they do not “belong” to any one individual but instead represent legitimate public opinion and will (Rehg and Bohman 2002). The ideal would be that public discourses thus sense problems and issues and sort out those with the most convincing arguments, organize and thematize them, provide them with potential solutions, and forcefully transmit them on to the political system.

The “strong” public, tasked with both discursive opinion formation and decision making, is responsible for converting communicative into administrative power (Scheuerman 2002). In essence the inclusive participation of individuals in the public sphere is translated into the inclusion of arguments in the formal decision making body (Rehg and Bohman 2002). In a democracy the political system is supposed to pick up the signals from public discourse and through its own discursive practice further filter them and ultimately come to a consensually validated decision as to the best action to take. The rationality of this process is ensured by institutionalizing the procedures implied in the discourse principle throughout the operations of the system. In this formulation “weak” public discourse is formative and steers the “strong” formal discourse in appropriate directions. Because the political system has the added task of taking decisions, there are inevitably constraints of time, resources, viability of proposals, and so on that must be taken into account and so compromise and bargaining are expected to be more common in discourse at this level, but these extra-consensual means of agreement must hold to strict discursively derived criteria. For example, compromises should not require any position to sacrifice such that it loses its coherency and bargaining should result in each side gaining as much as it gives up (Scheuerman 2002). Whatever the

exact communicative processes employed (so long as they do not violate the principles of discourse), the ideal end result is that the “strong” public comes to rational decisions that are reflective of the opinion and will generated in discourse in the public sphere.

#### **2.4.4 Problematizing Deliberative Democracy in Practice**

However, this idealized account glosses over many potential abuses that may serve to derail the process and result in illegitimate opinion and will being formed in the public sphere and thence taken up by the “strong” public where procedural failures may serve to translate even legitimate public opinion into illegitimate decisions. Perhaps most importantly, it assumes that all have equal access to discourse and possess the necessary communicative competencies to successfully engage in it. Habermasian discourse privileges a mode of logical argumentation that discourages more affective and personal modes of expression, which may serve to exclude or devalue some individuals’ contributions, and this would seem to disproportionately affect women, those with less education, and some cultural groups (Young 1996). As well, prejudices which linger in the public consciousness, for example against women, the poor, and people of colour, work to discount their views regardless of how expressed. Individual participants may also be effectively excluded when the dominant language of discourse is foreign to them, making it difficult for them to understand and to be understood. Especially considering Habermas’ description of language as “world disclosure,” it may be impossible to understandably express certain experiences and perspectives in translation, no matter how valid they be (Habermas 1998c). If for any of the reasons described above people do not feel they have a reasonable expectation that their views will be given due consideration, they will withdraw from discourse and the consequence will be a further entrenching of

their political alienation and social marginalization, which is the exact opposite of the intended outcome of deliberative democracy (O'Neill 2000).

Socio-economic class conditions also have an effect on one's having communicative freedom in exercising political autonomy, something Habermas recognizes in outlining the basic rights necessary for the functioning of deliberative democracy. "If the normative content of legal equality is not to be inverted . . . basic social rights must be introduced, rights that ground claims to a more just distribution of socially produced wealth and to more effective protection against socially produced dangers" (Habermas 1998b, 260-261). Mezirow also recognizes this by saying that "Hungry, desperate, homeless, sick, destitute, and intimidated people obviously cannot participate fully and freely in discourse" (Mezirow 2003, 60). Political autonomy can only be truly equal and free to the extent that class differentiations have been eroded such that no social group has its interests subjugated to those of another (O'Neill 2000). Yet, while Habermas' model would seem to require the identification and mitigation of asymmetries of social power for the optimal functioning of democracy, it does not provide guidance as to how this might be accomplished or how to operate when serious inequalities are factually present (Scheurman 2002). However, we can conclude that if people withdraw from discourse due to expectations of exclusion, if unequal material conditions preclude their meaningful participation, or if they participate but their discursive contributions are discounted due to prejudice or their mode of expression, the end result in any case is that the procedures of deliberative democracy requiring full and equal inclusion have been violated and any outcomes achieved are suspect at best.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The sociological literature and particularly the work of Pierre Bourdieu, while outside the scope of literature considered in this thesis, provides an instructive critique of this conditioning influence of social

Regarding the use of communicative rationality to arrive at reasoned outcomes, the idealized model also assumes a free flow of information in the public sphere so that discourse is a process of becoming informed and discursive validation is based on the best and most complete information available (Benhabib 1996). But as the media and forms of electronic communication come ever more under the sway of corporate and administrative influence, information is blocked and skewed to support their systemic imperatives (Welton 2001). One need only consider recent discourse on global climate change, especially in the United States, to see how this can lead to irrational public opinion. Communicative rationality further insists that acceptance or rejection of arguments is based only on the quality of the arguments, but this is often not achieved in practice. In addition to the often unconscious ways of discounting views and arguments discussed above, the inputs of people regarded as leaders or experts are often accepted based not on their merits, but on the perceived authority of the one presenting them (Rehg and Bohman 2002). As well, those particularly skilled in argumentation may be able to convince others based on their rhetorical abilities more than merely the logical force of their argument. This again points to how the idealized model assumes a high degree of communicative competence, here in being able to effectively critique information and social privilege, fill in missing information, and recognize and resist sophistry.

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fields, and individuals' positioning within them, on possibilities for realizing the core values of freedom, equality, and social justice implied in the vision of deliberative democracy I have described (Topper 2001). Bourdieu's work, though mostly absent from them, also connects with other concepts explored in this thesis, for example: his concepts of habitus and doxa can help clarify the nature of meaning perspectives, central to transformative learning theory (section 2.3); his analysis of social fields and human agency provides comment on the same territory as Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration employed in communicative planning (section 2.5) as well as on Iris Young's account of identity politics (sections 2.4.4, 2.5); and his general socio-analytic critique has implications for how we understand communicative distortions (section 2.2) and the healthy operation of the green public sphere (section 2.7.4) (see e.g. Callinicos 1999; Topper 2001; Young 2003; Crossley 2004; Haluza-DeLay 2008).

The existence of difference, in terms of life histories and perspectives, is ideally intended to be foundational to the rationality of discursive outcomes. Through engaging with difference in discourse, participants come to see and understand alternative perspectives and so have the opportunity to transform their own perspectives and views to ones that are more justified (Mezirow 1991a) and to coherently order their preferences in light of the interests and experiences of others (Benhabib 1996). By presenting arguments in public with the aim of persuading others with different social experiences and perspectives, individuals are also forced to universalize their personal views and express themselves with appeals to justice and the general public interest (Young 1997). In this way discourse across difference removes self-interested strategic action, reveals to individuals that their own experiences and views are situated and perspectival, and brings to light diversely situated knowledge and understandings thus adding to the overall stock of available social knowledge and understanding. From this basis discourse will have access to the widest possible range of perspectives, arguments, and preferences to consensually validate and hence identify the best choices in the interests of all.

However, in social interaction difference is often presented and/or perceived as reified and so becomes an impediment to reaching mutual understanding and consensus, with communication instead degenerating into a win-lose contest between seemingly incommensurable positions. As a result public discourse can tend towards the erasure of difference and the invocation of a false homogeneity corrosive to applying communicative rationality. Iris Young (1997) has suggested that the way out of this is to see that difference is not the product of some innate quality that assigns each individual to some rigid group identity, but rather that identity itself results from each individual's

response to their positioning within various social structures and experiences. This focuses our attention on the fact that while individuals may identify with certain others in particular contexts or regarding particular issues, each individual's difference is multi-layered and dynamic – put simply we are all different and discourse cannot help but attend to difference, however expressed, if we are to reach understanding. It is in this way that differentiated social perspectives, rather than being glossed, become the explicit focus of discourse where a commitment to openness and accountability requires each participant to attend to their own and others' particular differences in order to more fully understand the situation under discussion (Young 1997). Nevertheless, this again implies a necessary predisposition, here regarding difference, on the part of participants in discourse for it to be successful.

Habermas also acknowledges that practicing his version of deliberative democracy requires an already rationalized (i.e. post-traditional) lifeworld and a liberal political culture (Habermas 1996b), although he fails to completely describe what such a liberal culture would entail (Rehg and Bohman 2002). While this may be descriptive of Western societies in general, it certainly is not the case for each individual citizen. There are many who understand the world from traditional or spiritual bases, yet arguments from a metaphysically or authority based perspective would not survive discursive validation under conditions of value plurality. There is also no guarantee that every citizen holds to generally liberal values, some may well desire a more restrictive conception of rights to political agency for example, which may lead them to seek to actively exclude or devalue discursive contributions from some groups or individuals. As well, even the ambiguous requirements of “rationalized lifeworld” and “liberal political

culture” do not in any sense guarantee that everyone will agree that communicative action in society is the best way to regulate public affairs. Yet without such a commitment their political participation will not be aimed at reaching mutual understanding and so it is difficult to see where their (strategic, instrumental) efforts would fit within Habermas’ model of deliberative democracy – it would in fact seem to exclude them.

All of these difficulties and potential barriers to achieving Habermas’ ideal discourse are applicable to discourse in both “weak” and “strong” publics, however several additional potential problems emerge at the formalized level. In theory, public discourse is responsible for the generation and development of solutions to social problems while the political system is responsible for their completion, but in practice it appears that the public is often in a more defensive role of reacting to political decisions that may or may not reflect their opinion and will. Yet this connection between the public sphere and political system is underdetermined in Habermas’ model (O’Neill 2000). I have followed Habermas’ use of “weak” and “strong” in differentiating between the public sphere and the decision making body where this implies a formative influence of the “weak” on the “strong”, but Habermas also employs the idiom of “center” and “periphery” to indicate the relative distance from decision making power. Following this latter metaphor, under conditions of normal political operation the public is relatively uninvolved, awaiting crisis conditions before springing into action and pressing their claims on the center. This emphasizes a defensive rather than formative role for the public sphere and suggests a normalized position of dominance for formal decision making bodies (Scheuerman 2002). It is unclear in Habermas’ model exactly how and in what ways the “strong center” is to maintain connection with the “weak periphery”, but if

this is not accomplished then his two-track model loses coherency, critical oversight of decision processes is weakened, and there is a grave threat that the dominatory forces of the status quo will override the communicative rationality of public discourses in deciding outcomes.

Indeed, critical analyses of Western democratic governments reveal that political systems are generally more responsive to influence from economic forces and groups representing established power in society, and so it is the job of persons and organizations within the public sphere to identify such occurrences and locate the critical resources and collective capacity to resist domination (Welton 2001). There are various means by which the public can press their influence on the political system, from individual communication with legislators to organized lobby groups, mass protests, court challenges, or civil disobedience, but it would appear that in instances where the system remains unresponsive to the public sphere and civil society they are left with only recourse to electoral retribution. Habermas is not advocating violent revolution but rather an evolutionary social learning process towards a more perfect democracy (Brookfield 2005b), which suggests to me that what is important is that the public maintain a constant critical oversight of the political system and identify as illegitimate and resist any political decisions that contravene the public opinion and will. At the same time the political system must be deliberately organized to effectively seek out and accurately read messages coming from the public sphere, and the public must be able to see how this is done in order for them to both better influence the system and be able to regard legislative outcomes as legitimate.

This connection between the public sphere and the decision making body must also be able to operate in reverse; there may be instances where the formal body must decide on issues relatively absent in the public discourses from which they are supposed to take direction. There are numerous techniques used to spur public participation in decision making processes, but they are primarily aimed at locating this participation, discursive and otherwise, within the boundaries of the “strong” public rather than stimulating discourse within the public sphere itself (Innes and Booher 2004). At the same time we are familiar with decision making bodies putting issues on the public agenda, but this is more often done so as to frame public debate in ways that direct it toward preferred administrative ends. What I am suggesting is that “strong” publics ought to institutionalize procedures whereby problems, information, arguments, and even potential solutions can be introduced to the “weak” public in neutral and non-directive ways in an attempt to foster public discourse around issues that have not yet emerged and percolated through public consciousness. The decision making body would then extend its specialized antennae to detect the signals from public opinion and will forming in discourse in the public sphere. Of course unavoidable limiting decision factors may preclude this time consuming process, in which case “in house” participation methods such as public comment periods, open houses, citizen juries, public hearings, or multi-stakeholder collaborative approaches, imperfect as they often are, may be recommended.

Publicity in the operations of the political system is vital regarding the “sensing” of public discourses mentioned above, but it is especially important that citizens can see and trust the discursive practices of the system as well. Remembering that in Habermas’ model it is the democratic process that bears the weight of legitimacy and not the

outcomes, it must be publically visible that members of the political system are basing decisions on free and equal discourse, that the best arguments are carrying the day, and that economic or administrative imperatives are not steering the system against the public interest (Habermas 1996b). Closed door meetings, redacted publications, information-out communication strategies, and reliance on combative, distorted, or insincere communication all bring suspicion on political motivations, make decisions appear arbitrary, and ultimately undermine the legitimacy of political processes.

It is also important that membership in the “strong public” be generally representative of the diversity in the public they serve. While communicative action and rational discourse provide the means for understanding the perspectives and interests of others differently situated in society, it is considerably more difficult to achieve than when we share certain affinities respecting socially situated experience (Young 1997). It is thus reasonable to suggest that a diversely composed decision making body will be better able to adequately take up the views and interests of a diverse public, and that such a composition will strengthen the public’s trust in the legitimacy of the body’s discursive practice (Rehg and Bohman 2002).

#### **2.4.5 De-Idealizing the Model of Deliberative Democracy**

All of these ambiguities and potential difficulties in achieving Habermas’ ideal discourse in “weak” and “strong” publics must be addressed if his model of deliberative democracy is to be practiced. Yet many of these impediments are ubiquitous in society and to the extent that they refer to dispositions and competencies of participants (e.g. prejudice, mode of communication, critical abilities, attitude toward difference), they cannot be somehow proscribed. In “strong” publics, and to a lesser extent also in “weak”

ones, the appropriate communicative procedures can be institutionalized, but the competencies and dispositions necessary to practice them cannot be legislated. Further, if a level of distributive justice in society is a precondition for full inclusion in discourse, then it would seem that even the best of Western societies, which yet contain significant economic and social disparities, are unready for deliberative democracy. For practical application what is needed is a certain weakening of Habermas' ideal conditions, something he would seem to accept given he acknowledges for example that the ideal conditions of discourse will never be fully achieved in practice, but rather serve as a benchmark for assessing discursive practice (Habermas 1996b). In *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas refers to a need for "reversing step by step the strong idealizations by which the concept of communicative action has been built up," and it would seem such a "de-idealization" is necessary for his theory of deliberative democracy to correspond more closely with the complexities and inequalities of actual social situations (quoted in Rehg and Bohman 2002, 50).

Habermas provides his own weaker reading of communicative action. He suggests that "weak communicative action," which still consists in action aimed at mutual understanding, need not include vindication of the validity claim to normative rightness (Habermas 1998c). Hence participants in discourse can come to mutual understanding concerning an utterance without expecting that the other ought to be guided by the same norms or values; it is enough to recognize that the reasons for the stated preference are good for the speaker from their perspective without accepting those reasons as our own. In weak communicative action what is affirmed are the validity claims to truth and truthfulness, which are sufficient to reach (weak) mutual understanding. While the

discursive goal should generally be for strong communicative action, which references a shared social world and thus binds participants more closely towards a common goal, participants can resort to the weak variety and yet coordinate their plans of action when disputes are seemingly intractable or time constraints demand compromise, bargaining, or an arbitrary end to discourse. Significantly, weak communicative action still supports Mezirow's ideal conditions of learning as the rules of discourse still apply, and so its practice can be regarded as enhancing opportunities for transformative learning, which I have argued lies close to the heart of democratic practice.

But in particular need of weakening is Habermas' depiction of ideal discursive practice as a way of progressively moving towards agreements that, given the current circumstances, are "correct" in that any rational person could, through participation in free and equal discourse, eventually come to regard them as legitimate (Baber 2004). This assumes there are no intractable disagreements among discourses or perspectives and that discourse participants can always separate out conflicts based on moral understandings from ones where transformation or compromise are less threatening (Rehg and Bohman 2002), and it leaves open exactly what to do when disagreements stem from opposing fundamental value orientations that individuals are unwilling or unable to change. As well, insisting on this potential unanimity would seem to argue against regarding difference as a resource for achieving reasoned agreements, as difference would ultimately be something we strive to overcome. In fact it would seem contradictorily to rely on a social homogeneity that threatens to render engaging in communicative action redundant. Indeed, holding to a strong reading of this ideal discursive convergence seems to be practically untenable in a world characterized by a

plurality of perspectives and life histories and where instances of strategic action and dominatory flows of power are a factual reality.<sup>14</sup>

Habermas' emphasis on discursive convergence as the inherent *telos* of discourse relies on a conception of power that is rooted in a consensus vs. coercion distinction (Shabani 2003). Consensus is made possible through the exercise of positive, communicative power that is generated horizontally among discursive participants while failures to achieve consensus result from negative, coercive uses of power imposed from the top down in contexts of unequal power relations. Thus, legitimate and illegitimate power are distinguished by the former's formation and justifiability in a discursive context characterized by effective power neutrality. Further, Habermas' analysis of illegitimate power is focused almost exclusively on the distorting effects of economic and administrative imperatives on discourse (Shabani 2003). But as Foucault's power analytics demonstrates, exercises of power are implicated in everyday practice and are inescapably present in every communicative act, and so referencing a concept of discourse devoid of power is to set up an illusory ideal (Flyvbjerg 1998). A more holistic notion of power, understood as a network of contestational relations flowing in all directions but "possessed" by no one, can increase the critical tenor of deliberative democracy by acknowledging non-ideal aspects of the discursive context (e.g. bias, rhetoric, material inequality) as belonging to the category of political power and hence appropriately the subject of critical analysis (Shabani 2003). However, acknowledging power ubiquitously at play in discourse would suggest that consensus could only ever be achieved through a group or individual's communication overpowering dissenting views,

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<sup>14</sup>Untenable that is unless all are prepared and able to devote unlimited time and effort to discourse and all participants are entirely open and receptive to change any or all of their arguments, perspectives, beliefs, etc., which again is a counterfactual expectation.

which is clearly not the equal and free consensus Habermas describes as the ideal outcome of discourse. At the heart of this difference is what Flyvbjerg (1998, 193) calls Habermas' "leap of faith" in identifying consensus seeking and freedom from domination as universally inherent characteristics of human communication, while other philosophers, following Aristotle through Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Foucault, have identified quite the opposite – that human communication is also inherently about divisive identity formation and a drive to dominate. Habermas' view is compelling to us perhaps because he emphasizes the more hopeful and positive side, what we would like to believe about ourselves as a species, but nevertheless in actual democratic practice what we most often recognize is the distance between Habermas' ideal and observed reality (Flyvbjerg 1998).

The danger in Habermas' one-sided emphasis is that it robs us of much of our critical freedom to reproach the system, to dissent from and challenge established norms (Shabani 2003). By grounding justice in legitimate law, which is itself based on outcomes of communicatively rational discourse, we can only ever speak of injustice to the extent we can identify procedural failings in the production of the norm under question. But if procedural failings are ever-present in instances of deliberative practice, and critical analyses of such instances suggest that they are, then there is virtually no legitimate law and Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy cannot guide us to a just and equal ordering of our affairs in common as he claims. On the other hand, Habermas has been accused of granting too much to actually existing democracy as he traces the path from informal public discourses to legitimate law – outcomes of discourses in the public sphere are converted into influence, which is converted into communicative power by authorizing (generally through elections) the political system to act, and which is

finally converted into administrative power as legislation is developed and enacted (Shabani 2003). It is unclear in Habermas' model what exactly is deliberative about the transfer of public opinion, discursively formed in the public sphere, into the legislative actions of the state, and he is vague as to the roles of specific actors in this transfer (Hendriks 2006), but nevertheless through this process the general outline of liberal democratic functioning is essentially affirmed, and our opportunities to challenge and dissent from its outcomes are limited to procedure, leaving content and effect otherwise validated. To be sure, Habermas does speak of the fallibilistic nature of human discourse and hence the need to regard deliberative democratic outcomes as provisional and open-ended, but this exists in uneasy tension with his emphasis on an ideal consensus, which, in being capable of drawing the assent of any potential discursive participant, seems above reproach. What is needed is an account of discursive politics that acknowledges the ambivalence of communication in power terms between strategic and constitutive thinking, struggle and control, conflict and consensus. Such an account would understand justice and democracy as an ongoing discursive procedure ever open to critique and where dissent and irreducible difference are regarded as the pillars of democracy and the best guarantors of justice (Flyvbjerg 1998; Rehg and Bohman 2002). On this view injustice and domination are presumed present, and democracy and justice, which are always "yet to come," are approached through continuous critique and discursive contestation among participants with different social position, life histories, and perspectives (Shabani 2003).

Toward this end, Rehg and Bohman (2002, 46) have suggested that a weaker reading of Habermas' ideal conditions for democratic legitimacy that is more empirically

plausible and yet theoretically defensible would be that in order for citizen-deliberators “to consider a political decision legitimate . . . it is enough for them to assume that, given the conditions of deliberation, outcomes and decisions allow an *ongoing cooperation with others* of different minds that is at least *not unreasonable*.” This is an acceptable reading for practical application if we are assured that: the structures of discourse at the informal and formal levels make it less likely that irrational and unjustified arguments will sway decisions; arguments, decisions, and the entire decision making process are open to potential revisions that may take up currently defeated positions such that they have more impact in the future; and that decision making procedures are broadly inclusive such that those with less influence now may reasonably expect that they will be able to have greater impact in the future (Baber 2004). This accords with Habermas’ characterization of a generalized concept of validity as “rational acceptability” (Habermas 1998c), which would seem not to necessitate an acceptance of the normative rightness of others’ expressed positions. Dryzek (2005) echoes this sentiment in suggesting that successful discursive practice does not require agreement on reasons for action, but rather an agreement on actions coupled with an understand of others’ reasons, as the latter is important to maintaining an ongoing, constructive dialogue. If we accept that the discursive processes of deliberative democracy lead to more legitimate outcomes, then we can acknowledge the “rational acceptability” of decisions while disputing their “correctness” to the extent that we are convinced an honest effort was made to follow the procedures of discourse and that the decisions are regarded as but part of an ongoing process and hence inviting of future revision (Rehg and Bohman 2002). Consequently, we cannot automatically regard failures to live up to the ideal model of democratic

practice as failures to achieve legitimate outcomes; legitimacy is attained relative to the affected public's acceptance of the sincerity and strength of efforts to overcome barriers and imbalances. In a sense we can regard democratic decisions as falling somewhere along a scale from lesser to greater legitimacy, and our goal is to further our evolutionary social learning regarding democratic operation by progressively pushing our practice ever closer to the latter end.

