

**CIVIC-IZING MARKETS:
SELLING SOCIAL PROFITS IN PUBLIC DELIBERATION***

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ABSTRACT:

Scholars investigating the commercialization of deliberation have forecasted two scenarios: one in which deliberation is protected from the market and retains its emancipatory power, and the other in which deliberation is corrupted by market logics. Drawing on the economic sociology of “moralized markets,” we find that practitioners themselves frame the deliberation market as a normative alternative to both ordinary politics and business as usual, using new managerialist discourses of spiritual, creative, and emotional fulfillment. Multi-method field research demonstrates that paid deliberation consultants resist commercialization and commodification, sacralizing practitioners’ callings as a form of civic evangelism and fostering the art of deeply-contextualized process design. The moral authority of this “designer democracy” is grounded in performance measurement and “citizen accountability”: a rejection of consumer demands in favor of authentically “positive” attitudinal and behavioral change. As such, the social profits produced in public deliberation provide quiet forms of regulation for their elite sponsors, reframing stakeholder surveillance, control, and legitimacy goals as outgrowths of a public-spirited alignment of collective aspirations. Paradoxically, deliberative processes may simultaneously enhance political equality and reinforce social inequalities by virtue of their protection from market excesses.

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The principles of economics and of participation do not sit easily together.
Involve (2005)

Some people say, “Talk is cheap.” We say, “Conversation is cost-effective.”
Practitioner, dialogue and
deliberation listserv (Database files)

Political scholars and reformers envision public deliberation as a restorative, “real utopian” remedy for an ailing, increasingly privatized public sphere (Fung and Wright 2003; Wright 2010). Public dialogue and deliberation processes, which convene lay citizens to engage with each other on the major questions of our time, seem a throwback to a less commercial, public-spirited civic life—literally “free spaces” (Evans and Boyte 1992) light years from the partisan venom and professional punditocracy that have proved so lucrative to international media conglomerates and influence-seekers (Crenson and Ginsberg 2002; Vogel 1989; Wolin 2008). Despite these perceptions, given that they are embedded in 21st century social processes, public deliberation projects do not occur in a space free of commerce. For far too long, scholars have ignored the economic dimensions of the deliberative renaissance Martin terms “the Great Consultation” (2010).

An industry of non-profit and private consulting organizations produces these public deliberation processes for a growing market of public, private, and non-profit clients who seek to engage their stakeholders in productive dialogue (Lee and Romano 2010). Professional facilitation consultants are now regular players in formal stakeholder engagement processes for decision-making and planning by governments, non-profit organizations, and private companies. The “organizational infrastructure for public deliberation” (Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009:136) offers clients a diverse selection of trademarked processes, including “21st Century Town Meetings®,” “ChoiceDialogues™,” “Fast Forum Opinionnaires®,” “Citizen Choicework,” “Deliberative Polling®,” “Consensus Conferences,” and “Issues Forums.” Sample client lists offered by public deliberation consultants reveal a wide variety of household

names, from Fortune 500 companies to industry trade groups to federal agencies to transnational organizations: 3M, Abbott Laboratories, Allstate, Altria Group, American Express, American Red Cross, AstraZeneca, AT&T, Autotrader, Coca Cola, Cisco, the Clinton Global Initiative, the Consumer Electronics Association, Eastman Chemical, the Enterprise Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, Exxon, FedEx, the Food and Drug Administration, FEMA, GAO, Georgia Pacific, Girl Scouts of America, GlaxoSmith Klein, the IMF, Kraft, Macy's, SAP America, Shell Chemical, Sierra Club, State Farm, Sun Microsystems, Sun Trust Bank, Teradata, the UN, United Way, the USPS, World Bank, and the World Economic Forum (Database files). Such processes are becoming so common that 18% of Americans in a 2007 survey had participated in face-to-face or online deliberative problem-solving with diverse others over the course of the previous year (National Conference on Citizenship 2007: 17).¹ A conservative estimate based on the 2009 Dialogue and Deliberation Practitioners Survey puts the cost of such processes at least in the low hundred millions per year (Lee and Romano 2010). But scholarly approaches to deliberation tend to assume that the expanding scope of deliberative reforms tell a story about the success of a progressive movement to reform politics, not about the expanding market for deliberative process management in contemporary governance.²

Given the scale of demand for deliberation, this paper takes a closer look at the deliberation consulting industry, and finds that deliberative reforms are actually marketed to sponsors as civic, socially-productive interventions protected from “conventional” business logics, even as they draw on new managerialist discourses long enshrined in the “cultural circuit of capital” (Thrift 2005). Public deliberation consultants have been extremely attentive to managing the commercial dimensions of their work. But researchers have generally either dismissed the “business” of deliberation as inconsequential, or have feared deliberation’s contamination by market forces. The analysis conducted here takes a different approach. Using a multi-method field study of the public deliberation industry, we investigate moral claims about the public deliberation market and its impact on the public sphere, and find that both perspectives on markets as destructive and as civilizing play a role in justifying the unique virtues of privately-facilitated deliberation as a collective good. Doing so is particularly revelatory of the multi-

layered moralization of markets described by economic sociologists, and reveals the impossibility of distinguishing a pure civic space protected from market incursions in an era in which the boundaries of public, private, and non-profit sectors are continually blurred in practice (Walker 2009).

These moral discourses around public deliberation also reveal the stakes involved in producing ostensibly pure civic spaces, inasmuch as these are the products sought after by paying clients. As top-down civic projects and participatory opportunities become more common, and their production by the deliberation industry becomes more sophisticated, the territory being contested is increasingly that ground in which markets are made civic, and markets in turn create civic space. The production and promotion of these civic spaces by private actors, and those actors' understanding of the imperative to protect such spaces from the market, represents a domain of political life that is not so much new because it is privatized, but new because it represents the private pursuit of political authenticity. Such findings have broad implications for those critics who would write off privately-sponsored civic space as "astroturfing" or "democracy, inc.," and for those scholars interested in bridging political and economic sociology (Fligstein 1996; Giraudeau and Gond 2008). When there is a burgeoning market for "real" utopias, the civic empowerment they produce for different stakeholders must be investigated not just in terms of the extent to which political and economic outcomes are interpenetrated in practice, but the ways in which they are moralized as distinct. This paper argues that the particular manner in which public deliberation is civic-ized contributes to its utility as one form of quiet regulation (Tepper 2009; Earl 2003) for sponsors.

MORALIZING THE MARKET FOR DELIBERATION

Deliberative democracy scholars have elaborated three different types of responses to the rise of markets for deliberation and the resulting commercialization of democratic processes, which can be categorized according to Hirschman's typology of perspectives on markets as feeble, civilizing, or destructive (1982). In general, deliberative democracy scholars tend to focus on the political rather than commercial aspects of deliberation and those scholars who have recognized markets for deliberation in most cases have minimized the potential impact of economic logics on political processes, arguing that

professional process production only affects a minor corner of the field and does not represent a significant portion of deliberative practice. The area of disagreement here is in the extent to which deliberation is impervious to the market; as such, these perspectives reflect the conception of markets as feeble (Hirschman 1982; Fourcade and Healy 2007). As I will argue below, this assumption that markets are irrelevant to politics neglects the ways in which a) the economic dimensions of deliberative processes are pervasive topics of field discourse and negotiation, and b) understanding the economic and civic outcomes of deliberation in fact requires investigating how those outcomes are negotiated alongside each other in the deliberation market.

In contrast, scholar practitioners Hendriks and Carson lay out the two civilizing and destructive poles of the debate for those scholars who do raise concerns about market colonization, presenting two scenarios for the rise of deliberative facilitation as an industry, one entailing the “prolific spread of deliberative democracy through market forces,” and the other producing “competition resulting in non-deliberative and undemocratic outcomes” (2008:305). While Hendriks and Carson assert that the former, civilizing scenario is more likely, in which deliberation sustains a professional “community of practice” “richer than just a ‘marketplace’” (2008: 304), some critics have been far more concerned about the negative implications of a market for deliberative processes, particularly in regards to the commodification of participatory products and services.