Thus democratic decision making is less about the outcome achieved in one specific instance of discursive interaction about some issue, and more concerned with how that issue has been and will continue to be discursively contested. As well, rather than the universalistic thinking Habermas favours, attention becomes explicitly focused on details of particular discursive contexts, on how the present context was shaped, including the evolution of the issue or problem under consideration, the dynamic constitution of the subjects involved in the inter-subjective relations of discourse, and the existing alignment of power relations (not their absence) (Shabani 2003). Such attention to context enhances participants' understanding of the issues at hand, of themselves, and of their fellow participants. Significantly, this also helps open participants up to possibilities for transformation and change in any or all of these areas by recognizing that the current baseline conditions have been and are dynamically formed through a constant interplay of power relations and so are not set or somehow historically inevitable (Flyvbjerg 1998).

Viewing deliberative democracy in this way also strengthens the claim that it is fundamentally a learning process. Brookfield's (2005a) description of Habermas' overall project as "learning democratic reason" explicitly relies on democracy as an iterative

process of constant critique as it is through encountering differing understandings and the perspectives they stem from that we are able to reflect on and move toward better justified understandings and perspectives ourselves. This transformative learning can occur for organizations as well as individuals, and through successive iterations of similar practice the learning outcomes can become distributed throughout society (Cranton 2006). In terms of deliberative democracy, ongoing critique and dissent are thus fundamental to the individual and social-evolutionary learning by which we hone our democratic skills and enhance and strengthen democratic institutions and social-democratic practice. As well, democratic decision making existing as an open-ended discursive process punctuated by periodic episodes of more focused and formal discourse allows for individual and socially-mediated critical reflection to take place between specific, provisional decision making processes. Brookfield (2002), drawing on Marcuse, describes how moments of calm, when we are able to distance ourselves somewhat from focused discursive engagement, are key to enabling the critical reflection necessary to consolidate and deepen our learning, which may be transformative, such that it can be carried forward to inform and thus improve subsequent participatory opportunities.

To be clear, I do not intend by this de-idealization to dispense with Habermas' discourse ethic, but rather to enrich his analysis with a better justified and more holistic understanding of power, which draws our attention to critiquing the historic and present alignment and uses of power in particular discursive contexts and replaces strong consensus with ongoing reasonable contestation as the *telos* of discourse. In this critique we identify the places and ways where discourse is particularly vulnerable (such as those discussed in section 2.4.4), and actively seek out instances where the play of power has

resulted in unjustified and irrational exclusion from, privileging, or discounting of discursive participation. Such critiques can certainly be brought forth within formal, deliberative decision processes, but they could also take place in the media, within civil society, through protests, or even refusals to participate, and to the extent that democracy is an ongoing process they exist as invaluable contributions to public discourse, which informs present and future democratic decisions.

Habermas (1996b) is clear in acknowledging that in practical decision making contexts time and resource constraints will most often require that a decision be reached prior to achieving his ideal consensus, but since closure mechanisms are themselves discursively agreed upon the pre-consensual decision still exists as a kind of consensus since his universalistic vision of discourse implies that any rational person, were they to be participants, would eventually assent to the truncated discursive outcome. But this further implies that, barring new information or arguments sufficient to upset the consensus and absent critiques identifying significant procedural failures, we are all bound to regard the decision as legitimate, as essentially above reproach. Rather, I would suggest that when external constraints require a decision be taken, it does not signal an end to discourse but instead, following Rehg and Bohman (2002), a commitment to act in such a way that the discursive cooperation with others of different minds is both ongoing and reasonable. In this way reaching a decision in the present is not at the expense of discourse, rather it affirms and ensures its continuation. While a particular, focused instance of discursive practice (e.g. a participatory planning exercise) will necessarily come to an end, it does so understood as part of a larger process with historical antecedents, present implications, and that will be carried forward into the future as our

fundamentally diverse society continues to discursively grapple with the issues at hand. Thus no decision is ever above reproach; dissent and critique are presumed and indeed invited as the necessary means by which we approach the ideals of justice and democratic equality.

## **2.5 COMMUNICATIVE PLANNING**

Communicative planning, as I envision it, is an exercise in practicing deliberative democracy as described in some detail above. As such it represents an attempt to overhaul dominant planning systems and practices that are steeped in positivist epistemology, Modernist conceptions of instrumental-objective rationality, and dominitory forms of governance. Together these have served to facilitate the hegemony of administrative and economic imperatives, presumed as adequate proxies for the public interest, in structuring public life (Healey 1993; Innes 1995; Friedmann 1996). But these imperatives have proven to be ultimately self-serving, and as society comes to recognize that detrimental effects to the environment, socio-economic equality, and self-determination are among the outcomes of planning efforts, faith in planning as the collective management of public affairs in the service of the public interest is eroded. Yet there is a compelling need to do just that – to somehow conceive of ways to coordinate our public actions toward the general good – but in ways that we can regard rationally and normatively legitimate, which is precisely the task deliberative democracy seeks to accomplish.

Communicative planning theory incorporates Habermas' theory of communicative action and hence foregrounds discourse and communicative rationality in planning practice. Such planning thus aims for inclusivity, equality, and power neutrality

as participants collaboratively identify problems and issues to be addressed, seek out relevant information, and interrogate potential responses and their attendant supporting arguments in an effort to arrive at a consensual best judgment on a course of action (Innes and Booher 2003; Healey 2006). The potential for such a process to further mutual understanding, transform individuals' perspectives, produce a rational ordering of preferences, develop legitimate public opinion, build the social solidarity necessary for collective action, and produce legitimate decisions are all suggested in the communicative planning literature (e.g. Innes 1995; 1996; Forester 1999; Campbell and Marshall 2000; Allmendinger 2002; Innes and Booher 2003; Harper and Stein 2006; Healey 2006). However, as the rationales behind these claims directly parallel those developed for the same claims previously made in the context of deliberative democracy, they do not need reiteration here.

Patsy Healey (2006), drawing on Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration, develops further grounds for the transformative potential of interactive planning processes. This theory argues that human agency and the social structures that constrain and direct agency are always in a dynamic, mutually constituting relationship. Possibilities for human action are framed by powerful social forces and structures that inhere in the finegrain of everyday social relations, but these forces are themselves actively constituted through human agency as we respond to their structuring imperatives. We are essentially socially embedded and hence are shaped by our socio-historical culture, which we reproduce, remake, and transform as we carry it forward in our daily patterns of social relation. This implies that our identities and means of understanding the world, broadly speaking our cultures, are developed through networks or webs of

interactive social relation, but we all live within multiple overlapping relational webs simultaneously and as such daily live with and communicate across difference.<sup>15</sup> Hence communicative planning practice explicitly draws on multiple “cultural” perspectives and has inherent transformative power in that working to establish mutual understanding in this context is fundamentally about creating new intersections and connections among relational webs. And this action amounts to the creation of new webs, new structures of power relation giving rise to new understandings, and so new possibilities for social action are opened up that themselves have the power to further transform social structures, and so on.

Understood in this way, communicative planning processes serve as vital relational nodes or arenas, as points of reference for the many relational webs present in an area or around an issue, from which new institutional structures and shared understandings can develop out of diversity and difference. Significant to the social learning and democratizing potential of communicative planning, these new relational bonds can create intellectual, social, and political capital in communities wrestling with contentious issues (Healey 1999). Intellectual capital accrues as participants share information and perspectives such that a deeper and more complete comprehension of the issue at hand is developed. As well, knowledge is effectively democratized as all have a hand in its discursive creation and validation, which can help to neutralize power imbalances present as some individuals and organizations inevitably come to the process with more information or with greater resources to access information (Innes 1998). This

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that Healey’s account of identity and agency is strikingly similar to Young’s (1997) description where individuals are positioned by social processes and interactions within a set of social fields constituted by social relations of power, and their individual identity is then determined by their exercise of agency from that position.

can be especially important when specialized technical knowledge is involved, but it is also a powerful way in which localized “lay” knowledge, often undervalued and inaccessible to “experts”, can be recognized and distributed. Social capital is generated, as described above, as new relational bonds and mutual trust and respect are engendered in society, which can effectively embed processes of public participation as mechanisms are developed that can sustain citizen involvement in planning processes over time (Rydin and Pennington 2000). Political capital is also developed as individuals, organizations, and communities learn about and extend their capacity to mobilize action. This can be more or less instrumental, learning how to work the levers of power, but more importantly participants learn how new intellectual and social capital can be converted into political power, which can transform established patterns of social relation and the distribution of power in society.

The creation of intellectual, social, and political capital are considered secondary outcomes from a perspective that considers coming to decisions and developing an implementable plan as the primary aim of planning processes. However, for communicative planning these intangible products are considered indispensable because without them the “best” plan cannot be conceived. Developing shared knowledge, heuristics, and understandings, discovering others’ interests and perspectives, learning about our inherent interrelatedness and how our interests are interdependent, all of these “secondary” effects are in fact foundational to the transformative and rational potential of communicative planning (Innes and Booher 2004; Healey 2006). Plans exist as provisional best judgments and so communicative planning is intended as an iterative process and the outcomes just described all contribute to the continual improvement of

our ability to engage in the process, and I would consider this an exemplar of Habermas' evolutionary learning for democracy (Brookfield 2005a).

As was the case with deliberative democracy generally, communicative planning theory also presumes that the quality of plans produced should be improved, but this is not the only, or even most important, criterion in evaluating their success – what is important is that the communicative process is adhered to as best as possible. However, if in the end the plans produced do not lead to greater justice, quality of life, or sustainability it is hard to recommend such a time-consuming and costly planning process (Rydin and Pennington 2000). I have already discussed the rationality, understood communicatively, that communicative planning processes are based on, and this leads theorists to posit that rationally coherent plans that are durable and implementable will ideally result (Innes 1996). Indeed, case study analyses of such planning processes suggest that while there are barriers to be overcome and results are often uneven, communicative planning is capable of producing high-quality practical plans (e.g. Petts 2001; Margerum 2002; Healey, de Magalhaes et al. 2003).

In order to more fully appreciate the nature of communicative planning it is necessary to explore just where such planning processes are situated and what they should look like. Regarding the locus of planning, communicative planning can operate at levels from households to neighborhood or regional associations, formal and informal organizations, within the public sphere, inside the government system, or somewhere in between. But, from the perspective of deliberative democracy, I think it is important to determine the positioning of planning processes relative to the notion of “strong” and “weak” publics. Since they are intended to make decisions and produce plans it would

seem appropriate to consider them “strong” publics, which accords with arguments that participatory processes should ideally be given full decision making power (Arnstein 1969). However, as the finality and binding nature of plans produced ultimately depends on empowerment from the appropriate level of government (the ultimate “strong” public), the strength of processes will vary and perhaps they are best understood as “quasi-strong”. It should also be kept in mind that the development of social and political capital can serve to strengthen processes as they take place, and determining the strength of the process to effect change has been seen to be an important factor in motivating involvement and ensuring the commitment of participants to doing the difficult work of communicative planning (Margerum 2002).

While being located closer to the government system would seem to suggest greater strength (recalling Habermas’ use of “periphery” and “center” in parallel with “weak” and “strong”), there is an inherent danger that processes too closely aligned with government systems will be co-opted or “captured” by the system and simply result in putting a democratic gloss on workings of administrative power. Dryzek (2001) suggests that when the state is “actively inclusive” of public democratic processes their vital capacity for critiquing state operations is undermined, when the state is “passively inclusive” we risk converting the public sphere into a battleground for organized interest groups, but that when the state is “passively exclusive” such that public processes remain independent of government but are not undermined by it the discursive vitality of the public sphere can flourish. However, locating communicative planning in the public sphere, which Habermas (1996b) has described as a “wild” complex of spontaneous discourses resistant to organization, fails to acknowledge that planning processes are by

definition more focused and formalized attempts to grapple with a particular set of issues in a specific time and place.

Again I would suggest that planning processes be conceived as located somewhere between the public sphere and the government system, perhaps operating both as what Habermas (1996b) has termed “filters” for public opinions discursively developed in the public sphere and as “sluices” that allow public opinion to enter the discursive apparatus of government bureaucracy. This filtering would be an intermediary step between the filtering already operative in the validation procedures of discourse in the public sphere and the same process finally occurring in a more focused form within the discursive practice of the political system. In this view communicative planning takes on some of the role of both “weak” and “strong” publics: it has the “weak” task of inclusively engaging in public discourse, inviting all relevant perspectives, interests, and supporting arguments to be raised and consensually (in)validated, forcefully identifying problems, thematizing them and furnishing them with possible solutions, and passing this on to the political system; and it has the “strong” task of sensing and interpreting the products of discourses in the public sphere, discursively filtering them, and coming to decisions and producing plans consisting of the provisional best judgment regarding action to be taken. Accomplishing this dual role can be envisioned using Healey’s (2006) description of communicative planning as an arena where the discourses of the already existing relational webs or cultures in the public sphere intersect and forge linkages such that the planning process itself creates new webs and discourses which unleash new opportunities for collective action that can effect real change. This would suggest that in its “strong” role of reading extant discourses in the public sphere there is a place in

communicative planning for more passive public consultation, much maligned in the literature for its failure to provide deliberative opportunities (Palerm 2000; Petts 2004; Sinclair and Diduck 2005; Wiklund 2005). But this must be balanced with the active inclusion and discursive treatment of public perspectives, interests, and preferences as planning takes on its “weak” role of including “meaningful public participation” (Sinclair 2002; Doelle and Sinclair 2006).

As to what communicative planning processes look like, it is not possible, or even desirable, to describe an explicitly prescriptive model. Considering that planning is a socially embedded endeavour, much of the specific process design depends on contextual variables (Allmendinger 2002). As well, communicative planning has been described as yet in the experimental stage where new forms are being invented and existing processes are being rethought and elaborated upon to reflect the normative claims of communicative action and rationality (Healey 1999; Healey, de Magalhaes et al. 2003; Innes and Booher 2004). Communicative planning processes are distinguished by the assumptions from communicative action they invoke, from the questions they ask, and from the tone they display. Healey has outlined ten propositions that summarize the direction of communicative planning:

1. Planning is interactive and interpretive, drawing on multiple discourses and using a range of presentational forms.
2. This interaction assumes the preexistence of individuals engaged with others in diverse, fluid, and overlapping “discourse communities,” each with its own meaning systems, knowledge forms, and ways of reasoning and valuing. While no common language or fully common understanding can be attained, communicative action focuses planning efforts on searching for achievable levels of mutual understanding for the purposes at hand.
3. Communicative planning involves respectful discussion within and between discursive communities, “respect” implying recognizing, valuing, listening to, and searching for translative possibilities between different discourse communities.

4. Planning involves invention through programs of action and in the construction of the arenas within which these programs are formulated and conflicts are identified and mediated, and hence such a process must be reflective about its own processes.

5. Within communicative argumentation all dimensions of knowing, understanding, appreciating, experiencing, and judging may be brought into play. The struggle is to grasp these diverse viewpoints and find ways of reasoning among the competing claims for action they generate, without dismissing or devaluing any one until it has been discursively explored.

6. A reflexive and critical capacity is kept alive in the processes of argumentation, following Habermas' validity claims, and is directed at the discourse that surrounds specific actions being invented through the communicative process.

7. This inbuilt critique serves the project of democratization by according "voice," "ear," and "respect" to all those with an interest in the issues at stake.

8. Interaction is not simply a form of exchange or bargaining around predefined interests, rather communicative planning recognizes that preferences may be altered when individuals and groups are encouraged to articulate their interests together following the guidelines of communicative action – it is a mutual reconstruction of participants' interests through mutual learning that may be transformative.

9. Communicative planning has the potential to change, to transform material conditions and established power relations through the continuous effort to "critique" and "demystify"; through increasing understanding among participants and hence highlighting oppressions and "dominatory" forces; and through creating well-grounded arguments for alternative analyses and perceptions – through actively constructing new understandings.

10. The purpose of communicative planning is to help planners begin and proceed in mutually agreeable ways based on an effort at interdiscursive understanding, but the inbuilt critique should prevent such starting agreements from consolidating into a unified code and language which could then limit further invention. Neither the plan nor goal-directed programs have more than a temporary existence, always being open to revision as contextual factors change or new information and perspectives are presented.

(adapted from Healey 1993, 242-244)

While the communicative planning literature seldom makes explicit reference to deliberative democracy theory, given their shared communicative premises and interest in achieving democratically legitimate outcomes it is fair and useful to consider, as I have above, planning as an application of democracy. Our understanding of communicative planning can thus be enriched and its theoretical basis fortified through reference to a model of deliberative democracy, and at the same time new theoretical insights as well as

lessons drawn from practical experience contained in the planning literature help to flesh out and specify the more abstract and general ideals in deliberative democracy theory.

## **2.6 COMMUNICATIVE RESOURCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING**

There are numerous compelling reasons for applying a communicative approach to resource and environmental planning. Communicative planning is particularly well suited for dealing with situations characterized by complexity, a multiplicity of perspectives and interests, and a high potential for conflict over value differences (Healey 2006), which is highly descriptive of environmental and resource management. As well, the foundational discursive component encourages the recognition of other interests, and this can be expanded to include the representation of “mute” interests such as those of nature and future generations (Goodin 1996; Baber 2004). Further, considering communicative planning as a node where, as well as new ones being made, existing intersections among relational webs are explored, such planning can ensure that the implications of interconnections and mutual dependencies among social and ecological webs are given due consideration – that an understanding emerges linking the interests and sustainability of social and ecological networks in an articulation of the public interest (Innes 1996; Healey 1999). Traditionally environmental planning and management has tended to exclude meaningful public involvement due to the complexity and technical nature of ecological knowledge which has privileged “expert” voices that are difficult for “lay” people to understand (Bocking 2004), but communicative planning provides a way that such information can be democratized and local knowledge can be included (Innes 1998). The science of ecology is also characterized by fundamental uncertainty, and in such instances where uncertainty, complexity, and a high potential for

conflict combine, a democratic approach that is inclusive of various perspectives and ways of knowing and that acknowledges the implication of value judgments in the production of scientific knowledge recommends itself (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993). Indeed, the field of environmental planning and management is one of the primary areas where communicative approaches are being increasingly applied (Baber 2004; Dryzek 2005).

However, much of environmental and resource management decision processes remain rooted in a rational planning tradition that is not conducive to deliberation (Parkins and Mitchell 2005), yet there are analyses in the literature which identify some common issues that arise in applying deliberative processes in environmental and resource decision making. It should be noted that most of these analyses are not interrogating processes intended as instances of deliberative democracy as I have described it, rather they are decision and planning processes that *contain* deliberative elements which fall under the general umbrella of “public participation,” and the analyses are directed at the deliberative operation of those components. Nevertheless they focus our attention on significant issues obtaining in deliberative public involvement in environmental and resource management processes, and it is to a discussion of some of these issues I now turn.

A prominent and recurring theme here has to do with entrenched administrative and regulatory structures. Legal frameworks most often require only limited public “consultation,” and since decision processes are often driven by the political system and/or developers there is little incentive for them to involve the public in a meaningful way, especially considering that it would effectively reduce their power to direct the

decision towards their preferred outcome (Petts 2001; Diduck and Sinclair 2002; Wiklund 2005; Doelle and Sinclair 2006). As well, the political system tends to compartmentalize decision making, leading to a fragmented approach to solving environmental problems that inherently require a more holistic vision given the interconnections and mutual dependencies among the causes and effects of diverse environmental issues. Needless to say, the paternalistic culture characteristic of administrative systems is resistant to attempts at reframing issues to recognize this complexity (Petts 2004; Torgerson 2005).

The participatory tools generally used when the public is involved tend to constrain opportunities for free discourse in favour of one-way communication (Innes and Booher 2004; Wiklund 2005). As a result, opportunities for mutual understanding and transformative learning are greatly reduced and processes become dominated by competitive strategic action as opponents strive to win others to their side rather than collaborate towards a shared understanding (Innes and Booher 2004). To combat this tendency it is essential that process structures and time-lines allow for a full discursive treatment of whatever issues participants feel are relevant (Fitzpatrick and Sinclair 2003). Enshrining free and inclusive discourse from the beginning of the process has been seen as key in achieving the positive potential of deliberative practices discussed previously (Palerm 2000; Sinclair and Diduck 2001; Parkins and Mitchell 2005).

The literature also identifies the timing of public involvement to be crucial. The public is often involved in the decision process only after the problem has already been identified, its scope defined, and a preferred solution offered (Petts 2003; Sinclair and Diduck 2005). The result is that normative questions are effectively ruled out and participants are left working within an agenda they had no hand in creating, which serves

to restrict their discursive autonomy (Wiklund 2005). Deliberative democracy requires that problem identification, definition of terms, and the adoption of procedural rules, including the rules of discourse and procedures to deal with failures to reach consensus, must all be achieved through, and not in advance of, inclusive, free, and equal discourse (Webler 1995). If this is not done then the scope of acceptable discursive inputs is constrained by arbitrary decisions made before discourse even begins, which is inimical to communicative action. Connected with the issue of regulatory compartmentalization, public involvement over the course of the decision or planning timeline is often uneven, and this results in public input at any particular stage frequently having little effect on the final implemented outcome. This public perception that their input will be lost in the process or, relatedly, that decisions are foregone conclusions is a serious impediment to public motivation to participate in decision and planning processes (Diduck and Sinclair 2002). For participants to trust the process and regard the outcome as legitimate, meaningful opportunities for discursive input must be available from the earliest stage and maintained throughout the process, including the implementation and follow-up stages.