David Mosse, both an academic and a practitioner on development projects, critiques the marketing of participatory development agendas and the commodification of participation in a project with which he was involved: “Through skilful public relations the project management succeeded in establishing ‘participation’ as a technique/commodity and itself as the primary local source and supplier, and reaped the rewards of high-profile visibility, and reputation... What it meant was that participation (ultimately a matter of shifting relations of power) could be formatted, printed, wrapped (sometimes quite literally in coloured tissue paper) and delivered as a gift” (2003:57). Action researchers Kashefi and Mort criticize “the extractive, incidental outputs of the consultation industry”:

This network of academics, market researchers, consultants, trainers, advisors, and public relations workers has an ever-increasing supply of new conferences, training workshops, toolkits, Do-It-Yourself Guides and How-To manuals to promote and sell; it has a plethora of fixed models of consultation that are formulaic and can be learned, packaged, and replicated without being contextualized or situated. The guaranteed output of this process is ‘the public view’ in an unproblematic format, easily digestible by the policy process. (2004:300)

Ryfe critiques market-oriented practitioners who “brandish a dizzying array of tools, guides, handbooks, and methods” (2007: 3). Swyngedouw argues that, “while enabling new forms of participation,” democratic governance reforms produce a “substantial democratic deficit” because “the democratic character of the political sphere is increasingly eroded by the encroaching imposition of market forces that set the ‘rules of the game’” (2005:1991).

Like those who believe that deliberation is inherently resistant to the market, those who believe the market is destructive claim that deliberative and market values are antithetical. A deliberation “industry” is either impossibly ironic or oxymoronic, and can’t produce the civic benefits (such as community-building and empowerment) that deliberative democrats seek. As Somers argues, “pairing social together with capital actually threatens the very social relations upon which social capital depends” (220). Feeble, civilizing, and destructive approaches have been extensively critiqued in the economic sociology literature, but the key point for this analysis is that the researchers and scholar-practitioners cited above apply moral judgments to the deliberation market without attending to how such moral arguments are deployed by industry actors themselves to justify or defend their services.

Economic sociologists provide useful theoretical perspective on understanding and contextualizing the ways in which moral perspectives on markets are deployed in practice. These scholars argue that markets are explicitly “moralized”—an approach that allows researchers to investigate how this is accomplished, and how such processes are entangled with the creation and ongoing development of markets themselves (Fourcade and Healey 2007). While much of this research has focused on the extent to which seemingly rationalized markets are actually permeated with struggles over social and moral values (Cetina and Preda 2004), others have investigated those markets for products that are acutely

invested with “moral ambivalence,” such as life insurance, organ, and adoption markets (Healy 2006; Quinn 2008: 740; Zelizer 1979).

This study investigates a market for the idealized political “good” of deliberative democracy, in order to understand the ways in which moral values associated with politics, and particularly ambivalence about the relationship of politics to markets, affect the practical production of political processes.³ In doing so, I contribute to contemporary economic sociology by describing an understudied dimension of moralized markets—a “civic-ized” market that is increasingly typical in economic markets for the production of structured events designed to reinvigorate civil society. This politically-valenced moralization of markets works through nuanced mechanisms, which involve both the rejection of “conventional” market values and an embrace of business principles as critical to the responsible production of social goods. In attempting to understand the “civic-ization” of the deliberation market, the analysis below reveals that industry actors themselves use both destructive and civilizing perspectives, often simultaneously, to advance their interests in the field—asserting not a blanket condemnation or uncritical celebration of market interests, but carving out an idealized middle landscape of civic purpose, in which the wild nature of the market and the corrupted humanity of urban politics are tamed by seasoned pastoralists with a calling for deliberation.

DEFINING THE PUBLIC DELIBERATION INDUSTRY

In order to understand the economic dimensions of public deliberation, it is first necessary to understand the development of a professional industry dedicated to public deliberation consulting. The field of professional public deliberation facilitation developed in the United States in the 1990s and 2000s, and is supported organizationally by two major professional associations, national and community-based foundations, specialized training, certificate, and degree programs, and many smaller methods organizations and academic institutes. The International Association of Public Participation Practitioners, or IAP3, was founded in 1990, with the goal of promoting “the values and best practices associated with involving the public in government and industry decisions which affect their lives”

(Database files). The association changed its name to the International Association of Public Participation, or IAP2, in 1996, to reflect its expanded mission: “an organization which looks beyond the formal practitioner to include all people involved in public participation” (Database files). With 300 members at its first conference in 1992, the association grew by 2009 to include 921 members in the U.S. and Canada, and another 609 in other countries. The U.S.-based National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, or NCDD, was formed after foundation-sponsored conferences in 2001 and 2002 on engaging communities through D&D techniques. Founder Sandy Heierbacher and other conference organizers formed an association of 50 individual and organizational members, which has grown to 1,200 members and spun off similar professional associations in Canada and other countries (Database files). NCDD’s mission, according to Heierbacher, draws a disparate group of consultants, funders, academics, software developers, and enthusiasts together: “All of us in this field would like to see a future in which every individual has the chance to participate in their communities, in politics, in organizations, and make a difference when it comes to making decisions about things that they care about” (Interview transcript).

Before describing the methods used to study the public deliberation industry, it is critical to describe briefly the object of analysis and further define key terms. The term “public deliberation” is shorthand for “public dialogue and deliberation,” and is used here to refer to facilitated processes aimed at engaging the public and relevant stakeholders with organizations in more intensive ways than traditional, one-way public outreach and information. Public deliberation processes can range from two-way dialogue meetings to more properly “deliberative” processes, which give lay participants an opportunity to learn about, discuss, and change their preferences regarding policy options. The aggregated input resulting from deliberative processes provides rich information to administrators on participant preferences and, in cases in which decision-making power is turned over to participants, may determine the course of organizational action. The terms “public engagement,” “public participation,” and “public deliberation” are typically used interchangeably by practitioners in the field to refer to the broad spectrum of reforms aimed at broadening and deepening lay roles in governance.⁴ I use the terms “practitioner,” “professional,” “consultant,” and “facilitator” to refer to those actors, whether self-employed or working

in a non-profit or private organization, who are paid to provide facilitation services and products (kits and materials, software and websites, and preference aggregation systems like polling keypads) to client organizations. The term “sponsor” refers to client organizations, but also to third-party organizations, such as foundations, media and real estate development companies, and banks, that may subsidize process facilitation services on behalf of client organizations like public agencies or community-based nonprofits. Sponsors may also underwrite process costs intended to subsidize participant engagement (through stipends, translation and childcare services, or transportation).

Typically, the responsibilities of the public deliberation consulting firm involve the full range of services required in process design and implementation, including production of informational materials, stakeholder outreach and process marketing, selection of process methods, design of topical scope and coverage, recruitment of participants, recruitment and training of volunteer small group facilitators, overall facilitation and “master of ceremonies” duties, event logistics, continued communication and follow-up with participants, presentation to the client of process outcomes, and evaluation of process efficacy. Some tasks may be outsourced to subcontractors for large projects, but most contractors provide the complete range of process design and facilitation services from inception to evaluation, which may last from a few months, in the case of engagement on pandemic flu planning priorities, to ten years or more in the case of stakeholder collaborations on long-term processes like contaminated sites remediation. As consultants, public deliberation facilitators move among multiple institutional contexts, communities, and regions. Because of their mobility, this group of organizations and professionals comprises a “portable community” (Chayko 2008) that comes together primarily through online outlets such as listservs,⁵ over the phone in teleconferences and web-enhanced teleconferences called “webinars,” and in face to face conferences in business hotel chains and on college campuses.

METHODS

This project has employed techniques appropriate for a “deterritorialized ethnography” (Merry 2000: 130) of an emergent industry characterized by the extensive use of online communities and

networks. As a multi-method field study, analysis involved cross-referencing the many different forms of data collected in different sites and organizational settings in order to ensure theoretical saturation (Charmaz 2006) and confirm that inductive findings from one site or source were also surfacing in other sites and among different kinds of actors. Ethnographic research of this kind is ideal for identifying “the logics of particular contexts” and “the strategies through which governance is attempted, experienced, resisted and revised, taken in historical depth and cultural context” (Scheppelle 2004: 390-1). Research was conducted under a human subjects protocol approved by Lafayette College.