Compounding these difficulties, members of the public often feel that they lack the competence to participate in environmental decision processes. It is important that “expert cultures” are effectively challenged through discourse so that technical information is demystified and local knowledge and perceptions are included (Petts 2003). Providing support and educational programs to participants can help them deal with the volumes of specialized information as well as the complex legal and regulatory frameworks characteristic of environmental decisions (Sinclair and Diduck 2001;

Fitzpatrick and Sinclair 2003). Often financial support to participants is appropriate, both as a compensation for their time and effort and as a way to level the playing field by allowing them to secure assistance in effectively interpreting or challenging expert opinion (Diduck and Sinclair 2002; Margerum 2002). Participation itself can produce confidence and increase competence, and it is important that the process allow sufficient time for such learning outcomes to feed back into and improve the process (Sinclair and Diduck 2001; Petts 2003). As well, activities internal to the process that allow for more informal interaction and experiential activities such as field trips and site visits are seen as key to building a collegial spirit and deepening participants' understanding of the issues at hand from the perspectives of others, thus improving their discursive participation (Webler, Kastenholz et al. 1995).

However, much still comes down to the willingness of participants to "buy in" to the communicative presuppositions of deliberative decision processes and to their possession of competencies related to communicative action (Palerm 2000; and see section 2.4.3). Processes can be structured and procedures institutionalized to foster discourse, but they will be successful only to the extent that participants move beyond adversarial stances promoting egoistic interests, and given the traditional reliance on adversarial decision methods such a move may require significant learning (Webler, Kastenholz et al. 1995). Repeated experience with sound communicative planning can engender such evolutionary learning, but it is equally true that experience with dysfunctional processes, which is much of what we have had, erodes public trust in democratic practices (Innes and Booher 2004).

The success of deliberative processes in dealing with many of these issues hinges to a large extent on the facilitator. Good facilitation will ensure that everyone collaborates on initial agenda setting and problem definition, that participation tools are selected and used such that real opportunities for discourse are provided throughout, and that participants are given time to digest and reflect on information and apply their learning to improve their participation (Margerum 2002). As well, facilitators must be trusted and seen to be impartial, not directing the process but rather enabling its free and equitable operation (Webler, Kastenholz et al. 1995). However, given that planning processes are generally designed and run by either government or industry proponents, facilitators are often perceived as compromised by an allegiance to established power and hence to be subtly (or not) committed to a particular outcome. This suggests that facilitation and facilitator should be a subject of critical discursive scrutiny.

Perhaps the most difficult issue pertaining to deliberative environmental processes is inclusivity. From deliberative democracy theory it is full inclusivity together with institutionalizing the rules of discourse that grounds the legitimacy of deliberative decision processes. Beyond the workings of administrative and economic power alluded to earlier, there are many subtle ways that cultural power in the planning context works to exclude individuals and perspectives as established forces seek to work out their agenda (Healey, de Magalhaes et al. 2003; Wiklund 2005), and as Young (1997) has observed, the communicative genre of the deliberative process itself can be exclusionary. The criticality of deliberative democracy brings focus to these more subtle forms of exclusion internal to the deliberative process itself, something often lacking in resource

management practices (Parkins and Mitchell 2005). But first it is necessary to clarify just what is meant by inclusion.

Resource management has tended to emphasize interest-based representation as a means to ensure collaborative decision processes are appropriately inclusive (Parkins and Mitchell 2005). This generally entails identifying the relevant stakeholders, which tend to be business, government, and civil society organizations, with the public interest presumed to be somewhere in that nexus (Margerum 2002). But the extent to which civil society fully represents the diversity of perspectives and interests in the public is questionable (Wiklund 2005), and critical theory points out that it is ideological falsity which equates administrative and economic imperatives with the public interest (Brookfield 2005b). A random selection of participants may theoretically lead to a fuller representation of the diversity of public interests, but there is no guarantee that it will as much depends on the competencies and perspectives of the individuals so selected (Petts 2001). It has also been suggested that inclusivity can be achieved by requiring that no one making a credible and relevant claim to be included may be excluded (Rehg and Bohman 2002). But this begs the question of just who determines the credibility and relevance of claims to inclusion prior to the planning body being formed, and if this judgment is done by those stakeholders always already there at the table then inclusion will tend to be defined in ways that reinforce the interests of the immanent powers of society. In practice, planning processes are often structured with core groups of traditional stakeholders and with public participation components tacked on in order to claim full inclusivity (Innes and Booher 2004), but these add-on public activities are typically non-discursive and so cannot count towards satisfying inclusivity claims.

In response to these issues Palerm has adapted Webler's (1995) first rule of fairness as a guarantor that all interests are represented in discourse: "Any person or group who considers themselves to be potentially affected by the results of the discourse must have an equal opportunity to attend the discourse and participate" (Palerm 2000, 587). But, given that environmental decisions potentially affect wide areas and multitudes of people and provoke a significant diversity of values and perspectives (Healey 2006), this leads to a paradox: if literally every person or group with a self-perceived interest in the outcome participated, democratic discourse would be practically unworkable; but if the number of participants must be kept relatively low in order for true discursive engagement to be possible, it can only be accomplished through the exclusion of some or by reliance on a largely apathetic public, neither of which is conducive to legitimate democratic functioning.

So we seem left with the goal of attempting to have the diversity of public *interests* represented in communicative planning processes as a means of providing full discursive inclusivity. This can be accomplished by recalling Habermas' two-track model of deliberative democracy and by regarding the discursive planning group as a "strong" public, which in that role takes on the responsibility of picking up and exploring public interests and opinions discursively developed in the public sphere. Dryzek (2001) has referred to this notion of inclusivity as seeking to have the discursive practice of the decision maker reflect the existing "constellation of discourses" in the public sphere. However, it is likely that the planning process itself, by bringing together information and arguments in a manner transparent to the public, will affect public discourses or may indeed initiate discourse in the public sphere around issues previously not within the

horizon of the lifeworld, which feeds topics into public discourses. This formative feedback between “strong” and “weak” publics must be recognized and the “strong” must be accountable and transparent to the “weak” in order for the circuit to function effectively in both directions. As a result the planning process should discursively develop explicit procedures with the stated goal of “sensing” the state of relevant public discourses along with guidelines for how this will feed into and inform the planning discourse, and these procedures must be publically visible and ongoing throughout the planning process. This view would also suggest that membership in the planning body should be generally representative of the diversity of social positionings in the affected public, as those with closer affinities to particular arrangements of social position (e.g. rural-aboriginal-young-woman-mother) are better able to comprehend and represent interests and perspectives emanating from them (Young 1997).

In this way any individual or group who self-identifies an interest in the results of the planning discourse and who sees that their interest or perspective is not represented in that publically visible discourse will have a clear opportunity and means to have it included by way of the planning process’s publicized “sensing” procedures. There is of course no guarantee that the planning group will be able to adequately represent and discursively deal with every expressed public interest, but the legitimacy of the planning process is dependent on their ability to demonstrate that an honest effort has been made to do so. This will require the flexibility to respond as appropriate by, for example, scheduling unexpected workshops, dispatching a smaller working group to explore newly raised perspectives, or inviting guests to join the discursive group temporarily or permanently. The planning process must strive for a balance between relying on the pre-

filtering of public opinion through public discourse, necessary to escape paralysis from a potential deluge of private opinions and interests, and providing participatory opportunities for those who feel their interests have been excluded from both the public and the planning discourse. It is unlikely that this will ever be completely accomplished, but, recalling the “de-idealized” Habermasian model, what is vital is that the planning process and its procedures are recognized as themselves legitimate and that the public can see that a sincere effort was made to carry out the process and follow its procedures as closely as was possible. Such planning exercises are further likely to achieve legitimacy when it is clear that they are not “one off” events, but that the process is open to continual critique and is ongoing such that less influence now is no predictor of potential influence in the future.

Although there are significant process outcomes, notably the potential for transformative learning, building social and political capital, and social-evolutionary learning for democratic practice, a primary purpose of communicative planning remains the production of a legitimate and implementable plan that will make a difference by coordinating and directing our collective actions. Legitimacy and plan production result from a process appropriately structured and carried out, but plan implementation relies on the political capacity of the process, which may depend on independent factors such as government acceptance. However, if the planning process is widely regarded as legitimate by the public, any level of government’s rejection of the outcome proceeds at the peril of undermining its own democratic legitimacy. As well, in granting legitimacy to the planning outcome members of the public are in a sense agreeing to bind their wills to act in particular ways as specified in the plan (Habermas 1996b), and so again it would

appear that the political capacity of a planning process is fundamentally dependent on its achieving legitimacy. And since it is the normative suppositions of communicative action underlying deliberative democracy theory that ground communicative planning's claims to legitimacy, it is the institutionalization of and adherence to the rules of critical, free, and inclusive discourse and all that it entails throughout the planning process that determine its legitimacy and hence to a large extent its political capacity.

## **2.7 ECOLOGICAL DEMOCRACY**

### **2.7.1 Introduction**

Despite all the preceding discussion, the deliberative democratic planning process I have described is open to the charge that it is not particularly environmentally minded, that there is nothing intrinsic to the approach suggesting it will be more likely to achieve ecologically rational outcomes than current planning procedures. In fact it has been argued that Habermas' philosophical project is itself fundamentally anthropocentric and anti-ecological (Eckersley 1990). These are obviously significant charges given that I am recommending this as an approach to be used for addressing environmental issues in planning contexts. There have been numerous attempts in the literature to "green" deliberative democracy, to suggest the inclusion of particular institutional or procedural elements rendering it specifically suited to the task of reaching ecologically sound decisions, to in effect outline an ecological democracy. I will first critically examine Eckersley's charge that Habermas' theory is committed to an anti-ecological conception of the natural environment, and then will briefly describe and critique several of the more prominent suggestions for how deliberative approaches to governance can be considered truly ecological democratic practice. Finally, I will discuss a broader view of

environmental politics, especially drawing on the work of Torgerson (1999; 2000; 2003; 2005), in order to describe more clearly the position and role within green politics of the communicative planning process I have been describing.

### **2.7.2 Anthropocentrism in Habermas' Discourse Ethic**

The critique of the instrumental and objectivating nature of Enlightenment rationality as directing and justifying the domination of humans and external nature has always been central to critical theory. Hence the emancipatory thrust of critical theory has sought to rescue both humans and nature from a subject-less position where they are open to manipulation by the technocratic operation of state and administrative systems (Dobson 1993). Regarding non-human nature, critical theorists have spoken, for example, of a re-enchantment of our relationship with the natural world or of a new science accepting of human values and judgments through which to know it. In general, critical theorists have, as part of their overall project, sought some way to develop and sustain a “pacified” connection between humans and the natural world by both domesticating instrumental reason and advancing a new, non-instrumental concept of rationality (Dobson 1993). Habermas, however, broke with these approaches in his theory of knowledge-constitutive interests. Here he argued that fundamental human interests emerge from frameworks of human action – success oriented instrumental action, termed work, expresses the “technical” interest in the prediction and control of the natural world, while communicative action with other social agents, labeled interaction, describes the “communicative” interest in achieving mutual understanding (Vogel 1997).<sup>16</sup> Each interest constitutes a domain of objects and implies methods of investigation appropriate

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<sup>16</sup> Habermas also posited the ‘emancipatory’ interest, associated with self-reflection, which was somewhat problematic and later seen as being largely subsumed in the communicative interest (Brookfield 2005b).

for generating knowledge in each domain. The technical interest constitutes the realm of nature and is appropriately studied through the manipulative objective methods of the natural sciences, while the communicative interest constitutes the social world which is appropriately investigated through the more interpretive, hermeneutic approach exemplified by critical social science.

As such Habermas essentially surrenders nature to the domination inherent in the instrumental logic of positivist science, while seeking to emancipate humans and human relations from precisely the same fate by privileging communicative over instrumental rationality in the social realm (Eckersley 1990). On this view we can only know nature through our work and as an object of instrumental control. Human interactions with nature are further governed by a “quasi-transcendental” interest in, or biological drive for, the survival of the human species, which serves to further cement the appropriateness of nature’s subservience to human interests. Habermas holds that the principle of egalitarian reciprocity built into communicative action cannot be carried over to relations with the natural world because they would at some point conflict with this human interest in survival and because of the lack of communicative competence in nature (Habermas 1982). He proclaims that the instrumental rationality of science and technology is the most efficacious and fruitful means for knowing and appropriately manipulating nature, for our ends, and he is entirely skeptical regarding even the possibility of “rationalizing fraternal intercourse with a non-objectivated nature” (Habermas 1982, 250). So the ends we deem appropriate to achieve in our relations with nature are, insofar as they exist in the social world (e.g. home-building and recreation), determined through communicative rationality, but the ends in nature (e.g. logging and park development) required to satisfy

desired social outcomes and the means to those ends (e.g. forest management practices) are determined through objective science by technical experts. Thus when it comes to direct human-nature interaction, we, through our mastery of instrumental rationality, are in a normalized position of dominance.

From this analysis, Eckersley (1990) concludes that despite the emancipatory content of Habermas' discourse ethic, when it comes to our interactions with nature he accedes to the Modernist status quo, which commits us to a strong anthropocentrism where we manipulatively relate to nature as directed only by our human interests. Instead she argues that we should extend the discourse ethic to an ecocentric one. Whereas the nature of human communication, the basis of the discourse ethic, generates an egalitarian reciprocity among human subjects, the nature of ecological reality implies relatedness and reciprocal relations among all earth systems. The "ecological reality" Eckersley describes is basically systems-ecology's description of reality as constituted by webs of inter-relations where nothing is entirely determined or determining, rather action is constrained by the actor's relational context while that context is itself shaped through the actions taken. Eckersley (1990) suggests that these insights from ecological science, together with advances in subatomic science and relativity and chaos theories, fundamentally challenge many of the assumptions of the Modern worldview – in particular its technological optimism, atomistic focus, and commitment to anthropocentrism. Thus an ecocentric worldview, with its interactive focus on our embeddedness in ecological relations, is more scientifically accurate and suggests a new, non-anthropocentric understanding of "self" that is inclusive of the ecological relationships that constitute us. While Eckersley does not precisely define the ecocentric

ethic she speaks of, her “ecocentric perspective” presents an attitude of mutuality and inclusiveness as a more appropriate orientation towards human-nature relations, which presumably would be foundational to such an ethic.

Eckersley sees Habermas as attempting to perfect the Enlightenment project of achieving rational autonomy (emancipation) through overcoming all natural and social constraints on human thought and action. But an ecocentric perspective sees this notion of autonomy as illusory insofar as it denies our fundamental embeddedness in the natural world. Rather than seeking the separation and differentiation from nature implicit in Habermas’ theory of cognitive interests, we ought instead to emphasize our continuity with and relatedness to nature. Later, Eckersley (1996) develops this line of argument further by drawing on autopoietic intrinsic value theory. Here she asserts that the basic unit of moral considerability should be those entities concerned with self-(re)production, which would include self-organized units of the human and non-human, biotic and abiotic world. Politics would thus need to navigate among these entities’ competing claims, and “the rights of individual organisms would need to be framed in the context of the requirements of larger autopoietic entities, such as ecosystems, in ways that maximize the opportunities for both individuals and ecosystems (on which individual organisms are dependent) to flourish” (Eckersley 1996, 189). Framing this in terms of deliberative democracy, Eckersley reinterprets the notion of democratic legitimacy, which for Habermas is the potential assent of all “those affected” through discourse, to essentially mean respect for the autonomy of all “those affected” to pursue their fundamental interest in surviving and thriving (Eckersley 1999).

Given our ecological reality, this would mean that democratic processes should require that the exercise of human autonomy be delimited by the broader requirements of ecological sustainability, which would enhance the autonomy of all. Since in deliberative democracy the autonomy of human subjects is respected through the procedural requirements of discourse, if we recognize the existence of autonomy in non-human nature we should augment democratic procedural requirements to similarly guarantee respect for that form of autonomy. Such a procedure would operationalize a notional test of the validity of decisions affecting autopoietic entities, “*if they could talk and reason, would they agree to the proposed norm?*” (Eckersley 1999, 44). Toward this end Eckersley recommends adopting the precautionary principle as a rule directing all democratic decisions, which she suggests, though imperfect, would at least direct our attention to possibilities for environmental harm and would commit us to giving fair consideration to “natural” interests (in at least surviving and flourishing) in our political deliberations. So while Habermas insists that only the rules of discourse may precede discourse and hence give it *a priori* shape and direction, Eckersley argues we need to add another rule (or rules) on a par with the rules of discourse to shape and direct political discursive practice so as to respect nature’s interest in autonomy.

However, I feel Eckersley’s judgment of Habermas’ discourse ethic as inadequate for achieving ecologically rational decisions is misplaced, primarily because she bases her critique on Habermas’ theory of cognitive interests, a concept he eventually saw as problematic and largely dropped from his work by the mid 1970s (Vogel 1997). As well, Habermas’ claim that employing instrumental rationality toward an objectivated nature is the only theoretically fruitful way of accumulating knowledge about it does not rule out

other modes of relating to nature – “we can indeed adopt a performative attitude to external nature, have aesthetic experiences and feelings analogous to morality with respect to it...” (Habermas 1982, 243). However, he argues that such experiences are entirely subjective and hence unfruitful for generating generalizable knowledge claims that would be discursively criticizable, unless we ground them in metaphysically inspired philosophies of nature. Habermas (1982, 250) thus holds the “interpretive sciences of nature” as incapable of contributing to political discourse. But this merely belies his dated understanding of scientific practice. More recently, especially post-Kuhn, the philosophy of science generally accepts that all science is inherently interpretive, shaped and directed by the (subjective) values and perceptions of scientists and the disciplines they work within, and thus the objective science Habermas refers to was always a conceptual fiction (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993; Vogel 1997). Eckersley (1990) is indeed correct that scientific theories are underdetermined by facts just as human perception is underdetermined by sensory input, and hence the science through which we know the natural world cannot be conceived as epistemologically singular and rigid as Habermas presumes. However, she fails to build upon this insight by recognizing that such a view of science denies its existence as separate from the social domain and so renders it, and by extension our interactions with and knowledge of nature, subject to communicative rationality.

This still does not directly address the claim that since there are autonomous entities in nature we are morally bound to ensure that their interests are present in discourse. This claim is, I feel, based on several theoretical errors. Eckersley grounds her entire concept of natural autonomous entities on systems ecology, which has been

largely supplanted by an evolutionary understanding of ecology where, while still acknowledging its webbish, relational character, nature is seen as continuously adapting and changing, not reproducing and maintaining some static (ideal) form (Brulle 2002). Eckersley presents her ecological “fact” and derives from it a moral duty to include nature’s interests in discourse, but this represents an essentialist move whereby natural entities are understood and their interests reified such that they can be situated comfortably within human constructs, such as systems ecology. Surely this is an anthropocentric move. Her commitment to systems ecology also has the ironic effect of further entrenching the human/nature dichotomy, a split her ecocentric perspective would deny, in that unconstrained human actions are seen as artificial, as upsetting nature’s balanced self-regulation.

Perhaps more pertinent to the task at hand, Eckersley assumes that for Habermas recognition of and respect for agency is the basis of moral considerability and hence inclusion in discourse, but instead his ethic is founded upon principles implicit in human language use and so the moral community is necessarily constituted by communicatively competent humans. Communicative competence is not an arbitrary capacity from Habermas’ moral perspective; human language use implies consciousness and self-awareness and hence the ability to make rational choices, and this is the autonomy respected in his discourse ethic (Brulle 2002). Her notion of agency in nature provides for nothing of the sort, but rather weakens the notion of agency to merely the unfolding of natural biological functioning, and nearly any form of political decision making can and has been justified on grounds of according with natural functioning (Dryzek 1996). Eckersley’s approach also confuses Habermas’ moral with his ethical questions, where

the former are concerned with who participates in discourse and how discourse proceeds, while the latter are those having to do with what is the “good life” and how we will order our collective affairs, and are appropriately dealt with in discourse. Eckersley seems to believe that natural interests or values can only be considered in discourse if we admit the natural entities holding them into the moral fold and then enforce some means of affording them discursive voice. But Habermas is clear that in discourse there are no bounds on the interests or values that can be advanced and intersubjectively (in)validated. Indeed, his notion of ethical discourse is deliberately structured so as to invite the presentation of as broad a range of perspectives and interests as is possible – its claim to rationality is in fact dependent on precisely such an openness.

Eckersley (1990) differentiates between an inevitable form of anthropocentrism (i.e. that we can only ever perceive the world as human subjects), which she terms trivial, and a stronger substantive form where beings are treated differentially simply because they are non-human, and she argues that Habermas’ ethic commits us to the strong sense of the term. The impression I get from Eckersley’s writing is that she feels this anthropocentrism goes beyond mere differential consideration, but also implies disregard for and/or patently mean treatment of nature. But Habermas (1982, 247) plainly states that the ecological problematic suggests extending our *ethical* perspective to recognize that “with the heightening of our technical power of disposing over nature, there also comes increased responsibility for the natural processes set in motion by our interventions. However, this problematic can be dealt with satisfactorily within the anthropocentric framework of a discourse ethic.” Within this discursive framework there is no reason to suppose that non-human nature will be disregarded, meanly treated, or

even that an ecocentric perspective will not meet with wide acceptance. A strong anthropocentrism will pervade discourse only to the extent it is unchallenged, the challenge is logically unconvincing, or economic or administrative power is allowed to dominate – it is not somehow required by the fundamental character of Habermasian discourse. Further, the weak anthropocentrism inherent in deliberative decision processes is not, simply because it is inescapable, merely trivial. It is fundamental to the process, and it is precisely when attention is diverted from the fact that our decisions are based on partial, fallible human perceptions and understandings that we are at grave risk of failing to recognize and respect the diversity of perspectives and interests deserving of consideration.