Field work. The first author conducted participant observation between 2006 and 2010 at field sites in major cities across the U.S. and Canada, in a wide variety of fora for peer-to-peer discussions regarding the governing logics and common challenges of public engagement practice. These included: online seminars, teleconferences, member focus groups, and “webinars” for professional and organizational development; virtual meetings, demonstrations, and presentations in Second Life; a five-day public participation facilitation certification course and three specialized intensive training sessions for public deliberation facilitators; two national and two international conferences of public deliberation professional associations; and two conferences for public deliberation practitioners engaged in a particular method or type of organization. Field notes were compiled in an electronic database and inductively coded using standard practices for ethnographic research in multiple settings (Charmaz 2006). The first author also has been interviewed by former interviewees, and has shared preliminary findings from the research at deliberation and public administration conferences and an association chapter meeting, on a public website, and in a free international webinar open to the public. These activities have engaged the practitioners being studied in an ongoing dialogue, a key element of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Informal interviews. In addition, informal interviews with over fifty individuals were conducted by the first author over the phone and in-person, and typically lasted from a half hour to a few hours. Interviewees were selected for their diversity and their ability to reflect on discussions and activities observed. The sample represented former and current public deliberation practitioners from all types of

organizations, in addition to relevant field actors from diverse perspectives, including: founders and leaders of professional associations; directors and staff of methods and funding organizations; public administrators and internal agency facilitators; stakeholder management and deliberation software developers and entrepreneurs; academics; civic engagement institute founders; and facilitation trainers and trainees. Because the currency of the field is reciprocal discussion, these conversations were intensive and open-ended, occurring in an iterated fashion over three years in offices and at deliberative events and conferences, but also in informal settings in airports, hotel common spaces, and cars, and over meals in bars and restaurants. In cases where interviews were not recorded, conversations were reconstructed from field jottings immediately after they took place. Subsequent to data collection, these electronic files were also coded inductively by the authors. Data from field observations and informal interviews is cited parenthetically as “field notes,” and from recorded interviews as “interview transcript.”

Archival research. Analysis of organizational documents, training certification handbooks, brochures, blogs, three-years’ worth of daily digests from deliberation and facilitation listservs, and organization websites, in addition to digital images, datafiles, screen captures of websites and online meetings, and digital photographs documenting conference activities, supplements the information gathered through participant observation and interviews. The listserv data includes 8,400 text files, collected daily from major professional associations’ and methods organizations’ lists and stored in a full-text database coded by source. Content analyses using inductive coding of text files, major guidebooks in the field, and unique data sources were conducted by the authors. Separate coding schemes were developed for each document type; since text files varied enormously in length and context, only documents of similar origin and source were compared. According to standard practices in content analysis (Roberts 1997), the research team refined codes over the course of the coding process, and then continued to test codes by applying them independently on texts used in the analysis in order to confirm intercoder reliability. All coding differences were reconciled prior to analysis. Minor spelling errors in emails and blog posts have been corrected for readability. Archival data are cited within the analysis as “database files,” rather than cited in the bibliography, to protect the confidentiality of informants.

However, concerns about confidentiality are balanced with identification of historically-important organizations, methods, and public figures wherever publicity is requested or expected.

Practitioner survey. As a supplement to the fieldwork, informal interviews, and archival research, a non-random online survey of dialogue and deliberation practitioners, distributed through over twenty online listservs and web-based community networks in the field, was conducted in September and October 2009 in collaboration with Francesca Polletta of UC Irvine, in order to solicit a broader perspective on the dominant tensions and shared beliefs surfacing in the qualitative research. The survey, whose target population was dialogue and deliberation practitioners in the United States, yielded 345 completed responses from respondents based in the United States. For a variety of reasons, we chose to focus on surveying individual deliberation practitioners connected to the field through email listservs rather than conducting a random mail survey of deliberation organizations. Although non-random sampling is not appropriate for a developed field in which organizations or practitioners are readily identified in available sampling frames, this method is appropriate in a case where the population of organizations remains undefined. Not only is the field of actors involved in deliberative democracy “so complex, diffuse, and diverse” (Leighninger 2009:3) that it is extremely difficult to isolate as a distinct field, there is, despite the developing professional public deliberation associations described here, still no common qualification that would make identification of public deliberation practitioners possible. The researchers concluded that the self-selection of those who identified themselves as dialogue and deliberation practitioners, and the bias in such a sample toward those most invested in the field and most connected to electronic networks through existing institutional structures, was acceptable given our research interest in the perspectives of experienced practitioners. While the survey sample was non-random and therefore cannot be generalized to all public deliberation practitioners, this is an important first step in understanding areas of broad agreement and tension, and a valuable supplement to the extensive field research and archival analysis described above. These data are described in the text as survey results; the N given reflects the total number of valid responses. See the public survey website

(<http://sites.lafayette.edu/ddps/>) for full results and for an extended discussion of design, sampling, and limitations.