What Eckersley has effectively done is present an argument from a particular perspective that implies certain values and ways of thinking about appropriate human-nature interactions, and as such her offering functions as a contribution to discourse on, among other things, environmental decision making. But its deliberative consideration is necessarily taken by participating human subjects, from their perspectives and influenced by their perceptions of values and interests; we are, after all, talking about human political practice, about how we humans can best order our affairs in common. Despite Eckersley's protestation, I agree with Brulle's (2002, 17) comment that "It is in the democratic conversation about our fate and the fate of nature that Habermas and green political theory converge." There is much in Eckersley's perspective on how we ought to relate with non-human nature that I agree with, and the points she develops should be raised and considered in discourses grappling with environmental issues, but they cannot be imposed on discourse from the start as she seems to desire. Such a move would be

both unnecessary, as a deliberative democratic approach provides ample space for their consideration, and democratically illegitimate, as it would represent a violation of the fundamental rules of discourse.

### **2.7.3 Greening Deliberative Democracy**

While above I have argued that Habermas' ethic is not strongly anthropocentric in the sense of precluding the discursive consideration of non-human value and interests, there is still no guarantee that deliberative democracy based on this ethic will recognize and respect the values and interests necessary to reach ecologically rational decisions. I have already discussed arguments for how a deliberative approach to governance is well equipped to deal with the complexity, uncertainty, and fundamental value conflicts characteristic of environmental problems, and this belief has resulted in the environmental sphere being one of the primary areas where experiments in deliberative democracy have been developed (O'Neill 2002). Deliberative democracy theorists have tended to avoid commenting on institutional design, but some green theorists have sought to outline specific procedures and ways of viewing deliberative democratic practice that would effectively ensure that decisions reached are ecologically sound (Smith 2001).

Eckersley's ecocentric approach has been described in some detail above, but here I will comment briefly on one of her suggestions for institutional design. Eckersley (1999) concludes that the interests of her autonomous natural entities and the interests of future generations must be represented in green deliberative democracy, and that given the impossibility of their presence in discourse this representation must be done vicariously by participating humans. However, she recognizes that we have no vantage point outside our socio-historically constituted selves from which to apprehend nature's

interests, and so she suggests we need a procedure that will guide deliberators “away from putting ‘the silent environmental constituency’ at grave risk” while simultaneously relieving “the participants of the problem of imperfect information, uncertainty, insufficient time and epistemological complexity” (Eckersley 1999, 46). For this purpose she suggests institutionalizing the precautionary principle in all environmental decision making such that, while its interpretation and application would be discursively determined in particular cases, participants in discourse would not be free to ignore it. In this minimal way at least the (presumed) interest of nature and future generations in having the environmental conditions promoting their survival and flourishing would be respected in discourse.

The idea of vicarious representation is taken a step further by Dobson (1996) who recommends that actual proxy representatives be present in deliberative democratic decision processes where nature and/or future generations are part of “those affected.” In order to ensure that the proxies are committed to advocating the interests they stand for, Dobson suggests electing them from a proxy constituency consisting of a subset of the general population already endorsing nature’s and future interests, and he recommends the sustainability or environmental lobby for this task. Again, the natural interests these proxies would be representing are at least inclusive of the conditions necessary to survive and flourish, as going much beyond that becomes epistemologically problematic. In this way he hopes to have these mute and absent interest-holders both present and communicatively participating in as direct a fashion as he deems possible, thus avoiding the paternalistic and distorting tendencies of indirect representation where nature and

future human's interests are presumed contained within the interests of present human participants.

Goodin (1996) does not recommend specific institutional designs, but rather a way of viewing interests in nature that supports participatory, deliberative political decision processes as being best suited to respond to these interests and hence reach ecologically rational decisions. After a brief axiological excursion he concludes that "all interests point to objective values," and "[o]bjective values are the sources – indeed, the only sources – of interests" (Goodin 1996, 837-838). What converts an objective value into an interest is its interaction with an appropriately cognitively equipped appreciator (i.e. a human), but that interaction adds nothing of value, it merely recognizes the value that was already there. Goodin further posits that the basis for respecting interests in democratic practice is because they are of value, and so given his argument above there is no reason for preferentially attending to interests rather than to the objective values they express. Put another way, he asks, "why take political notice of what is of interest *to people* rather than just what is *of value*?" (Goodin 1996, 839). If we accept that objects and non-human entities in nature have objective value, then a commitment to democracy, understood minimally as the equal consideration of interests, commits us to equal consideration of nature's values-cum-interests in democratic discourse.

Nevertheless, objective values in nature can only enter discourse through communicative inputs from participating humans. Goodin does not feel these natural values will be adequately represented through regarding them as encapsulated within human interests, rather they will be present only to the extent sympathetic humans internalize and counterfactually regard natural interests as their own. But he sees

democracy as precisely about this internalization of the interests of others such that one comes to an enlarged, more holistic sense of self-interest. This obviously accords nicely with core ideals of transformative learning that I argue are embedded in deliberative democratic practice and underpin its claims to communicative rationality. Goodin (1996) argues that participatory, deliberative democracy will best be able to facilitate this internalization and expression of values-cum-interests in nature because: it breaks down concentrations of established power that have tended to militate against the recognition of nature's interests; the free and inclusive engagement of a large and diverse citizenry will help ensure that every relevant point of view, including ones that have internalized nature's interests, will be represented; and discursive engagement forces participants to defend their positions with appeals to the general public interest, to consider reasons that would be good for others from their points of view, and this process of anticipatory internalization provides participants with the attitude and means to represent interests in nature. While Goodin recognizes that this is an imperfect system of representation given the epistemological challenges of knowing, internalizing, and then expressing nature's interests, he suggests that such a process is politically unavoidable once we accept that there are values-cum-interests in nature deserving of recognition.

Yet another response to the perceived inadequacy of Habermas' discourse ethic to allow for an environmental ethic to inform and direct discourse is provided by Vogel (1997). The crux of his argument is that the natural world, insofar as it is implicated in our political discourse, is always already social, and hence Habermas' communicative ethics are sufficient to direct decisions regarding our interactions with nature. Vogel identifies two dualisms in Habermas' work – between “nature as we know and experience

it” and “primordial, presocial nature,” and between the “social world” and “nature for us.” The first dualism is dissolved as we recognize that a primordial nature is by definition inaccessible to us and so can have no bearing on our discursive practice. As for the second, Habermas’ notion of “nature for us” refers to that nature known through our instrumental science, but as mentioned previously this simply highlights Habermas’ failure to acknowledge that science is an interpretive human practice and thus as a social construct it falls within the bounds of the discourse ethic.

The world we live in – the one world, not divisible into ontologically distinct “social” and “natural” realms – is a world constituted in and through the socially (and linguistically) organized practices we engage in every day – including, of course, the practices of technology and of science. Never a “nature in itself,” the nature we actually inhabit is one that always already shows the mark of the human: first, because we perceive and experience it, study and dream about it, in terms that are from the beginning social through and through, but second also because the objects and landscapes through which we experience it are always themselves – when closely examined – in part the product of earlier social practices. (Vogel 1997, 186)

Vogel thus criticizes Habermas for failing to recognize the sociality of nature, which once acknowledged enables us to apprehend more than instrumental value in nature and commits us to discursively consider what sort of nature we believe most appropriate for us to socially construct. This discursive consideration, following Habermas’ communicative guidelines, is precisely about determining an environmental ethic, but, significantly, in such a way that recognizes us, with our partial perceptions and linguistic interactions, as the ethic’s source rather than supposing it somehow springs from a nature independent of our social realm.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This is a somewhat fine distinction. Habermas (1982, 247) states that the ecological problematic suggests extending our ethical perspective to take “responsibility for the natural processes set in motion by our [technological] interventions. However, this problematic can be dealt with satisfactorily within the anthropocentric framework of a discourse ethic.” Vogel modifies this by locating the ecological problematic squarely within the social realm, and thus, contrary to Habermas, making it’s discursive consideration about more than issues of technical efficiency and instrumental manipulation.

Dryzek (1996) similarly seeks to locate an ethical understanding of our interactions with nature within the discourse ethic. He begins from the assumption that some form of democracy is the preferred form of government, and goes on to argue that all historical democratic forms have been irredeemably materialistic, anthropocentric and hence inadequate to appropriately direct our interactions with nature and cope with environmental challenges. In particular Dryzek argues that liberal democracy, with its regulative ideal of efficient aggregation of private preferences, is ultimately incapable of reliably arriving at fair and rational decisions. Instead, Dryzek points to Habermas' communicative-based analysis of modernity as the most fruitful approach to rescuing rationality and democracy from anthropocentrism. Ironically, he agrees with Eckersley that Habermas' philosophy, because of its insistence on only knowing nature instrumentally, is itself also inherently anthropocentric, and thus the communicative rationality Habermas describes must be rescued – from Habermas. Dryzek (1996, 20) seeks to accomplish this by recognizing the existence of agency in nature and treating “communication, and so communicative rationality, as extending to entities that can act as agents, even though they lack the self-awareness that connotes subjectivity.” Thus, “we should treat signals emanating from the natural world with the same respect we accord signals emanating from human subjects, and as requiring equally careful interpretation” (1996, 21). From this basis the regulative ideal of deliberative democracy, free and equal discourse among human subjects, is reinterpreted in the context of ecological democracy to be effectiveness in communication that transcends the human – nature boundary.

Dryzek draws several political lessons from these natural signals, most notably that the size and scope of democratic institutions should match that of the ecosystem or environmental problem under consideration. This ecological democracy is not defined by some bounded political community but rather by the discursive, democratic, and ecologically sensitive content and style of interactions across issue, geographic, socio-cultural, identity, economic, and political boundaries. “An ecological democracy would, then, contain numerous and cross-cutting *loci* of political authority,” which would be functionally coordinated by locating democratization within a public sphere and civil society set in opposition to the state (Dryzek 1996, 26). The unbounded character of discourse in the public sphere would allow democratic response according to the scale of the problem, the variability of topical engagement and general flexibility of public discourse would enable public spheres to constitute themselves in direct response to issues as they arise, and their inherent openness coupled with the diversity of knowledge and perspectives present in society would support the communicative rationality and legitimacy of discursive outcomes. Beyond these observations, Dryzek (1996, 25) resists offering a blueprint for ecological democratic institutions, observing that “idealist political prescription insensitive to real-world constraints and possibilities for innovation is often of limited value.”

The visions of ecological democracy discussed in this section demonstrate that there are diverse ways in which deliberative democracy can be massaged so as to be more attuned to environmental interests, but a consideration of some of their implications and assumptions also reveals that doing so is far from theoretically and practically straightforward. As argued in the previous section, attempting to make natural entities

morally considerable within Habermas' discourse ethic by recognizing agency in them misses the point that it is the nature of communication and not agency, however weakly defined, that forms the basis of the discourse ethic. Further, this communication is the sort that implicitly raises validity claims and that is capable of justifying them, which certainly is not characteristic of Dryzek's "signals emanating from the natural world." Eckersley and Dryzek, by basing their claims on agency and communicative competence in nature, are unable, without significant biopomorphization (such as in some articulations of the Gaia hypothesis), to direct our interactions with non-living aspects of the environment that are implicated in most of the ecological problems we face. In effect they argue for an expansion of the moral community, but not sufficiently to ensure the ecological rationality they seek.

Dobson's "proxy representatives" and Eckersley's argument for enforcing the precautionary principle both represent an *a priori*, normative shaping of discourse, whereas, to the extent they can be legitimated, they should exist as discursive outcomes.<sup>18</sup> If discourse is to proceed on equal grounds for all participants, there is no justification for an ecocentric victory claimed and enforced in advance of discourse. Dobson's suggestion also has significant practical problems, particularly relating to the proxy constituency effectively having a double voice in political discourse and voting – once for themselves and once for nature. As well, concerning the legitimacy of this representation of nature, since claims cannot be authorized by nor accountable to the represented constituency there remains only the possibility of an epistemic claim that the representative somehow has particular knowledge of nature and its interests (O'Neill 2002). But it is difficult to

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<sup>18</sup> In a sense this is precisely what Eckersley and Dobson are doing – putting forth arguments into the discourse on deliberative democracy, which implies they are yet in need of discursive critique and (in)validation.

see how nature's proxy representatives could know and represent nature any differently from Goodin's "sympathetic humans" who have internalized natural interests and made them their own, but if so then they would simply exist as human discursive participants raising and attempting to justify arguments based on their, human, perception of nature and its interests. As such, drawing proxy representatives from the environmental lobby represents an institutionalized advantage for one group's general perspective on nature in a discursive context that is supposed to be characterized by the removal of just such privileging.

As well, none of these theorists actually address the basic epistemological problem of how we know nature, and hence can identify its interests and value, apart from through the fallible and partial human perspectives and the human interests they generate, which are already (potentially) present in democratic discourse. Even if we accept Goodin's shaky equation of objective values and interests, how do we identify the values in nature to represent in discourse? His only answer, which would seem to apply to Dobson's proxy representatives as well, is for humans to internalize natural values and express them as their own interests, and he describes this process very nicely, but that is not really any answer at all. Presumably Eckersley's ecocentric perspective would direct us to apprehend nature's interests appropriately, but unless we resort to essentialist definitions of nature the interests so identified will be imaginative human constructions. Vogel effectively sidesteps this issue by subsuming the natural world within the social, a move which results in the only nature we can know being constituted in and through our social practice. While this allows us to know nature non-instrumentally, and hence subjects dominatory tendencies towards the natural world to communicative rationality,

we still arrive at an ethical understanding of interactions with our external environment through the inter-subjective validation of arguments based on human perspectives and human interests, which is really no departure from Habermas' discourse ethic. Dryzek, at first blush, appears to address this epistemological problematic by allowing nature to, as it were, tell us itself what are its fundamental interests in need of our discursive consideration. But he quickly points out that these signals are difficult to read and require careful interpretation, which is of course done by humans and so relies on humans creatively constructing notions of nature's interests and presenting them in discourse.

This all points to a shared weakness in the ecological democratic visions considered, namely an overly simplified depiction of the concept of representation, here the representation of nature. Saward (2006) points out that representation is an active, constitutive process whereby we construct concepts which allow us to see the objects of our interest; it is about claim-making rather than fact-establishing and so representative claims can, and should, be discursively contested. He describes representative claims as always involving: a *maker*, who asserts the claim; a *subject*, put forth by the maker as standing for or signifying an object; an *object*, which is the concept or idea of the thing being represented; a *referent*, which is the actual thing itself; and an *audience* who receives and accepts, rejects, or ignores the representative claim.<sup>19</sup> Without delving deeply into this, suffice it to say that on this view representative claims are always necessarily some distance removed from the "truth" of that which is represented, even when the claim maker is (a member of) the referent constituency.

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<sup>19</sup> For example, in the course of parliamentary deliberation on some issue my member of parliament (the maker) offers a speech (the subject) as embodying my best interest (the object), with respect to my stake in the issue (the referent), and makes this claim to me and to the parliament (the audience).

Saward (2006) identifies three principle problems in green theorists' typical representations of nature. First, they tend to be unidirectional in that the representative acts merely as a conduit for passing along the claims of the represented. Instead, Saward (2006, 192) holds that "representative and represented are in a shifting and mutually constitutive relationship" where "the referent's material reality conditions the range of what can be said about it, and makers and subjects create representations within that range." Second, green representations of nature tend to reference some authentic nature "out there" with particular interests that if only we could perceive directly, without distortion, would guide our deliberations to correct environmental decisions. But Saward argues that in representation identity is always authored, not authentic, and so can never be more than partial and selective. Finally, in all of the views considered above, save for Vogel, there is the presumption that there are values and interests in nature that our democratic discourse needs to attend to, but that they exist objectively, independent of our perception and articulation of them. Whether such objective natural values and interests exist is quite beside the point; what matters is that insofar as our political discourse is able to take account of such interests, they exist as interpretive, authored representations voiced by human participants.

Following this line of thinking, representations of nature are metaphors that both reflect and condition our understanding of nature and hence what may be done to it, because "metaphors underpin belief, and belief underpins actions" (Saward 2006, 194). The real power then in deliberative democracy's grappling with environmental issues lies in putting forth compelling alternative metaphors of nature that can challenge dominant conceptions. Doing so opens space for new beliefs and understandings, and hence for

new ways of acting and new prescriptions for political practice. In this respect Vogel's claim that the natural world is always already social seems fitting; in democratic discourse we cannot avoid working with representative claims, which are actively constructed and interpreted within the various socio-historical and life-history contexts of discursive participants. "Our need to 'make up nature' does not go away just because we are close to it (or even because we *are* it)" (Saward 2006, 196). This leads us to recognize that it is inappropriate to seek a "true" or "correct" representation of nature, but rather that as there are multiple persons from diverse contexts and differing social positionings there are also multiple, shifting ways of seeing nature and its interests that require inclusion and discursive treatment in democratic practice.<sup>20</sup> Further, it is important to recognize that representation of nature occurs in and beyond existing political institutions, which would imply that discursive democratic designs, if they are to address the problematic of human-nature interactions, need to be situated such that they can engage the various *loci* where such representation takes place. But, significantly, claims about nature and their accompanying demands for attention to particular interests, wherever they are made, are social products and hence appropriately explored and validated according to the guidelines of the discourse ethic.

#### **2.7.4 Administrative and Public Spheres and Ecological Democratic Practice**

Torgerson (1999; 2003; 2005) picks up on the main themes discussed in section 2.4.5 (De-idealizing...Deliberative Democracy), especially the more holistic understanding of power, the focus on the context of deliberation, and the consideration of

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<sup>20</sup> This line of argument should also put to rest, for once and for all, Habermas' ill-conceived claim that we can only know nature through instrumental, objective, manipulative science. While scientific study certainly is part of the context from which we understand nature, our 'knowing' also implicates the full range of our social and cultural experience, and is constructed by us from that basis.

dissent and ongoing critique, rather than consensus, as characterizing deliberative democratic practice. But whereas most deliberative theorists analyze democratic politics as the interplay between the public sphere (or spheres<sup>21</sup>) and the state, Torgerson replaces the focus on the state with the concept of the administrative sphere. “The administrative sphere extends beyond the state to encompass that fragmented, yet somehow also coherent, complex of public and private administrative organizations that, with varying modes of conflict and coalescence, largely shapes the pace and character of development in industrially advanced societies” (Torgerson 1999, 10). Significantly, the administrative sphere thus already penetrates, and connects aspects of, the state, the economy, and (potentially at least) the public sphere and civil society. As such, it is inherently less stable and monolithic than most visions of the state and, insofar as it functions through interrelations among its constituent elements, the administrative sphere is also a site of communicative interaction, a fact which its typical practices tend to obscure (Torgerson 2003). Torgerson (2005) thus identifies opportunities for democratization in the discursive openings that are already present within the operations of the administrative sphere and in those that emerge from the context of push and push-back at the boundaries between the administrative and critical public spheres as they seek access to decision making power. Like Habermas, he regards a diverse and robust public

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<sup>21</sup> Habermas (e.g. 1996b) typically speaks of a single all-encompassing public sphere within which public discourses proceed as an anonymous public conversation (Benhabib 1996), but the diversity of social movements and public discourses has “provoked talk of a plurality of public spheres, differing according to a range of perspectives and identities” (Torgerson 1999, xii; Crossley and Roberts 2004). I think both concepts are sensible and are not mutually exclusive – individual public spheres exist nested within the broader, holistically conceived public sphere, but when speaking, for example, specifically of ecologically-minded public discourse it is useful to refer to a green public sphere. Nevertheless it must be kept in mind that specific public spheres have porous boundaries and do not exist in isolation from one another, they are often overlapping and discourse in one may have significant impacts in another, and in that sense they collectively make up a “public of publics in which various linguistic public spheres debate common issues, and through intermediaries translate across linguistic and cultural boundaries the results of deliberative processes in other publics” (Bohman 2004, 36).

sphere as the keystone of healthy democracy, and Torgerson (1999; 2000) further suggests that it is the existence and political actions of a green public sphere that enables deliberative democracy to effectively confront and deal with environmental issues.

For Torgerson (2005), discourse itself has an ambivalent potential; the possibilities for increased rationality and democratization through discourse depend on contextual factors. In deliberative environmental politics the administrative sphere, where decisions are traditionally made, is a key element of the context of power which must be understood if discourse is to lead toward democratic and ecologically rational outcomes. Torgerson (1999) describes how Western liberal democracy developed from an exclusive (i.e. educated, propertied, white, male) but robust and influential public sphere in the late seventeenth to mid nineteenth centuries where relatively unconstrained communication shaped public opinion significant to state legitimacy. But, ironically, as citizenship rights became more inclusive in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the direction of influence between the public sphere and the state became inverted; public opinion became increasingly the product of propaganda emanating from an oligarchic center of administrative organizations in the state, economy, and society, which was reinforced by the self-disciplinary practices of a largely acquiescent public (Foucault 1980; Ranciere 2006). This administrative sphere was not the realization of some conspiratorial master plan, rather it was produced out of a confluence of movements and practices responding to perceived problems arising from power relations in the economy, state, and society (Torgerson 1999), the end result of which Habermas has described as the normalized dominance of economic and administrative imperatives in the political system and in the colonized lifeworld as well. As such the administrative

sphere is not a unified body or movement; it is a collection of interrelated organizations and operates through communicative relations among them. While administrators typically present a dispassionate, rational-scientific face, they work through discourse, however constrained it may be, and as such there are discursive openings which can be enlarged and engaged and that may lead to unanticipated outcomes. Understood in this way it is clear that the present alignment of power is not an historical inevitability, and neither is it impervious to substantive changes as a result of outside pressures as seen in, for example, the civil rights or environmental justice movements (Foster 1998; Furman and Gruenewald 2004).

While the specific administrative organizations participating in decision and policy making will vary with the particular issue under consideration, Torgerson describes an “administrative mind” that characterizes administrative behaviour in general. Echoing Habermas’ description of instrumental rationality, the administrative mind “suggests an impartial reason, which exercises a supreme, unquestionable authority” and which in its contemporary, technocratic form “gestures to the functional operations of a multifaceted system, monitored and regulated through depersonalized analytic techniques” (Torgerson 1999, 11). Thus all problems must be rendered manageable according to scientific rationality, which requires analytic simplification in identifying discretely defined problems, purged of extraneous and complicating variables, such that they can be appropriately controlled and manipulated towards desired ends. That the administrative sphere invokes a mobilization of bias regarding both means and ends in favour of economic and established power interests is effaced in its claim to impartial reason. As environmental problems are typically characterized by uncertainty,

complexity, and interrelatedness, to the extent that the administrative sphere operates as described above it is itself an environmental problem. But this mind is less stable and monological than is often suggested; Torgerson (2003) identifies dissenting policy professionals working within the administrative sphere who seek to question the foundational assumptions of typical policy discourse. Thus the administrative sphere contains within it impulses that may steer policy in unexpected directions.

Torgerson (2000) looks to the political activity of the green public sphere as the most democratically defensible and effective way to constitute new discursive openings and to engage those already present in the administrative sphere in ways that can enhance ecological rationality. However, the practices of the administrative sphere tend to shrink and weaken the public sphere by consigning the actions and spaces of action of non-administrative actors to the realm of private life (Ranciere 2006).<sup>22</sup> Essentially that which is not already under the normalized sway of the administrative sphere or is not of interest to it is defined as private and hence non-political, and what is left of the public sphere is reserved for the play of the dominant actors and institutions of the administrative sphere. And given the colonization of the lifeworld by the same imperatives that constitute the administrative sphere, there is a double domination – dissenting voices on matters deemed public by the administrative sphere confront an almost overwhelming mobilization of bias against them, while in the freedom of the private sphere “this freedom of each is the freedom – that is, the domination – of those who possess the immanent powers of society” (Ranciere 2006, 300)<sup>23</sup>. Thus to practice

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<sup>22</sup> Ranciere is referring here to the state, but given my analysis I think it is appropriate to adapt his insight to apply to the administrative sphere.

<sup>23</sup> For an example of this, consider the hyper-consumerist base of Western societies, which arguably has public implications related to social stratification, quality of life, and environmental degradation (among

democracy is to struggle against this privatization, to seek to enlarge the public sphere such that challenges to the status quo operations of the administrative sphere cannot be easily ignored, summarily refuted, or co-opted. Indeed, enlarging and invigorating the public sphere is a consistently emphasized theme among proponents of deliberative democracy (e.g. Benhabib 1996; Habermas 1996b; Dryzek 2001; Bohman 2004; Crossley and Roberts 2004).

It is within this context that environmental political action takes place. Discursive input that challenges the administrative status quo may of course be refuted, ignored, or co-opted, but the end result is never a foregone conclusion and may have impacts beyond the particular discursive interaction (Torgerson 2005; Goodin and Dryzek 2006).

Torgerson (1999; 2000) describes three faces of political action – functional, constitutive, and performative – that may appropriately be employed to strengthen the democratic legitimacy and ecological rationality of decisions traditionally restricted to those within the administrative sphere.

Functional politics proceeds as an effort to reform existing decision making procedures and outcomes by working from within existing institutions. Such an approach seeks out discursive openings where democratic participation may, while not immediately challenging the foundational assumptions of the existing process or of the administrative mind, yet exert influence towards more ecologically sensitive outcomes. Functional, pragmatic political action has been criticized as being too accommodating of extant socio-political and economic inequalities, of sacrificing criticality in favour of small

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others). Yet public suggestions to limit consumption are routinely denounced as transgressing individuals' private freedom (and in the post September 11, 2001 rhetoric in the US were tantamount to treason). Hence that which is appropriately public has been effectively privatized. At the same time within the private sphere individuals confront a society so structured that an over-consuming lifestyle is almost unavoidable and where messages encouraging hyper-consumption are ubiquitous.

victories, and as a result potentially perpetuating and further entrenching structural injustices (Eckersley 2002). Further, because of its instrumentalist focus, Eckersley suggests that deep-seated cultural, value, or identity-based conflicts are effectively sidestepped in order to achieve immediate solutions, which may simply leave the ultimate source of conflicts over, for example, resource use intact and hence guarantee similar conflicts will erupt in the future. Torgerson (1999) further points out that functional politics is most open to co-option, citing the example of “sustainable development” being introduced by environmentalists as a radical reorientation of industrial practice but subsequently appropriated by industry and used to green-wash practices that remained essentially unchanged. However, Torgerson argues that this fear is greatly exaggerated and places undue faith in the strength and stability of the administrative sphere. Once even small changes are introduced into decision making practice and discourse their eventual outcome is uncertain, and it is certainly possible, and increasingly likely when critical publics remain active and vigilant, that small reforms may eventually lead to larger fundamental reorientations. In this way the criticism of being too accommodating is also blunted somewhat, as failure to immediately address all structural injustices need not mean that they are forever unchallenged.

Constitutive political action presents a more radical face and seeks the transformation of the existing system by drawing on diverse social forces to create new and radically different political spaces (Torgerson 2000). Akin to the moral monism of environmental activism (Eckersley 2002), constitutive politics tends toward exclusion even as it invites participation from diverse sources in that it cannot countenance whatever is not of its precise mould. This approach also frequently creates extreme

narratives of dire consequences and necessary heroic actions, which limits its effect by distancing those who regard such scenarios as either infeasible or merely expressions from a lunatic fringe. Nevertheless, especially when adopting the posture of the carnivalesque, constitutive political action can throw the status quo into sharp relief and unmask the irrationality of the (objective-instrumentally) rational administrative mind (Torgerson 1999). But Torgerson favours what he has termed incremental radicalism, a combination of functional and constitutive politics that retains their oppositional tensions with a decentred orientation that would guarantee continuing contestation and debate. At its core this would acknowledge the need for fundamental changes together with the recognition that the path to such changes will not be straightforward nor can it be comprehensively planned, and as such diverse political actions at all levels are appropriate.

Yet, if all political action is conceived in instrumental terms, discourse is devalued as merely a means to an end. In fact, on this view the *telos* of democratic discourse would paradoxically be the termination of discourse. This is clearly a problem if I am advocating deliberative democracy, conceived as an ongoing process of discursive contestation, as the best justified and rational way of reaching public decisions. In response Torgerson (1999) introduces Hannah Arendt's concept of performative political action, which considers debate as the essence of politics and as an intrinsically valuable activity. He likens this to an infinite game where the whole point of playing is to play well and to keep the game going. We perform because it is fun, because we want to experience and nurture the relationships developed through discourse. While taken on its own performative politics is difficult to swallow, especially given pressing issues in need

of immediate solution and an administrative sphere in need of transformation, it nonetheless provides a welcome counterpoint to the instrumentalism of functional and constitutive politics and draws our attention to the centrality of discourse in political action. As well, a focus on the performative reinforces the view I have described of democracy founded on ongoing reasonable contestation through discursive interaction.

Torgerson's conception of green political action thus keeps alive the tensions in the green movement between a reformist, functional orientation on the one hand and transformative, constitutive action on the other. As such there is space for legitimate action both within and outside of, accommodating and against, extant administrative institutions. This is increasingly possible to the extent that the concept of a green movement is replaced with that of a critical green public sphere where diverse approaches and understandings are vigorously debated and explored (Torgerson 2000). Such a sphere is constituted through public discourse and through all manner of green political action, but is weakened and diminished when green discourse is practiced in exclusive ways that deny even the possible legitimacy of alternative understandings. So what enables a deliberative form of democracy to rationally engage ecological issues is the existence of a diverse, open, and vibrant green public sphere that engages in discourse within its own boundaries, in other overlapping public spheres, and in the discursive openings created and already present in the administrative sphere.

### **2.7.5 Micro-Deliberative Practice in a Macro-Deliberative Environment**

Within the literature on deliberative democracy there are two general foci – on clarifying the ideal conditions of discourse according to which decision making in formal fora should be structured, and on unstructured, open discourse in the general public

sphere through which legitimate public opinion and will are formed, which subsequently exert influence on formal decision making processes. Hendriks (2006) has termed these micro and macro deliberation respectively in reference to the scale of the participating discursive community. Micro deliberation has the advantage of being better able to ensure that the conditions of free and equal rational discourse are maintained, but it runs the risk of lapsing into an elitist version of democracy due to size limitations necessary for successful and focused discourse as well as the fact that not all individuals or organizations are equally equipped to participate according to the stringent standards of ideal discourse. In particular it would tend to exclude those who are unable or unwilling to pursue decision making as an exercise in expanding their perspectives, which would limit its attractiveness to interest groups and social movements and thus the role of civil society in democratic functioning would be limited. At the same time micro deliberation would favour those more comfortable and skilled in rational debate. Macro deliberation on the other hand is much more inclusive, more open to the wild and unpredictable communication that is characteristic of discourse in a diverse public sphere. But there is also a tendency to underestimate existing inequalities in the public sphere and the communicative distortions they introduce, while being overoptimistic of the self-corrective capacities of public discourse. Marginalized groups and individuals exist as those whose voices and perspectives have not been heard and/or respected – because they lack the resources to make themselves heard, because there is a general mobilization of public bias against them which drowns out their discursive contributions, or because they have internalized and normalized their own marginal status – and there is no mechanism inherent to public discourse that guarantees any of these issues will be ameliorated.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Habermas (1996b, 540) states that while in practice “the actual course of the debates deviates from the

Habermas' (1996b) two-track model of deliberative democracy takes account of both deliberative contexts by situating opinion and will-formation in the public sphere (macro deliberation) which is then transferred as influence, primarily via elections, media, and the courts, to formal deliberative fora in the state (micro deliberation) where decisions are made and policy set. However, as mentioned previously, it is unclear exactly what is deliberative about this transfer and Habermas is vague on the role of specific actors in the process (Hendriks 2006), and so the door is still open for the imperatives of the administrative sphere to direct democratic decision outcomes and the means for resisting this domination are underdeveloped in Habermas' theory (Shabani 2003). Dryzek's (2001) discursive designs, by being located outside of and in opposition to the state and administrative sphere, fail to interface with decision making processes and so also have only indirect, if any, impact in determining outcomes.<sup>25</sup> But Torgerson's (2005) analysis of the administrative sphere suggests that Dryzek's fear of the outcomes of public discursive fora being co-opted when directly connecting with administrative or state institutions is overstated. Indeed, for most proponents of deliberation the more empowered a public micro-deliberative exercise is as part of the final decision making process the better (Goodin and Dryzek 2006).

Ultimately, the success of deliberative politics in achieving rational and democratically legitimate outcomes rests on this interplay between formal, deliberative

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ideal procedures of deliberative politics...presuppositions of rational discourse have a steering effect on the course of the debates." This makes good sense in micro deliberative contexts where discursive presuppositions have been mutually agreed upon from the beginning, but it is considerably more difficult to see how such steering would reliably function in the more informal communicative context of the general public sphere.

<sup>25</sup> Goodin and Dryzek (2006) provide a good overview of a variety of means by which the indirect influence of such "mini-publics" can and do in fact exert significant influence on formal decision making processes. I do not mean to devalue the importance of these forms of influence, but simply to suggest that a stronger and more sure and direct transfer of public opinion and will into decision making power is necessary if they are to form a reliable foundation for democratic functioning.

decision making processes and public opinion and will formed through discourse in the public sphere (Baynes 2002; Rehg and Bohman 2002). Habermas (1996b, xxviii) himself stipulates, if he does not fully explore, that for deliberative democracy to function optimally, discursively formed public opinion and will must generate power that “has a real impact on the formal decision making and action that represents the final institutional expression of political ‘will’.” But the precise ways in which this influence is exerted cannot be normatively developed as they are necessarily context specific (Baynes 2002). Torgerson (2003, 119) echoes this in observing that “discursive designs unavoidably emerge from contexts of power such that a discursive design in the policy process has an ambivalent potential that depends on power structures and alignments.” This context of power is determined by the particular constituents of the public and administrative spheres involved, together with the assumptions, political action preferences, and history of interaction they bring. Bohman (2004) suggests that rather than taking the goal of deliberative democracy to be having decisions based on the discursive participation of all citizens in the general public sphere, we should instead focus on the concept of an emergent public that is formed around a particular “problematic situation” and the discourse that occurs within it. In essence this is a development from the idea of democratic legitimacy based on the outcomes of discourse among “those affected.” Similarly, not all elements of the administrative sphere will be actively involved in every decision or policy making process and particular instances may well draw in actors not generally part of the administrative sphere, and so it makes sense to think of multiple administrative spheres as well. Thus, in specific decision contexts our attention is focused onto the transfer of discursive outcomes, in the form of communicative power,

from the emergent public sphere into the decision making process of the emergent administrative sphere.

Hendriks (2006, 497) suggests that deliberative democracy be thought of as a deliberative system comprised of multiple deliberative venues along a spectrum where at one end is “the informal ‘everyday talk’ among citizens and social movements, and at the other end is the formal decision-making that takes place in public assemblies and parliament.” However, she recognizes that not all forms of deliberation along this spectrum are typically mutually supportive. While ideally there is an informative dialectic between public discourse and formal decision making processes where influence flows both ways, in practice formal processes often fuel antagonism and polarization rather than enhancing the quality of public deliberation. As well, even sensitive and communicatively rational formal deliberations can be undermined and rendered ineffective by loud voices and strategic actions from within the public sphere. Nevertheless the concept of an integrated deliberative system leads us to both celebrate the multiplicity of deliberative spaces and to seek to create and enhance formative connections amongst them.

The idea of “mixed discursive spheres” is introduced as a means to integrate the various discourses occurring around a particular problematic issue (Hendriks 2006). Significantly, these mixed spheres have a membership that would include actors not accustomed to participating together. In Torgerson’s terms this would mean drawing together members from the relevant public and administrative spheres and having them engage in discourse on equal terms. In order to ensure equality, various modes of discourse would have to be employed such that no participants would be privileged

merely by virtue of their greater comfort or skill with particular discursive styles and contexts. As well, by having a degree of formal organization and structure the rules of discourse and appropriate communicative presuppositions could be explicitly agreed upon from the outset, which would help to safeguard against strategic actions and power plays. There may well be other institutional innovations needed to achieve equality, such as information sharing mechanisms, funding provisions, and shared examination of experts, which would vary in importance depending on contextual variables.

While the details of the operation of such mixed discursive spheres remains to be explored further, what is key is that they interpenetrate and join together public and administrative discourses and take on some of the task of transferring public opinion and will into formal decision processes. In Healey's (2006) terms of communicative planning they would exist as vital relational nodes where the practices of various actors are brought together to create opportunities for new understandings and open space for new action possibilities. By being open to the full range of discourses, they would also approach Dryzek's (2001) standard for democratic legitimacy by representing the contestation of discourses existing in the public sphere. Thinking in terms of a deliberative system, by drawing its membership from diverse discursive spheres participants can see that their involvement in the mixed sphere, and even the eventual end of that discourse, does not bring about a cessation of discourse on the issue at hand, which would continue in the various spheres in which they participate. In fact it would be hoped that the deliberative activity of the mixed sphere should inform and enrich discourse on the issue elsewhere. As such participants can use the assurance of continued reasonable discourse to grant legitimacy to the outcomes of the mixed deliberation even if

they do not personally agree with those outcomes (Rehg and Bohman 2002; Bohman 2004). By ensuring publicity in the deliberative operations of the mixed sphere, interested but non-participating members of the public would also be able to evaluate the legitimacy of its outcomes.

This form of discursive interaction would seem to fit well with the concept of communicative planning discussed in section 2.5. In particular, both are founded on assumptions from communicative action and the associated rules of discourse, and both seek to draw in participants from diverse pre-existing discursive communities and have them engage in discourse as equals. As well, as indicated above, the theory of structuration Healey (2006) uses to describe communicative planning is also applicable here. Communicative planning, as does the notion of mixed discursive spheres, emphasizes the importance of being open to the full range of presentational forms, dimensions of knowing, and ways of experiencing and judging that are familiar in the various discursive communities represented. Both also highlight the importance of considering that discourse on the issue under consideration is ongoing; it has existed in various discursive communities before, and will continue there after, and the present deliberation is merely a more focused and collaborative attempt to reach a provisional agreement on a direction for action. Finally, I have described both as being located straddling the border between public and administrative discursive spheres and serving as filters and sluices by which public opinion and will are discursively transferred into administrative processes.

The sort of discursive planning and decision making processes I have been describing would institutionalize the procedures of discourse and employ communicative

rationality as described by Habermas (1996b; 1998a) and Benhabib (1996), and since this would commit participants to critically examine their own and others' perspectives, preferences, and their underlying assumptions, the potential for transformative learning would be fostered (Mezirow 2000). This potential is in fact foundationally implicit in the very notion of deliberative democracy, which assumes that adults can and will transform (aspects of) their perspectives, and hence their expressed preferences, through discursive encounters with others who present different perspectives and preferences. Absent this possibility there is no compelling rationale for pursuing deliberative forms of governance; simple preference aggregation techniques would present far more efficient means of determining public opinion and will. As well, the principle arguments in favour of deliberative democratic governance processes – that they have educative and community-generating power and produce fairer and qualitatively better outcomes – all rely on participants entering into communicative relationships where they mutually learn from one another's differences such that their individual ways of understanding are transformed in at least some respects. Thus, an openness to and a capacity for transformative learning is foundational to deliberative democracy, especially so when confronting systemic problems that have emerged from existing alignments of power and accepted status quo ways of understanding.

Planning and decision making through discursive participation in mixed spheres would foster transformative learning in several important ways. Taylor (1994) has suggested that developing intercultural competency is a transformative learning process and Healey (2006) has argued that discursive engagement across difference, characteristic of deliberations in mixed spheres, is essentially multicultural practice. As well,

possibilities for transformative learning are increased to the extent that participants in dialogue have a direct connection to the topic of discussion (Taylor 2007), which would be ensured by drawing in those directly affected by the outcome of the plan or decision. Epistemological change is also key to transformation, and this is enabled here by deliberately engaging alternative epistemological positions and encouraging diverse communicative forms (Cranton 2006). But it has been argued that this is not enough to complete the learning process, also needed is institutional support to act in new ways based on new understandings (Taylor 2007), and this is something that is provided by the newly established relational connections and by the framework for action articulated in the plans and decisions of discursive processes. From the preceding paragraph and these examples we can see that, as Brookfield (2005a) has observed, transformative learning is both a precondition for and an outcome of successful deliberative democratic practice. This supports the view I have presented that we consider deliberative processes as ongoing, for it is through multiple iterations, as present learning outcomes are applied to the practice of subsequent processes, that we can envision the social evolutionary learning for democracy that Habermas argues is foundational to deliberative democracy (Brookfield 2005b).

While the vast majority of literature on transformative learning supports Mezirow's position that transformation occurs first in individuals, who may then work for social transformation, I believe that with the analysis developed throughout this chapter we can begin to imagine transformative learning also operating at the societal scale. Benhabib (1996) describes discourse in the public sphere as an "anonymous conversation," and Dryzek (2001) speaks of the public sphere as an arena for the

“contestation of discourses.” And to the extent that public discourse is communicatively rationalized, the end result of this conversation and contestation is that the most valid and justified arguments and positions become increasingly distributed throughout society (Cranton 2006) – a process which Habermas (1996b) identifies as the filtering that leads to legitimate public opinion and will-formation. These discursively validated positions are not possessed by any one individual, but rather are an emergent property of the engaged public spheres, and Scott (2003) has used the term “social construction” to refer to this notion of particular understandings and perspectives as created by and through social collectives. Thus discourse within and among public spheres can ideally be considered as a quest for mutual understanding through the presentation and critical exploration of different socially constructed perspectives on an issue, together with their supporting reasons and underlying assumptions, and with the end result being that distortions are identified and corrected and more justified arguments are accepted – in essence social constructions are transformed into superior perspectives. This process contains the same elements and follows the same course as traditional articulations of transformative learning, except that the learning occurs in and among socially constructed discourses rather than individuals. And I would argue that this notion of transformative learning at the societal scale is fundamental to deliberative democratic processes, for it is the means by which communicatively rational opinion and will is developed in the public sphere, which serves the vital function of informing and guiding the operation of more focused discursive decision processes.

Discursive planning and decision making processes can also enhance this societal transformative learning. Bohman (2004, 36) speaks of an anonymous public

conversation taking place as various public spheres debate issues and “through intermediaries translate across linguistic and cultural boundaries the results of deliberative processes in other publics.” By explicitly seeking to identify and consider the full range of public discourses on the topic at hand in a publically visible fashion, discursive decision processes can act as such an intermediary that helps to translate among and feed results back into existing public discourses, which provides opportunity for them to become transformed. Habermas has suggested that this social evolutionary learning requires unresolved systemic problems together with levels of learning regarding the problem latently available in socially constructed world-views but not yet incorporated into action systems (Brookfield 2005a). On this view social progress in rationally dealing with these systemic problems depends on organizing and institutionalizing learning processes that embody norms of criticality, and again the sort of discursive planning and decision making I have been describing can be seen to function as such a critical learning process. Combining the ideas of individual and social transformative learning leads us to Scott’s (2003) observation that personal and social transformation coemerge in a dialectical relationship, and I would argue that both are foundational to and a potent outcome of successful deliberative democratic practice as I have been describing it.

Applying the approach I have described in this section to resource planning and management addresses the main issues raised in section 2.6. Most significantly, it addresses the observed disconnect between participatory resource management practices and democratic theory by establishing a foundation developed from Habermas’ theory of deliberative democracy. As well, I described communicative resource planning exercises

as being quasi-strong – situated between administrative and public discourses and allowing information and influence to flow both ways, which is also characteristic of the form of discourse described above. The concept of mixed discursive spheres also provides for many of the practical considerations described in the resource management literature. The foregrounding of discursive interaction with the acceptance of communicative presuppositions and the associated rules of discourse would rule out reliance on one-way, information-out communication styles. Equal access to and joint questioning of experts would aim to demystify complex and technical information, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives, epistemologies, and interests from the various discursive communities represented would present a fundamental challenge to the positivistic, expert-based rationality characteristic of current administrative planning and management practices. As Torgerson (2003; 2005) points out, inclusive and open discursive practice in planning and policy making processes has already demonstrated its success in pressing changes in administrative problem definition and agenda setting, which suggests an overturning of the typical practice of situating public deliberative opportunities late in the process, after the problem has already been described and preferred alternatives selected. To the extent that all participants are placed on an equal footing and demonstrate a genuine openness to altering their perspectives and preferences through the course of the discourse, both public and administrative participants would not regard the outcome as a foregone conclusion, which has been seen as a serious disincentive to participation.