The intent of the methodology described in this section is to explore practitioner discourse with each other and with clients, sponsors, and stakeholders regarding the business of deliberative facilitation and the economic interests of sponsors and practitioners. Because we have focused on data collection on the industry, the research described here is by no means a comprehensive assessment of changes in economic supply and demand for deliberation facilitation services (see Hendriks and Carson [2008] for a chart of the growth of privately-facilitated processes over time) or a fiscal sociology of deliberation (Martin 2010). However, the strategies of justification and marketing observed across many contexts in the field provide an ideal way to evaluate struggles over the moral dimensions of a market for the production of civic space.

A COMMUNITY, NOT AN INDUSTRY

Contrary to the assertions of those deliberation scholars who adopt the “feeble markets” perspective, deliberation practitioners are consistently preoccupied with managing the relationship between their civic passions and their and their clients’ business interests, and with describing their successful negotiation of this relationship to each other. The following analysis describes the two main forms this dialogue takes. These discourses draw on both civilizing and destructive perspectives on markets, allowing for a closer look at the way in which a market for political process is distinctively “civic-ized.” The first section of the analysis investigates how practitioners distinguish public deliberation consulting from business as usual—and especially from crass commercialization or logics of accumulation that might threaten access to their services.

Avoiding “Peddling:” Policing “Slick” and Self-Interested Marketing

As described above, scholar-practitioners Hendriks and Carson assert that the deliberative consulting field represents a “community of practice” “richer than just a ‘marketplace’” (2008: 304). As a

concept adapted from management consulting (Cox 2005; Thrift 2005; Vann and Bowker 2001), “community of practice” (Wenger 1998) is an ideal entry point for considering the ways in which new managerialist discourses provide resources for deliberation practitioners to make sense of their practice and to integrate explicitly moral sensibilities into their work.⁶ Practitioners themselves indeed feel comfortable adopting this terminology for their own expert field; U.S. survey respondents resisted the terminology of “profession” (10%) and especially “industry” (1%), with respondents overwhelmingly preferring to call the people and organizations leading dialogue and deliberation efforts a “community of practice” (57%; N=324).⁷

A central norm for the deliberative “community of practice” is that promoting individual methods or products should take a backseat to the larger mission of convincing others of the social value of public deliberation. An overemphasis on marketing of individual processes is criticized by field leaders and practitioners. Sandy Heierbacher, the founder of NCDD, notes that, while her organization provides a forum for people to share techniques, it is important not to let evangelists excited about one method dominate the conversation: “You don't want to give them a soapbox to just talk about their method all the time. They have to have the NCDD philosophy, what's going on in the whole stream of practice” (Interview transcript 2006). At conferences, field practitioners derided the “peddling” of methods that could occur among those more attuned to their own commercial success than to promoting the larger benefits of dialogue and deliberation (Field notes).

This resistance to marketing of methods and organizations sometimes takes the shape of policing those perceived as too commercial or flashy. In one vigorous debate on a deliberation listserv, a facilitator claims: “[Large methods organization] seems to miss the heart of real democracy, settling for selling the appearance of democracy... They have certainly been expert at attracting funding for expensive projects, promoting their organization and publishing slick (and by appearances, expensive) publications and reports” (Database files). Another facilitator speaks more generally about the whole field: “Too often I see the D&D community, conflict resolution community etc wanting to take conceptual material out into the world and market solutions like products...” (Database files). These anti-commercial approaches to

the deliberation marketplace largely reflect the claims of the scholars described above that market values are destructive of deliberative social relations. Such resistance to rational calculation is noted in reports on the challenges of pricing deliberative outcomes, where “there are those involved in participation who resist economic evaluations of participation on the grounds that cost-benefit analysis and other related techniques would tend to ignore the intangible benefits of participation, oversimplify the issues and potentially reduce the space for innovation and experiment by concentrating effort on those activities that can easily be measured” (Involve 2005). Practitioners take pains to emphasize the incompatibility of participation and economics (as in the quote that begins this paper) and to advance democratic values in ways that protect deliberation from market contamination and prevent the “commodified nightmare” (Fourcade and Healy 2007: 286) feared by deliberation industry critics.