Ecological rationality is achievable in this approach to discursive planning and decision making to the extent that there is participation from a green public sphere where

individuals have developed and internalized an understanding of ecological values and interests, including those who have adopted an ecocentric perspective (Goodin 1996; Eckersley 1999; Torgerson 1999; 2000). The strength of such discursive exercises ultimately depends on its empowerment from the political system, but regardless of their strength, influence over final decision making processes would be enhanced and made more direct by virtue of the participation of members from the administrative sphere. Of course the potency of this influence would depend on members of the administrative sphere maintaining an open mind and participating in good faith such that they would bring the communicatively and ecologically rational perspective developed in the mixed sphere with them in their various roles in administrative decision making discourses. Indeed, all of the above-mentioned outcomes would depend on the good faith participation, the acceptance of communicative presuppositions, and the adherence to the rules of rational discourse by participants in the mixed sphere, for, following Habermas' discourse ethic, this is what generates legitimacy and enables the achievement of rational outcomes. Nevertheless, such a forum for mixed modes of discourse among diverse actors, appropriately constituted to include representation from the relevant administrative and public spheres, including the green public sphere, emerging around a problematic environmental situation, would thus be sensitive to the socio-historical context of power, ecological complexities, and would instantiate communicatively rational micro-deliberation within the macro-deliberative context.

## **2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter we have seen that Habermas' theory of communicative action implies certain normative conceptions of rationality and social relation that contain an

emancipatory and transformative potential for collectively creating more just and humane societies. I have described how this potential can be developed through Habermasian deliberative democracy theory where the foregrounding of free, equal, and inclusive discourse and the application of communicative rationality lead us to particular normative understandings regarding the structure and operation of democratic practice. This democratic practice is then seen to facilitate the building of intellectual, social, and political capital, to create opportunities for learning, and to achieve rational outcomes with the potential to transform oppressive social structures and patterns of social relation. I have further argued that Habermas' two-track model of deliberative democracy requires a certain weakening, especially in replacing the achievement of consensus with the notion of ongoing reasonable contestation as the *telos* of democratic discourse. This then can be appropriately applied to the structuring of communicative planning and decision making processes, which were seen to be especially relevant in dealing with ecological issues and problems. Analyses of resource and environmental planning practices point out that while there are numerous barriers and difficulties to confront, communicative processes have demonstrated the potential to achieve the positive outcomes referred to above.

I have also explored claims that Habermas' discourse ethic is inimical to an understanding of non-human nature necessary for adequately dealing with ecological problematics, and concluded that while there are serious flaws in his handling of the human-nature relationship, his fundamental concepts need not be regarded as inherently anthropocentric in the strong sense. In fact there are numerous perspectives from which communicative action and rationality can be brought to bear on democratic functioning such that it is sensitive to the complexity of ecological problems and responsive to the

diversity of public perspectives on them. As well, I have deepened the previous discussion of planning and policy making by replacing the emphasis on public-state relations with an analysis of the interplay between public and administrative spheres. Following from this I have described a notion of discursive planning and decision making, considered as a bridge between public and administrative discourse, that was seen to build upon and draw together the various threads developed in this chapter, and which as such begins to form the basis of the generalized conceptual framework for resource and environmental planning and decision making that will be presented in the following chapter.

# **CHAPTER 3 – A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRATIC ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING**

## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

While there are numerous definitions of what a conceptual framework is, I intend it as a way to organize and integrate the key concepts discussed in the preceding literature review in a manner such that they can be clearly communicated to others. In essence it presents my approach to thinking about how environmental planning and decision making can be understood as embodying the principles of deliberative democracy. It is not a model, for it does not attempt to thoroughly describe a process such that it could be directly taken and enacted, rather it represents a particular way of structuring concepts and of viewing the relations among them that, with further investigation and added specificity, could form the basis for the development of a practical model. However, my presentation of the conceptual framework has the look of a model because of its idealized form and because it is anticipatory; it imagines the outlines of possible institutional arrangements that would operationalize the ideals expressed in the conceptual framework. But to be clear, it is not intended as a blueprint.

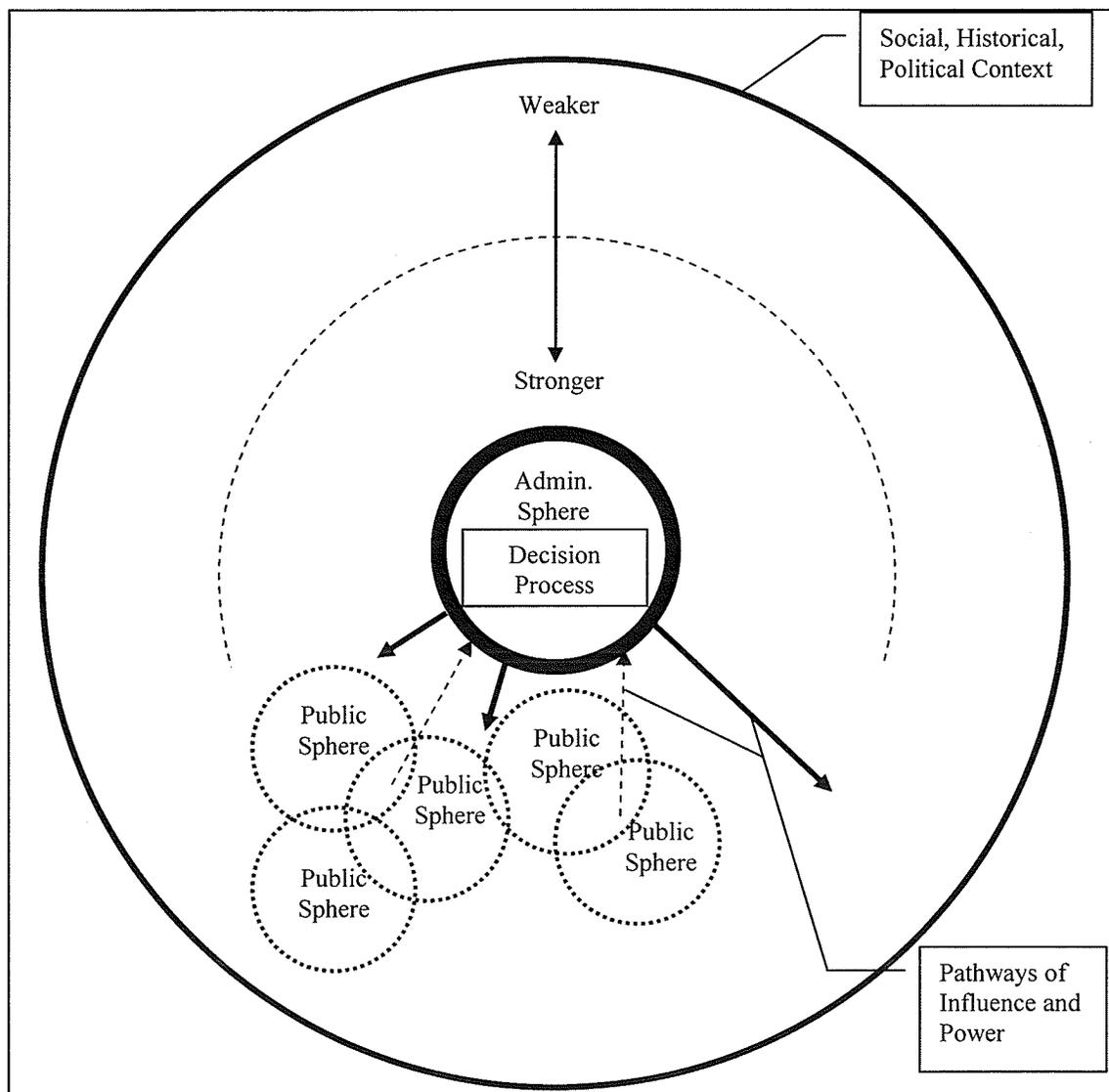
For purposes of comparison, I will start with a brief presentation of a framework describing the current dominant rationalistic approach to planning and decision making, and will follow that with the presentation of my conceptual framework for communicative planning and decision making, which will include a brief discussion of how it addresses some of the main issues raised in the literature regarding the operation of such planning processes. Next I will describe the ideal procedural norms implied in

the framework followed by a discussion of the ideal characteristics of participants and the general tone exhibited in the planning and decision making process. The final section of this chapter will explore some of the ways in which my conceptual framework requires de-idealization for it to align more closely with and take account of existing social, political, and institutional realities, which again would be a first step in translating it into an implementable model or practical guideline to direct and critique actual planning and decision making processes.

### **3.2 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRADITIONAL MODERNIST PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING**

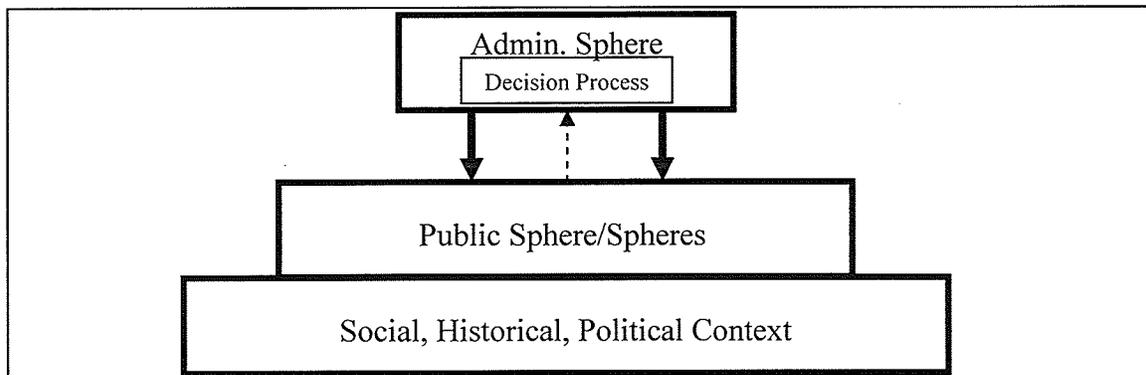
In order to more clearly demonstrate the ways in which my framework differs from traditional approaches, I will first present how the latter might be understood using the same terms and concepts foundational to my framework. In figure 1 the decision process is wholly located within the administrative sphere, whose thick and solid boundary indicates the perception that it is separate from the larger context and from public spheres. Thus, administrative processes are considered self-contained and relatively impervious to influence from outside the administrative sphere. This is further demonstrated by locating the administrative sphere directly in the center, which, recalling Habermas' (1996b) dual use of strong vs. weak and center vs. periphery, is indicative of its decision making strength relative to the more peripheral public spheres. As well, public spheres are located at varying distances from the center and hence possess correspondingly varying degrees of strength – in essence the closer publics align their discourse to central administrative discourses the greater their strength. Nevertheless, regardless of their distance from the center, there are pathways of influence and power flowing from public spheres to the administrative sphere, but, as indicated by the dashed

lines in the figure, these pathways are relatively weak and indirect. They represent public opinion and will directed at the administrative sphere through, for example, elections, the media, demonstrations, or personal communications with administrative members, but these often have limited, if any, steering effect on the outcomes of administrative decision processes. Conversely, the pathways of influence and power emanating from the administrative sphere are significantly more robust, and have the capacity to affect discourse in the public sphere and to change aspects of the overall social context as well.



**Figure 1. Framework of traditional planning and decision making**

In figure 2 this same picture is presented hierarchically. Such a pyramidal structure indicates that higher levels are supported by and built upon those below them, but it also connotes that higher levels possess a greater degree of strength or power. Following this interpretation, figure 2 shows that while action in public spheres is founded on a socio-historical context, it also has the power to modify that context through its actions. But more importantly for my purposes, the administrative sphere, and the decision process located within it, is set above and detached from both the realm of the public and the overall context. As well, the flows of influence and power are explicitly shown predominately oriented in a top-down direction, which is a familiar idiom used to describe traditional bureaucratic decision practices.



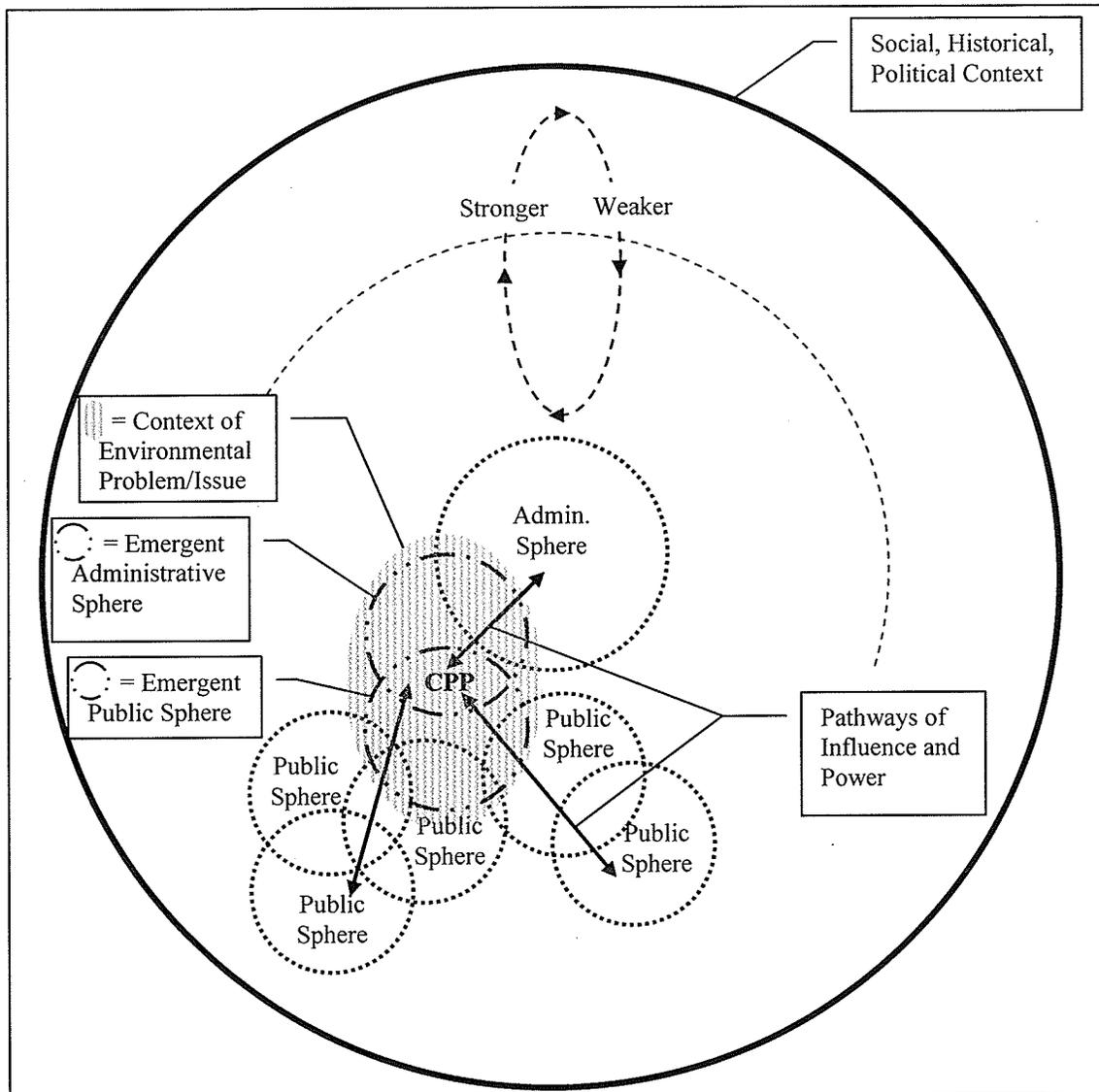
**Figure 2. Hierarchical view of traditional planning and decision making framework**

### **3.3 A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING**

#### **3.3.1 Introducing the Conceptual Framework**

In the framework presented in figure 3, while the administrative sphere is still centrally located in recognition that most often decisions will be finalized and/or implemented from that position, it is now bounded with a dashed line to indicate the discursive openings whereby public individuals and organizations may participate in and/or have influence over administrative discourses. As well there are several new

elements in this framework. The emergent administrative and public spheres represent new discursive communities called into existence within the context of the environmental problem or issue at hand, and which draw their membership from the relevant administrative organizations and public spheres that constitute “those affected” by the plan or decision being developed. These emergent spheres then provide the foundation for establishing a communicative planning and decision making process (CPP) to deal with the issue following the guidelines of deliberative democracy. This also means that the decision making process is immediately situated within and sensitive to the specific context of power characterizing the relations between the emergent administrative and public spheres as well as to the context of the particular environmental issue under consideration. The decision process, as indicated by the position of the CPP, is fundamentally decentred relative to the traditional approach presented in figure 1.



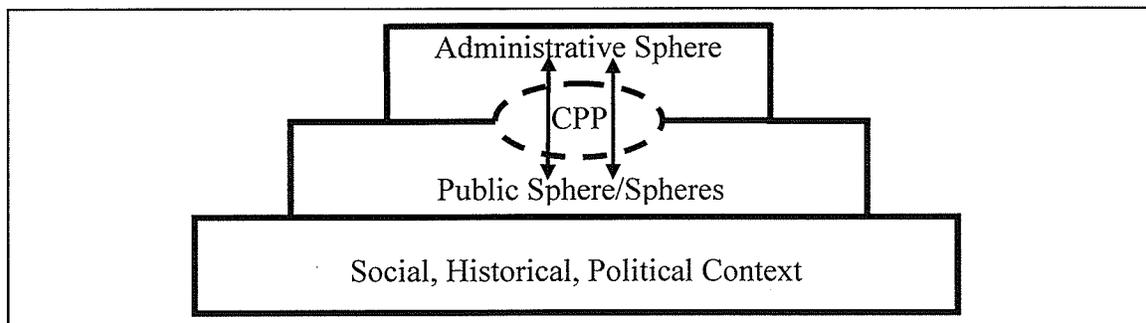
**Figure 3. Framework for deliberative democratic planning and decision making**

Significantly, the CPP interpenetrates relevant aspects of public and administrative spheres, and through its practices joins together and creates new relations among participating public and administrative actors and organizations. The pathways of influence and power are also now mediated through the CPP which serves to communicatively rationalize them and amplify the flows of influence from public spheres to the administrative sphere while critiquing and mitigating the domatory tendencies of administrative influence over public discourses and the socio-political context. This also

suggests that the CPP acts, in Habermas' (1996b) terms, as both a sluice and filter by which public opinion and will, discursively formed in public spheres, are further discursively refined, articulated as actionable plans or decisions, and forcibly passed on to the administrative sphere. In this way the transfer of public opinion and will into communicative power that influences final decision processes in the administrative sphere is itself clearly a discursive process with particular roles for participants in the CPP, which responds to previously identified weaknesses in Habermas' model regarding the underdeveloped nature of this transfer process. Establishing and communicatively rationalizing this formative connection from public discourses into administrative decision processes is in fact the primary role of the CPP. In a sense then I am presenting a three-track model of deliberative democratic functioning, with the concept of the CPP as an additional track situated between and connecting the discursive practices of the "weak" and "strong" publics of Habermas' two-track model. Additionally, the relative strength of the CPP is not determined by its proximity to or alignment with administrative discourses, but rather by a dialectical relation between public and administrative discourses, as mediated through the CPP, such that the strength and democratic legitimacy of the decision process are positively covariant with the non-dominatory deliberative collaboration of public and administrative discourses.

Figure 4 presents this conceptual framework hierarchically. The significant change here relative to the view presented in figure 2 is that the administrative sphere is no longer separate and detached from public spheres, but is instead rendered conspicuously porous by the presence and practices of the CPP, which again interpenetrates and joins together relevant aspects, actors, and organizations of

administrative and public spheres. Here both connotations of the pyramidal structure are intended – in particular the administrative sphere is considered strong in that it is the site where decisions are finalized, but the public sphere is recognized as foundational to the administrative sphere in that the former determines the context, delimits the effective range of operation, and grants legitimacy to the practices of the latter. In addition, the flows of power are now bidirectional, mediated through the CPP, and indicate that formative influence is mutually possessed by administrative and public discourses. Thus the discursive practices of the CPP serve to ensure the communicative rationality of power relations between public and administrative spheres and to identify and challenge diverse forms of domination.

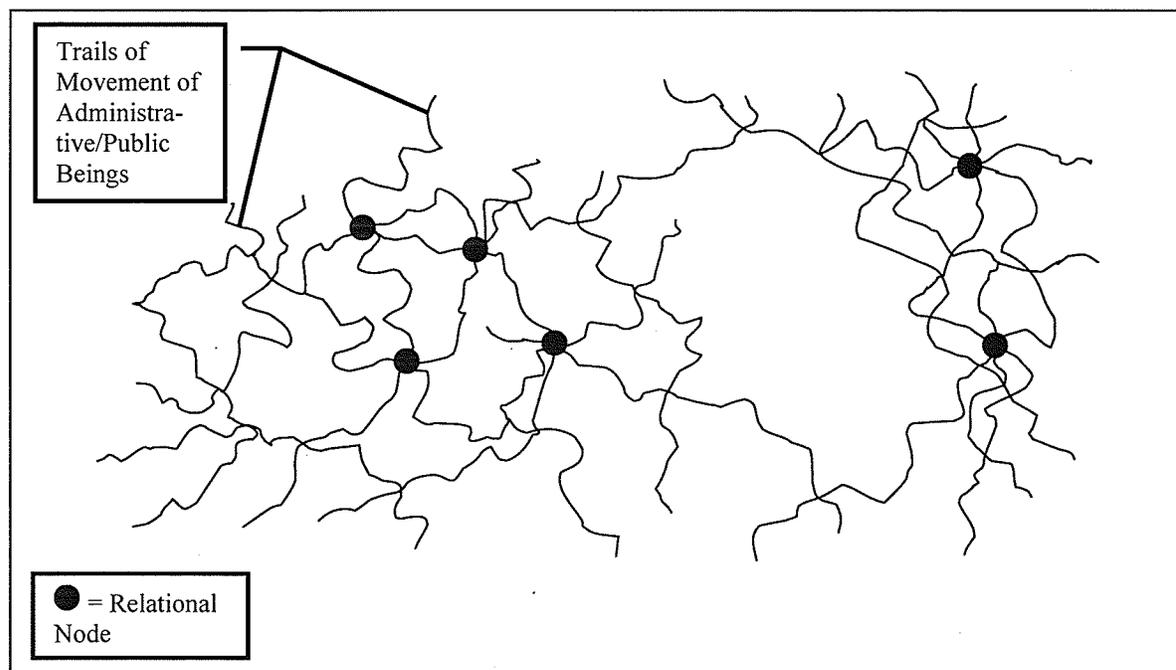


**Figure 4. Hierarchical view of deliberative planning and decision making framework**

A final view of this conceptual framework is presented in figures 5 and 6, which depict a combination of Ingold’s (2006) metaphoric representation of being-in-the-world and Healey’s (2006) articulation of structuration theory applied to communicative planning. Ingold (2006, 13) invokes the metaphor of the fungal mycelium to describe organisms as “trails of movement or growth...along which life is lived: one strand in a tissue of trails that together make up the texture of the lifeworld.”<sup>26</sup> These lines of

<sup>26</sup> Of course the lives of individuals generally extend along multiple trails branching out from a source, but for clarity of presentation I have left figures 5 and 6 relatively simplified in this regard.

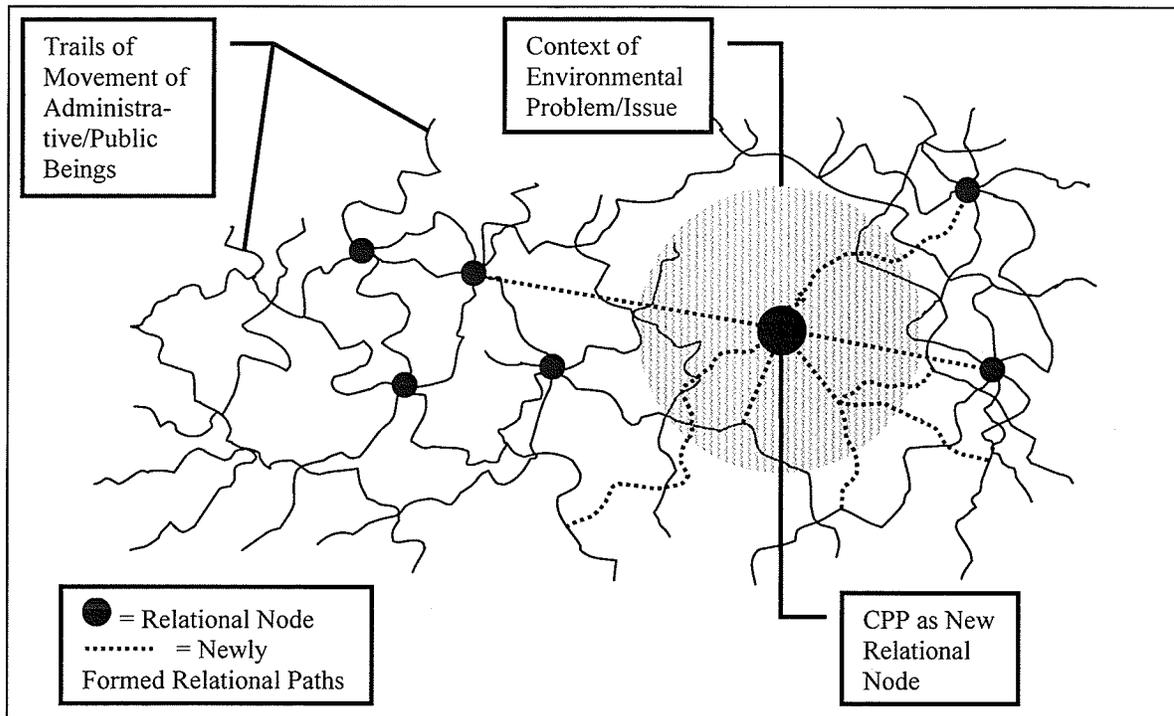
growth become comprehensively entangled with one another as life is lived, and the resulting meshwork outlines the relational character of our shared lifeworld. Recalling the theory of structuration introduced in section 2.5, the social forces and structures that constrain possibilities for human agency inhere in the finegrain of our everyday patterns of social relation, which are of course themselves constituted through our exercise of agency as we trace our paths of development through the lifeworld. But relational webs also contain and produce modes of thought and sets of values, and so as webs are reconfigured through new patterns of social relation, new possibilities for action are opened up and new ways of thinking and valuing are developed. In particular, points of intersection, or nodes, within and among relational webs constitute arenas where ways of thinking, acting, and valuing are learned, transmitted, and potentially transformed through the modification of existing and creation of new patterns of relation. The combination of these concepts is depicted in figure 5.



**Figure 5. Trails of organismal movement mapped as relational webs**

Figure 6 presents this conceptual understanding with the addition of the CPP as a new relational node created within the context of a particular environmental problem or issue. The dotted lines depicting new relational pathways forged in response to the CPP show the resulting growth and development as individuals, groups, and other relational nodes are brought, both directly and indirectly, into new configurations of social relation. As a result the meshwork of the lifeworld is itself enriched and realigned, particularly within the horizon of the environmental issue's context, such that new manners of thinking and understanding are created and new possibilities for individual and collective action are developed. This nicely describes the inherent potential of such a communicative planning and decision making process to transform individuals' meaning making activity, to remake social institutions and practices, and to facilitate the sort of societal transformative learning described in section 2.7.5. It is also clear that even after the problem at hand is provisionally dealt with and the particular CPP's work is done, the newly formed linkages do not disappear nor necessarily atrophy, which enhances possibilities for discursive relations to continue within the context of the environmental problem considered (which itself will evolve over time). Institutional changes and innovations that result from this reconfiguration may also continue to develop such that future iterations of communicative planning and decision making will be enhanced. As well, following this line of thinking we can see that drawing in diversely situated individuals and organizations will enrich the newly formed relational web centered around the CPP and provide it access to a greater array of other webs possessed of diverse manners of knowing and experiencing the world, especially regarding the particular environmental issue or problem at hand. As a result, through successfully

employing communicative rationality in its discursive practice, the outcome of the CPP will itself increase in ecological rationality in proportion to the diversity of the perspectives brought to bear on the environmental issue, thus converting difference into a resource for achieving communicatively rational agreements.



**Figure 6. Communicative planning in the context of relational webs**

So far my description of the conceptual framework has not explicitly addressed what makes following its path particularly well suited to dealing with ecological issues. Dryzek (1996) argues that democratic decision processes should strive to match the size and scale of the ecological problem being addressed. By establishing itself in direct connection to the public and administrative spheres emerging in response to the ecological issue, and to the extent that public and administrative discourses are responsive to the full scope of the issue, the CPP will be well informed of and itself responsive to that scope. As well, the decentred position of the CPP suggests that it is not limited to particular jurisdictional boundaries that often constrain purely administrative

discourses. Further, by forging connections to diverse relational webs whereby various different perspectives and ways of knowing and valuing are drawn into the CPP, its internal complexity will tend to match the external complexity of the issue at hand. This is important because administrative compartmentalization and the reductionist thinking typical of the administrative mind both militate against effectively handling the complex interdependencies inherent to most environmental problems (Torgerson 1999; Petts 2001). In this way the CPP can fulfill communicative planning's promise of being able to effectively work through ecological complexities, recognize interdependencies, and arrive at ecologically rational solutions (Healey 2006).

### **3.3.2 Procedural Norms of the Communicative Planning and Decision Making Process**

I will now briefly describe the idealized normative procedures for the deliberative operation of the communicative planning and decision making process (CPP) central to the conceptual framework presented above. The norms that follow are derived from Habermas' (1992; 1996b; 1998c) theory of communicative action and the associated rules of discourse, together with Brookfield's (2005a; 2005b) discussion of democratic norms and Mezirow's (1991a; 1994; 2000) description of the ideal conditions of learning, both of which are fundamentally built upon the work of Habermas.

The central focus of the CPP will be to facilitate discourse that is oriented toward the satisfaction of validity claims.<sup>27</sup> This means that participants must perform comprehensibly regardless of the presentational form or style used. As discussed previously, privileging rational argumentation, as most deliberative theorists do, can be exclusionary and so a variety of discursive modes should be encouraged, but discursive

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<sup>27</sup> In light of the discussion on de-idealizing Habermas' model of deliberative democracy (section 2.4.5), I am leaving the validity claim to normative rightness out of this discussion.

contributions must be capable of being understood by other participants. As such the CPP may need to retain language translation services as necessary, and to allow space for participants to provide context for or explanation of their preferred mode of communication so as to increase the chances they will be understood. Participants' claims must also be seen to reference something in reality or to make existential presuppositions that others can recognize. While it is not desirable that everyone share the same lifeworld experiences, discursive inputs must still allow others to connect the meaning communicated to some aspect of the world they experience. Finally, participants must demonstrate authenticity in their speaking – they must be able to convince listeners that they truly believe what they are describing and that they are not withholding information or framing their communication for strategic purposes. Discourse oriented towards satisfying validity claims fundamentally requires that all participants must be prepared to offer reasons in support of their claims, and to critique and be critiqued based on the reasons so offered. All of these conditions are necessary in order for a contribution to discourse to be potentially accepted as valid and persuasive, and violating these conditions will be grounds for rejecting arguments or requiring modifications to them.

Also foundational to the practice of the CPP is the requirement that coming to mutual understanding in discourse must be uncoerced. This rules out threats and manipulative sophistry, and also requires that participants not present aspects of their identity (e.g. social position or professional qualifications) as sufficient reason for accepting their claims. Instead, the affirmation or negation of positions presented must be based solely on the force of the argument and the reasons offered in support of it.

With agreements reached in the discursive practice of the CPP founded upon an intersubjective recognition of the validity of utterances, we can be assured that the best arguments presented will in fact be accepted. This will require participants to set aside their personal beliefs and preconceptions and to critically self-reflect to identify and overcome their hidden biases and psychological distortions in order to adjudicate the validity of the claims of others objectively (i.e. on their own merits).

However, coming to agreement as described just above cannot rely exclusively on reaching a strong consensus, which may often be achieved only at the cost of the erasure of difference. Recalling the discussion in section 2.4.5, democratic legitimacy is founded on the assurance of ongoing reasonable contestation and dissent, yet the CPP must be able to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision as to a preferred plan of action. Therefore the CPP should, in its initial stages, discursively develop and adopt a decision mechanism that all can live with in order to enable the eventual production of an implementable plan or decision. Not all participants need accept the “correctness” of the outcome, so long as they are satisfied that their perspectives have been heard and fairly treated, and that with ongoing discourse in other venues over time they may well have more influence over future decisions.

Participation in the CPP must also proceed from a basis of equality, which means that all must have the opportunity to take on the various roles of discourse. As well, financial, technological, and institutional support should be available as appropriate to establish an equitable discursive playing field. Perhaps less obviously, discursive equality also requires that the CPP begin its discursive practice with problem definition, agenda setting, and determination of its terms of reference. Failing to do so would mean

that some participants' understanding of and perspective on the problem at hand would be ruled out of bounds and hence invalidated without providing them opportunity to discursively present and defend them. Equality is further established by insisting that all participants' claims are judged on the same basis, as described in the preceding paragraph. Regardless of how it is accomplished, the core requirement of establishing equality commits the CPP to actively seek to identify and mitigate power imbalances among participants, whatever their source or effect.

As well, successful and communicatively rational discourse must be based on all having access to the most complete and accurate information relevant to the issue under consideration. Thus all must be committed to a full and transparent sharing of information, and the CPP must establish a mechanism to facilitate this. The discourse also needs to be open to diverse alternate epistemologies among the participants, as each represents a relatively unique way of experiencing the world and hence can contribute knowledge and information that would otherwise be missed. Practicing such openness does not release those drawing on alternative epistemologies from having to satisfy the validity claims to comprehensibility and truth, but it does require that those not sharing or familiar with the epistemological position be committed to judging the validity of claims from the perspective and in the context it is offered. The CPP must also effectively democratize knowledge by challenging and demystifying expert cultures and valuing lay knowledge, which is especially relevant in the context of ecological problems where highly technical scientific understandings are often poorly understood by non-specialists while the situated knowledge (e.g. traditional ecological knowledge) of non-scientists is

frequently considered less valid or appropriate to understanding relevant environmental issues.

In order for the process to achieve legitimacy, the CPP must do nothing to foreclose on opportunities for continued discourse on any of the issues raised through its practice. This will require that participants understand any discursive outcomes as provisional best judgements, subject to ongoing reasonable contestation and future revision as new information and perspectives are brought to light. The CPP will of course itself eventually come to a close, but during its life its discourse must be oriented towards supporting and enriching discourse in other locations so that over time the outcome of the CPP will be challenged and revised as appropriate to increase its legitimacy and rationality.

Finally, the CPP's discourse must be inclusive of the full range of interests and perspectives of all those potentially affected by its outcome. As discussed in sections 2.5 and 2.6, this is especially problematic given that focused discursive bodies such as the CPP must have a relatively low number of participants in order to effectively explore the problem at hand and reach agreement on possible courses of action. This inclusivity requirement can be understood to require that any one making a credible claim that they are among "those affected" and that their particular interests or perspective are not present in the CPP's discourse may not be denied participation. However, if the environmental issue under consideration is particularly contentious, it is likely that there could be so many making such a claim that the CPP would be prevented from doing anything but considering demands for inclusion. Nevertheless, full inclusivity would compel the CPP to conduct its discourse with full publicity and to establish a mechanism

for including discursive input from those observing that their interests are not already represented. Including such input does not mean that the person offering it must become a member of the CPP *per se*, rather it represents a commitment to ensure that the CPP's discourse is reflective of the full range of discursive contestation in the public sphere on the matter at hand. A truly inclusive decision process will increase the likelihood that those who have considered and internalized ecological values and interests from a wide range of perspectives will be heard and have their views discursively considered, which is a foundational requirement of achieving ecologically rational outcomes. Failure to achieve full inclusivity will not only corrode the rationality of the CPP, it will also significantly reduce the democratic legitimacy of the entire process.

### **3.3.3 Abilities, Dispositions, and Tone Characteristic of the Communicative Planning and Decision Making Process**

The normative requirements discussed above imply certain ideal dispositions on the part of participants in the CPP, and point to a general tone characteristic of its discursive practice. Underlying each of the norms is the requirement that participants are predisposed to seek mutual understanding among one another. While deliberations are about persuading others of the validity of one's expressed positions, in the CPP this must proceed from a basis of understanding the perspectives and interests of others and of being understood, for otherwise the objective assessment of validity claims is not possible. This orientation toward mutual understanding may indeed be implicit in language use, but it is often distorted as people act strategically based on calculations of individual success. Indeed, the hyper-individualism ingrained in our society tends to depict discourse as a win-lose encounter rather than as an opportunity for the shared benefit of mutual understanding. Nonetheless, meeting the normative requirements of communicative

action necessitates that participants are sincere in striving to understand others from their perspectives and to be understood from their own.

Related to this, participants in the CPP must be profoundly open, not necessarily to agreeing with others, but to considering the issue at hand, and even themselves, from new perspectives as expressed by others. This may be profoundly disorienting, and even threatening, as such a disposition requires openness to the possibility that one's understandings and perspective may not in fact be the best justified way of seeing the world. As a result participants must be capable and prepared to modify or replace some or all of their perspective on matters raised in discourse; they must, in short, be predisposed towards transformative learning. After all, a principle reason for advocating deliberative democracy over liberal preference-aggregation approaches is that individuals' preferences are considered to be refined and developed through discursive engagement, and not set in advance and thus amenable to simple summing. This openness implies an attitude that regards difference non-judgmentally, and that considers discursive engagement across difference as a valuable learning opportunity capable of increasing the rationality of one's own views and those of the collective as well. Such an attitude is especially important in the context of discourse on environmental issues which tend to be highly contentious and invoke profoundly varying perspectives and sets of values. And in order for the communicative rationality of the CPP to also enhance its ecological rationality, participants must be open to considering these significant differences and exploring their potential validity in an open and unbiased manner.

But maintaining the openness and attitude towards difference just discussed relies on a high degree of self-awareness and finely honed capacities for critical self-reflection.

Participants must be able to reflect on and acknowledge the context of their own ideas and to bring the biases and distortions in their meaning-producing structures into their conscious awareness if they are to truly appreciate the value of the perspectives and interests of others. This is also required if they are to rid their own communication of unjustified judgments and to demonstrate authenticity by fully disclosing how they actually view and understand the issues raised. Such abilities assume high levels of moral, emotional, psychological, and intellectual development, to an extent that is in fact rather uncommon, but that are nevertheless necessary to meet the normative requirements of participation in the CPP.

Engaging in this sort of discourse also requires a significant amount of communicative competence, both to be clearly understood and non-coercively persuasive, and to recognize and resist distorted forms of communication from others. As well, since a diversity of discursive modes and presentational styles are to be encouraged, participants need to be possessed of, or easily able to develop, fluency in more than their preferred communicative form. This is essential if they are to speak to, listen to, and critique one another in a truly equal and inclusive manner, and thus be able to reach mutual understanding as the basis from which to evaluate and eventually decide upon possible solutions.

Finally, participants must have well developed critical capacities. The very promise of communicative rationality depends on discourse being a forum for the critical assessment of claims and the arguments and reasons that support them. Participants must be skilled in identifying the often unacknowledged assumptions implied in one another's discursive offerings, in exploring the consequences of holding to them, and in assessing

their validity. Criticality is also required in order to recognize the often subtle forms of coercion and domination that work through discourse, and to identify their source and means of propagation so that a means of mitigating them can be collaboratively developed. But this critical attitude cannot be personal, as it is appropriately directed at ideas and arguments and not individuals, nor can it be destructive, for the express purpose of critical discourse is to collaboratively build upon the diversity of validated knowledge and perspectives available to the discourse such that the outcome is rationally superior to any of the individual contributions.

As is clear from the preceding discussion, the overall tone of the CPP's discursive practice is one of respect – for oneself, for others, and for the knowledge and understandings developed throughout the discourse. Respect here implies recognizing, valuing, listening to, and seeking to understand one another across differences in identity, social positioning, and discursive community membership. The CPP should serve the project of democratization by displaying an open and inclusive tenor such that all will feel free and welcome to participate as equals and with the assurance that the positions they advocate will be given a fair and unbiased hearing. It should be clear to all that the process is a collaborative one that joins them together in a mutually beneficial quest of arriving at the most rational and just solution to a shared problem currently possible.

#### **3.3.4 De-Idealizing the Conceptual Framework**

As was the case with Habermas' model of deliberative democracy, my conceptual framework is in need of de-idealization in order to take account of existing social, political, and institutional realities that constrain the ideal planning and decision making

practices described in the preceding sections. I will briefly discuss some of the key aspects of the conceptual framework in need of such treatment.

First of all there are the practical issues of how the CPP is initiated, and by whom, and how its participants are determined, which is not addressed in my framework. Nevertheless both have significant implications, especially regarding problem definition, agenda setting, and determination of the scope of what the CPP is to consider. This is demonstrated by the case of environmental assessment where the decision process is most generally initiated and conducted by the proponent, acting as a member of the administrative sphere, and as a result the assessment process is often constrained by having the problem, agenda, and terms of reference set before significant deliberations even begin (Sinclair and Diduck 2005). An exploration of how this might be addressed is beyond the scope of this thesis, which is focused on the operation of the process and its relational position relative to public and administrative spheres, but what is clear is that within the context of my conceptual framework the CPP must be considered an independent, non-partisan, and unbiased forum for it to achieve legitimacy and arrive at rational outcomes. While in the context of present realities its initiation will most often be from a non-ideal basis, the CPP should exercise its capacity for self-critique and find ways to challenge unjustified boundaries imposed upon it, reconfiguring itself as necessary, in order to approach the ideal of independently exploring the full range of perspectives and interests implicated in the problem under consideration.

I have already discussed some of the implications of Habermas' "leap of faith" in identifying mutual understanding, consensus seeking, and freedom from domination as inherent qualities of undistorted human communication in section 2.4.5. This view

contrasts with others who see communication as naturally involving power and domination (Flyvbjerg 1998), and I dealt with this tension by reframing the *telos* of discourse as ongoing reasonable contestation and dissent rather than consensus. However, contained in the notion of “reasonable” contestation is the assumption that the more positive view of communication characterizes its best, undistorted form, and which view is necessary to release the potential for communicative rationality and transformative learning that are basic to my conceptual framework, especially the workings of the CPP. So in a sense I follow Habermas in his leap of faith, yet I recognize that historically this has not been entirely typical of how communication is used, particularly in political contexts. Thus it would be naïve to assume that discourse in the CPP would naturally, on its own, proceed following the ideal rules of discourse, and this would need to be explicitly recognized as an area where participants would need to be constantly critically aware and reflective on their own and others’ communicative practice. Such vigilance would act as a self-corrective, but there would still need to be procedures established (e.g. censure, collaborative reframing) to allow the CPP to continue to function in the face of some participants who will have difficulty avoiding using their speech to dominate or coerce others.