The Spirit of Participatory Sharing: Spreading the Gospel of Deliberation

Given facilitators’ outspoken beliefs in public deliberation as a route to such “more than profit” outcomes as democratic empowerment and community capacity-building, practitioners use anti-commercial, often religious language to describe their compulsion to share their knowledge, products, and services with the world at large, and critique those perceived as violating this code. In direct opposition to rational logics of commercial or professional interests, these descriptions emphasize the irrationality of consultants’ missionary zeal, intellectual property-sharing, and extensive voluntarism. Those who have pioneered particular methods are especially evangelistic about their anti-commercial intent, constantly advocating their uniquely transformative power while handing out self-published guides, free software, and how-to cards. The “free marketplace” ethic of a dialogue and deliberation professionals conference borrows extensively from the open source and “free culture” movements (Kelty 2008), with which there is some crossover among attendees.

While some conference participants quantify the price of their products for for-profit clients or set up exhibitor booths, they also avow that, for non-profits and local communities, they are willing to give away their products and software for free or reduced cost—as their intent is not in making money but

spreading the word about the transformative potential of deliberation. One website that sells facilitation services also showcases “a voluntary world-wide Network offering public, non-profit and NGO [method] processes and training for whatever people can afford” (Database files). In the introduction of *Open Space Technology: A User’s Guide* (and at its website online), the developer of Open Space, Harrison Owen, foregrounds the extent to which his enterprise subverts contemporary business logics:

One thing must be clear from the outset. Open Space Technology is not the proprietary product of H.H. Owen and Company. This is not a matter of altruism, or as some might suspect, pure madness... The creation of OST has been a collaborative project involving perhaps 1000 people on four continents... The reality is, Open Space Technology is a World Product. There is also the practical matter that a number of people, in a number of places, are already using Open Space Technology without my say-so or sanction — a situation in which I profoundly rejoice... Please join me in what has been, and will continue to be, a marvelous co-creative adventure... Please share what you discover and we will all be the richer. (Owen 1997)

In a similar vein, the author of a manual on 21 participatory workshops welcomes sharing the intellectual property in his text: “In the spirit of participatory sharing, anything in this collection can be photocopied or translated... if you want to translate the whole book, whether or not for commercial use I shall be delighted... Anyway, whoever you are, if you can, enjoy. Do better than I have. Make up your own 21s. And please, share them around” (Chambers 2002: xvi).

This spirit of giving extends to voluntarism in the field. In the practitioner survey, 55% of U.S. professionals doing paid work (N=245) also report volunteer deliberation work; 13% of self-identified U.S. practitioners (N=342) do volunteer work only. National deliberation organizations with seven-figure budgets often solicit the volunteer time of professional facilitators and paid consultants, providing no support for travel or accommodations for those who simply want to have a role in democratizing public discourse. Calls for volunteer facilitation go out regularly on facilitation and deliberation listservs. This service orientation is revealed in one facilitator’s essay in a facilitation newsletter: “Recently, I did two informal facilitation ‘gigs’ with volunteer groups where I am a member. I was not ‘hired’ to do the work—I did it because I just cannot not facilitate when the need is there... These experiences really do make me feel ‘at home’ with facilitation—it has become something I am, more than something I do” (Database files). While voluntarism is expected in professionalizing fields, the self-actualizing discourses

of deliberative practitioners nest comfortably within the “caring, sharing ethos” that Thrift identifies as a key adaptive characteristic of “soft capitalism” (Thrift 2005: 11).

Seeing deliberative facilitation as a calling or mission resonated in conference conversations and in stories told about the transformations that occurred as former litigants or disengaged members of the public were won over to the “gospel” of deliberation. The transformative power of processes is an article of faith in the practitioner community; 91% of U.S. practitioners surveyed believed that “many people who do not currently support D&D efforts would change their minds if they could experience a single great D&D process” (N=341). One facilitator on a listserv describes himself as “always on the lookout for words and phrases that make these simple (and obscure) facts understandable, inviting and attractive to the 6.5 billion people out there who don't know they can help each other to everyday delight” (Database files). The rhetoric of spiritual conversion and enlightenment is so omnipresent in deliberation practice that those working with religious organizations specifically emphasize the seamless fit of deliberative methods with faith communities, as one practitioner describes on a listserv:

[The Appreciative Inquiry method] is so transformational and life-giving that it is extremely well suited, in fact ideal, for use in a church setting. I know that full well from my personal experiences... There is no doubt in my mind that AI has powerful potential to revitalize churches with a positive and life-giving spirit. (Database files)

In their own sharing of intellectual property, their voluntarism, and their work to convert the larger society to an appreciation of the deliberation “gospel,” the deliberative practitioner community emphasizes a principled rejection of instrumentalism and greed in favor of a spontaneous spirit of collaborative missionary work for the collective good.