As described in section 3.3.3, my conceptual framework assumes participants with highly developed communication and critical analysis skills, who have progressed to the highest levels of moral and psychological development, and who are predisposed to be open to and respectful of difference. However, in practice the CPP will be composed of actual humans who will all be non-ideal in at least some of these respects, but the process will still have to attempt to achieve the normative requirements of democratic

discourse. This highlights the need to reach mutual understanding of and institutionalize the rules of discourse from the onset so that when violations inevitably occur any participant can freely identify them with the support of the already agreed upon discursive standards. The inbuilt penalty for violating the rules should be that the discursive contribution is immediately seen to lack validity, but, as when a trial judge instructs the jury to “disregard the previous remark”, there is no guarantee that those sympathetic with the violating claim will in fact regard it as invalid or that others will not yet be swayed by it. Power imbalances and prejudicial biases are in fact ingrained in our social structures and institutions, as is the tendency to act strategically with primary regard for our own preferences, and so we should expect that they will be present in the CPP as well. However, as discussed in section 2.4.5, failures to achieve the ideals of discourse do not automatically strip the CPP of legitimacy, rather legitimacy is attained relative to the participants and affected public’s acceptance that an honest and sincere effort was made to deal with imperfections so as to increasingly approach ideal conditions. As well, even in instances where one or more participants consistently significantly violate the procedural norms and expectations there may yet be considerable positive outcomes among other participants, for one of the strengths of centralizing discourse is that it is a medium that is inherently slippery, ill-suited and uncertain as a dominatory tool.

The formative linkage established between the CPP and the emergent administrative sphere is intended to increase the strength of the CPP, to subject administrative discourse to communicative rationality, and to increase the overall rationality of the CPP’s outcomes by drawing in yet another source of potentially valid

knowledge and perspectives on the issue at hand. While Torgerson (2003; 2005) has argued that Dryzek's (2001) fear of public discourse being co-opted when located too close to the administrative center is ill-founded on an assumption of coherence and stability beyond what the administrative sphere possesses, it is still true that administrative processes dominate most planning and decision making, both in practice and in the minds of many citizens. Thus it is a very real danger that the CPP would be significantly steered by administrative imperatives, and resisting this domination may be difficult to accomplish. This highlights the need for participants to understand that they are, in their membership in the CPP, in fact separate from the administrative sphere, that its imperatives have no *de facto* power over their discourse. As well, truly free and open discourse is notoriously hard to predict or control from any one location as its course is determined by the intersubjective relations of those engaging in it. Nonetheless, this is an area in need of particular vigilance on the part of the CPP, requiring a continual critiquing of the relations of power between administrative organizations or actors and the discursive workings of the CPP. The only safeguard any public discursive process has against the dominatory tendencies of the administrative sphere, regardless of how closely they are linked, is this constant watchfulness and incessant critiquing and discursive (in)validation of the messages and underlying assumptions that find their way by various means from administrative into public discourses. Still, the co-optive or coercive power of the administrative sphere may in some instance be impossible to completely overcome. In most instances the CPP will rely to some extent on expertise, funding, and/or political empowerment from the administrative sphere, which gives it the power to frame vital components of the environment the CPP must work within. It may be that in some cases

the best the CPP can do is strive to identify and publicize the ways in which its operations and intentions are being overridden by powers beyond their control, with the hope that the general public will advocate on their behalf or reject the processes outcomes as democratically illegitimate and not in their best interests.

Discussions of the normative requirements for complete equality and full inclusivity tend to underestimate existing power inequalities that are built into social structures and institutions. Neither can be achieved by merely calling them into being as procedural conditions and then naively trusting it to be so, and as such the CPP will have to function with varying degrees of inequality and exclusion in place. As above, this is an area in need of constant vigilance and criticism from within and without the process. But in order to address such issues once they are identified the CPP must be flexible and prepared to act creatively with a clear view of the specific context as each instance of exclusion or inequality will be relatively unique. Again, it is less important that the ideal be achieved than that the CPP be seen to be sensitive to shortcomings in this regard and make every reasonable effort to ameliorate them.

As well, the conceptual framework assumes that if the CPP carries out its work successfully and adheres closely to the normative requirements, then its strength will be such that its decision outcome will be accepted by whatever administrative organization or actor is politically empowered to enact it. However, given our current social and political structures such participatory processes are nearly always much weaker, able only to make recommendations which may or may not be implemented or which may be twisted and distorted into something quite contrary to what the process's participants intended. It is true that administrative organizations risk undermining their own

legitimacy when they ignore or manipulate outcomes of a publically visible process that has achieved legitimacy in the eyes of the affected public, but often they feel secure enough in their position of power to take that risk (and often this feeling proves justified). Yet this too is perhaps overstated. Goodin and Dryzek (2006) present a much more hopeful, if less absolute, picture of how the deliberative outcomes of “mini-publics”, even when only in the form of non-binding recommendations, can and do have significant influence over administrative outcomes. This influence includes: informing public debate and building public confidence and social capital such that potent public oversight of the administrative sphere is increased; shaping policy and decisions by providing new information and perspectives to the administrative sphere and establishing the range of what will be considered acceptable and legitimate by the public; and resisting administrative co-optation of public opinion and will by making it publically visible and refining it through a discursive process that is difficult for the administrative sphere to predict or control.

In all of this it is important to recall Torgerson’s (1999; 2005) insight that discourse always has only an ambivalent potential for democratization and enhancing the rationality (ecological and otherwise) of decisions. Pushing discourse in these positive directions depends on the alignment of power relations in the particular context, on how they are dealt with, and, significantly, on the commitment and capacity of discursive participants to hold as closely as possible to the normative requirements discussed in section 3.3.2. In light of the foregoing discussion of non-ideal realities confronted by the CPP we must expect that as a result its discourse will not always immediately serve the project of advancing democracy nor will it always embody ecological rationality.

However, we must also remember that the underlying theory of deliberative democracy takes a more holistic view and evaluates decisions not just in the provisional form of the outcome of a single discursive exercise, but rather considers what they may become through ongoing reasonable contestation and repeated iterations of discursive processes. As such we can consider focused discursive fora, like the CPP I have described, as vital steps in a social process of learning democratic reason so that over time our capacity for practicing democracy and arriving at ever more rational decisions will grow and develop. This is the larger goal that can be accomplished, despite the absence of ideal circumstances or people, by sincere and honest efforts to collaboratively engage in planning and decision making as suggested by the conceptual framework I have presented. Hence, although it is presented as an ideal, I think it is well-suited for our imperfect world.

## **CHAPTER 4 – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The primary purpose of this research has been to describe an answer to the question of how people in society can engage in discourse together such that ecologically rational and democratically legitimate plans can be developed and decisions reached regarding environmental problems that affect them. In developing my response I pursued the following objectives:

- (1) To critically review the relevant literatures on the theory of communicative action, transformative learning, deliberative democracy, communicative planning, ecological democracy, and resource and environmental management.
- (2) To develop and thoroughly describe a conceptual framework for resource and environmental planning and decision making based on and reflecting the normative assumptions, ideal conditions, and best practices identified in the literatures considered in objective 1.
- (3) To make recommendations regarding future practical application and empirical testing of the conceptual framework.

The crux of my answer to the research question is articulated in the comprehensive and generalized conceptual framework for resource and environmental planning presented in chapter 3, which is founded upon communicative presuppositions that foreground deliberation and learning. This framework emerged out of the literature review (Chapter 2) conducted in satisfying my first objective and represents my own thinking and creative synthesis, after considerable reflection, of the range of literatures considered. My recommendations regarding the application and testing of this framework, together with suggestions for how this research could be further enhanced, are presented in section 4.3.

### **4.2 REFLECTION ON PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES – CONCLUSIONS**

In my literature review I found consistent confirmation of the ideal conditions of democratic discourse, namely that it is characterized by: full inclusion of all those

potentially affected by the issue under consideration; complete equality in participation, which includes power neutrality, role reciprocity, information sharing, and the removal of bias regarding status, identity, and presentational mode; a commitment by participants to seek mutual understanding based on the truthful giving of reasons for positions advocated; and a willingness by all to be open to alternative perspectives, to subject their own and others' perspectives, claims, and reasons to critical scrutiny on their own merits, and based on that to accept the most convincing arguments as provisionally valid given the current state of available knowledge, perspectives, and arguments. As well, I found general agreement in the various literatures regarding the promise of a communicative or deliberative approach to governance, which includes that it can: develop and articulate legitimate public opinion and will; steer governmental and administrative processes in the direction of the general public interest; create new social linkages that build social capital and solidarity and carry the potential to transform existing patterns of social relation; serve an educative function through the collective presentation and critique of diverse knowledge claims and through the critical consideration of alternative perspectives, both of which may lead to transformative learning; cope effectively with the complexity and uncertainty characteristic of environmental problematics; and produce plans and decisions that are qualitatively fairer and more rational than traditional liberal-democratic approaches.

However, there were also arguments in the literature that I felt were ill-supported and/or in need of modification, especially when considering some of the communicative ideals in the light of practical application, and I will briefly describe some of the most significant ones below. I found that the ideal requirements for discursive participation

presumed high degrees of communicative competence and moral development, indeed far beyond what can be reasonably expected of any actual participant. As well, there tended to be an under-appreciation of the complexity and ubiquitous presence of power relations within the very fabric of social and political institutions, and hence in all communicative contexts. Most often ideal conditions were simply referenced as necessary or were regarded as an evaluative benchmark, with little or no guidance as to how actual deliberative practice should best proceed when they are only partially achieved. In response I have suggested that what is necessary is an understanding of ideal conditions as a tool that enables ongoing critique of inevitable processes shortcomings, but that is really only a partial answer. A more complete response could emerge from a consideration of specific institutional arrangements and procedural norms that work to mitigate the distorting effects of non-ideal realities on democratic discourse, and which could be gleaned from the participatory process literature or explored in an action research context as described below.

Another area in need of modification was the fairly consistent insistence throughout the literatures on consensus as the ideal outcome of deliberative governance processes and as a guarantor of their legitimacy. This again betrays a simplistic conception of power, here into a strict consensus versus coercion dichotomy. The paradoxical result is that while deliberative approaches draw their strength from a consideration of different perspectives, epistemologies, and life-histories, the goal of ideal convergence suggests striving to overcome difference to arrive at a socially homogenous understanding. Instead, following Rehg and Bohman (2002), I have suggested that the ideal outcome of democratic discourse be considered the assurance of

ongoing reasonable contestation with others of different minds, with critique and dissent as the democratic pillars upholding the promise of justice and rationality. As alluded to above, such an understanding provides part of the answer regarding how to proceed in the absence of ideal conditions, as, for example, it allows participants to accept the legitimacy of present, provisional discursive outcomes that they do not fully agree with so long as they are convinced that currently defeated positions may well have greater impact in future deliberations.

I also found it problematic that throughout the vast majority of the literatures there was a focus on viewing deliberative planning and decision making processes as a sort of organized discourse in the public sphere that then seeks to exert influence indirectly over administrative processes in the state as they enact laws and policy. However, how this translation of public communicative power into state administrative power functions, what exactly is deliberative about it, and what actual formative power public discourse has over administrative processes is either absent or underdeveloped. In Habermas' two-track model of deliberative democracy, state administrative processes are themselves deliberatively structured and are responsible to somehow pick up the outcomes of informal public discourse to inform their own discursive practice. The communicative planning and natural resource management literatures clarify this somewhat by describing more formalized public participatory processes that pick up and discursively treat issues raised in the public sphere, provide them with potential solutions, and pass the results on to the state. I also drew on the work of Torgerson (1999) to point out that administrative decisions affecting the public take place in institutions and organizations beyond the state, in what he terms the administrative sphere, and thus the outcomes of public discourse

must be able to exert influence over more than just state governance processes. In my conceptual framework I have suggested institutionalizing communicative public processes as discursive arenas located between and interpenetrating public and administrative spheres, as a sort of third track linking the two tracks of Habermas' model. In this way the transfer of power from public to administrative discourses is itself deliberative, and if institutionally embedded in democratic practice would compel administrative processes to publically and rationally confront the outcomes of public discourse, which should reduce the chances that such outcomes will be ignored or co-opted.

Finally, although it seems clear that learning is fundamental to achieving the promised positive outcomes of the deliberative planning and decision processes articulated in the literatures on deliberative democracy, communicative planning, resource and environmental management, and ecological democracy, it is itself seldom the focus of attention.<sup>28</sup> As a result the dimensions of learning relevant to such processes, how they function to enhance or facilitate desired process outcomes, and how this learning can be deliberately fostered (or is inhibited) within them is not generally appreciated. I have addressed this in my review by exploring the relevance and place of transformative learning in deliberative democratic processes, which allowed me to identify some of the ways learning interfaces with and can enhance our understanding of concepts in these literatures. I have concluded that transformative learning is in fact implied in the basic concepts of deliberative democracy and that striving to foster

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<sup>28</sup> This is less of a shortcoming in the resource and environmental management literature where some authors do indeed foreground individual and social learning as a vital component of participatory governance processes (e.g. Webler, Kastenholz et al. 1995; Diduck 1999; Sinclair and Diduck 2001; Leeuwis and Pyburn 2002; Diduck and Mitchell 2003; Fitzpatrick and Sinclair 2003; Keen, Brown et al. 2005; Sinclair, Diduck et al. 2008). However, this learning focus is the exception rather than the rule.

Mezirow's (2000) ideal conditions of learning will enhance the quality of discursive outcomes. Nevertheless the role of learning in deliberative processes is an area in need of further exploration and development.

My conceptual framework for communicative planning and decision making in environmental contexts attempts to encapsulate the ideals articulated in the literature and reflect my critique, summarized above, such that the promise of deliberative democratic practice might be realized. In particular, I locate the communicative planning and decision making process (CPP) between public and administrative spheres such that, by adhering to the procedural norms I have outlined, it can provide the deliberative transmission of the outcomes of public discourses into administrative decision making. As well, directly connecting the CPP to the emergent public and administrative spheres that arise in response to particular environmental problems or issues should allow the process to be directly attuned to the contextual variables, especially the context of power, that frame the problem at hand and shape appropriate responses to it. The framework is idealized, and I have identified areas where a certain de-idealization is necessary in order for it to be applied to real planning and decision making contexts. This requires, as just discussed, a deeper appreciation of the context of power relations implied in particular instances, and a recognition that democratic decision processes must themselves discursively devise procedures for dealing with inevitable failures to hold to the ideal conditions of discourse.

#### **4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

My conceptual framework, viewed as an ideal standard, could be used as an evaluative tool to assess ongoing or completed deliberative environmental planning and

decision processes. Used in this way, the framework's structure and procedural norms would focus attention onto what I have argued are vital elements of such processes, thus providing a basis from which to identify areas of particular strength and weakness as well as procedural failings in the process under consideration. It could further help in unravelling the factors underlying the areas and failings so identified. This approach would also provide opportunity to critique the conceptual framework itself by highlighting structural arrangements and procedural norms observed to be particularly difficult to achieve or fundamentally problematic, under or over-emphasized in my articulation, or the evaluative process may suggest the importance of other structures or norms not included in my framework. However, using it as an evaluative tool would have to be done with sensitivity and caution as the process being assessed would not likely have been intentionally structured nor have committed itself to the procedural norms precisely as laid out in my framework, and as such finding that it does not measure up to that standard may be a trivial conclusion. A possible response to this would be that not every element of the framework need be applied, nor every aspect of the process be evaluated, but instead evaluation could be focused onto specific areas where the structure and/or intentions of process under consideration closely parallel elements of the framework. Nevertheless, I do feel that using my framework to evaluate specific instances of discursive planning and decision making could lead to an improved understanding of deliberative processes, of how and why they may fall short of their goals in particular instances, as well as potentially helping to refine and improve the framework itself.

Another application for my conceptual framework would be to use its structure and procedural norms as an ideal template directing the initiation and operation of deliberative environmental planning and decision making processes. As I have argued in this thesis, I believe this would be more democratically legitimate and would result in fairer and more ecologically rational outcomes than typical planning and decision processes currently in use. Processes deliberately structured in this way would then become fruitful cases for evaluative research, as described above, aimed at further developing and refining the framework through reference to actual practice, and would also provide (dis)confirmation of the basic assumptions and elements of the framework.

Perhaps the most thorough and powerful possibility for using, testing, and enriching my framework would be in the context of action research. There is a striking degree of agreement between the foundational assumptions and theoretical commitments of action research and the planning and decision making framework I have developed. Both are based on the belief that the most valid perspectives and understandings and the most democratically defensible decisions emerge from the inclusive participation of those actively involved in the issues under consideration and affected by the decisions taken, and they further hold that such decisions are vitally enriched by drawing on the diversity and multidimensionality of the persons engaged in developing them (Greenwood and Levin 2007). Thus they share a participatory, communicative worldview, and a commitment to such things as the democratization of knowledge and the collaborative involvement of participants from the earliest stages in problem definition, agenda setting, and procedural development. As well, both foreground a fundamental critical stance

towards existing social practices and power structures as they endeavour to enact justice and create emancipatory change in the world (Kemmis 2001; Reason and Bradbury 2001).

While action research prizes knowledge developed in and through active practice, this involves a dialectical relationship between the theoretical knowledge brought by the professional researcher and the situated experiential knowledge of the local participants (Greenwood and Levin 2007). Thus the theoretical understandings underlying and articulated in my framework could be brought into an instance of environmental decision making, set up as an action research exercise, where it would both inform and be informed by the participatory practice of the decision making process. Opportunities for action research could include working with a specific public, community, or organization confronting contentious resource or environmental management issues seemingly out of their control, but that desires to take on the sort of quasi-administrative role implied in my framework in order to ensure its interests and perspectives frame and direct final administrative decisions. An example where such an approach could be particularly relevant is with Canadian First Nations communities, many of which face intense external pressures for resource development together with internal pressures to balance the achievement of local sustainable economies with the maintenance and strengthening of traditional culture, and all of this while trying to assert their rights to self-governance in the face of complex and sometimes contradictory federal and provincial legal and regulatory frameworks. The history of federal paternalism, the frequent exploitation of resources on traditional lands without the meaningful involvement of First Nations people in decision making, and the emancipatory potential of both my framework and action research further recommend First Nations communities as a good example of a specific

context where an action research application of my conceptual framework would be appropriate.

Whatever the specific context of application, such an exercise would carry an inbuilt potential to mitigate some of the weaknesses inherent to my largely theoretical framework, especially as the inclusive participation of those directly living with and engaged in the problem would provide a pathway to generate understanding and insight regarding contextual variables such as the historic and present context of power relations relevant to the specific issue at hand. As well, the problematic issue of the unattainable ideal conditions and procedural norms implied in my framework would be somewhat ameliorated by the commitment of action research to continual cycles of critical reflection by participants on their own ongoing behaviour, interrelations, and general practice. The research outcomes would aim at the liberation of participants and their communities from the hegemonic domination of economic and administrative imperatives I have described earlier, and in that regard would be primarily applicable to the particular context where the research was conducted. But action research also generates valid social knowledge and can contribute to more general social understandings and theories, and as such the research outcomes would also contribute to a deeper and refined understanding of my conceptual framework and the theory behind it, which would add to our bank of social understanding of democratic processes in general.

Any of the potential uses of my research suggested above would provide for the testing of communicative theory with reference to empirical data and actual practice, a need much cited in the literature. As well, they would provide a grounded position from which to imagine, experiment with, and evaluate particular institutional arrangements and

processual procedures appropriate to particular contexts that are necessarily underdeveloped in a generalized framework. Ultimately, I would hope and expect that any use of my research would contribute to democratization and justice in the specific instance of its use as well as to our overall understanding and practice of inclusive, participatory democracy, especially pertaining to resource and environmental concerns.

Finally, while I considered a relatively broad range of literatures in developing the theoretical perspective that my conceptual framework emerged from, there is much that I did not consult that could provide additional lines of sight across the terrain of deliberative environmental planning and decision making, thus potentially enriching our understanding and improving the direction that could be given to future practice. I will only briefly mention a few fields that may prove fruitful for future researchers wishing to build upon what I have done. I have suggested that learning is both fundamental to and generally underdeveloped in this context, and this could be addressed through a more thorough exploration of the diverse approaches to transformative learning theory as well as by drawing in other learning theories such as organizational and social learning. Similarly, the deliberative democracy, planning, and resource management fields are richer and more diverse than what is included here and an expanded consideration of them would doubtless strengthen my analysis. As mentioned earlier, the sociological literature, and in particular the work of Pierre Bourdieu, could be drawn on to further our understanding of the conditioning effects of social structures and social positioning on individuals' understandings as well as their opportunities for achieving the positive values promised in democracy. A consideration of the historical literature, for example on the history of democracy, environmental governance, and human-nature relations

could also prove instructive. As well, I think an exploration of insights from psychoanalytic perspectives, which infuse much of the work in the vibrant and diverse world of critical theory as well as of adult and social learning, could be a relevant contribution, especially to my analysis of the dynamics and role of learning and socio-cultural structures in democratic discourse. And finally there is a growing body of literature describing and evaluating practical aspects of deliberative practice, and this work, especially that which is concerned with environmental contexts, could provide grounding to the theory and would help shed light on specific pragmatic approaches and structural arrangements that have proven to be successful in enabling deliberative processes to achieve the positive goals set out in the theory and conceptual framework contained in this thesis.

#### **4.4 CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

As I reflect on my research, it has been a powerful learning journey for me. In particular, I have come to a greater appreciation of the value of reasonable and civil dialogue in the public sphere, of the latent transformative power of actually striving to understand differently situated others on their own terms, and of the necessity of constant critique of illegitimate workings of (especially administrative and economic) power in distorting public discourse and steering democratic outcomes against the public interest. Through this I have come to a heightened appreciation of the foundational importance of a free and vibrant public sphere, and of critical public discourse within it, in underpinning democratic institutions such as the CPP I have described and in upholding the promise of non-dominatory democratic functioning in general. In a sense my own learning, which has been facilitated by a critical and dialogical immersion in a wide range of literatures,

confirms the basic outline of the potential I have ascribed to deliberative processes – that through an open and critical exposure to difference where we consider the validity of the insights and perspectives of others we can indeed come to understandings that transcend our initial particularistic perspectives and that in this sense are more communicatively rational and hence more reliable to guide our actions.

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