“Business as an Agent of World Benefit”: Bringing Deliberative Values to the Private Sector and Vice Versa

Despite the ways in which they invoke community values and police marketing and commodification within the deliberation consulting industry, practitioners do not reject the private sector itself. Their positive orientation to business is revealed in the fact that a near unanimous 97% of U.S. practitioners surveyed believe “the expanded use of deliberative methods in the corporate sector (with

employees or customers)” is “good for the field” (N=329). This was by far the highest level of consensus on any of the attitudinal questions in the survey. In understanding the virtue of spreading public deliberation in all kinds of sponsored settings, sectoral context is not salient for practitioners. One listserv member articulates this widely-shared sentiment: “of course, while facilitators are not exclusively involved in public engagement (most of my work is corporate) I think the same principles apply...its about engagement...the venue is irrelevant” (Listserv files). This perspective reflects that of many public sphere scholars, who have called for scholarship investigating the civic possibilities of non-traditional civil society settings (Baiocchi 2003). Indeed, Eliasoph argues that “Just because they are in a state agency or a market setting does not mean that people cannot speak and act civically” (2009: 295).

If commercialization of practices and products is anathema to the non-instrumental goals of practitioners, those promoting their products also emphasize that their interests are far broader than simply facilitating nonprofit- or government-sponsored processes involving citizens. Harrison Owen states that his role in promoting Open Space is to advocate for its wholesale adoption across all sectors in the interest of process improvement: “If I have a vision for Open Space Technology, it is that it become rather like accounting: something we all must do because it works, and because it is useful” (1997). This belief is consonant with Hendriks and Carson’s positive vision for the future commercialization of deliberation, in which “market competition reduces costs and ‘deliberative experiments’ become status quo” (2008:305). Leading practitioners like Owen hold a steadfast belief regarding the applicability of participatory techniques not just in public settings (with local governments and their constituencies or with government agencies and their stakeholders), but in organizational and business settings of all types. In the practitioner survey, the top selection out of five “most important challenges facing the D&D community” (developed collaboratively by NCDD conference attendees) was “making D&D integral to our public and private systems,” at 35% of U.S. respondents (N=339). As that phrasing indicates, rarely, if ever, are business, civic organizations, or government invoked in different breaths as promising recipients for deliberative interventions. This reflects the frequency of business sponsorship and the variety of sectors represented in typical client portfolios; 45% of professional U.S. practitioners in the

survey ranked businesses, industry associations, and chambers of commerce as one of their top three most common sponsors of processes conducted over the last two years (N=246); by comparison, state and federal government was ranked as a top three sponsor by 35% of professional U.S. respondents.

Going beyond the celebration of the benefits deliberative democracy can bring to the private sector, many deliberation consultants argue that the private sector itself can contribute social profits and civic benefits to the rest of the world. An announcement on a dialogue and deliberation listserv promotes a free online course in Appreciative Inquiry Summits by the developer of the method, David Cooperrider:

David's founding theory... is creating a positive revolution in the leadership of change, helping companies and communities around the world discover the power of strength-based approaches to planning, empowerment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. David's most recent passion is an inquiry into "Business as an Agent of World Benefit" ... where *every social and global issue of our day can be viewed as a business opportunity* to ignite industry leading eco-innovation, social entrepreneurship, and new sources of value. (Database files, emphasis mine)

As the description above implies, practitioners bring communities and business growth together in a positive context of mutual benefit in deliberative processes. One consulting firm describes its mission as to "support our clients in creating organizations and communities in which people, profits, and the planet thrive" (Database files). Such claims are not limited to public deliberation consultancies that work primarily in the private sector. Even national deliberation organizations most focused on state-centered reform advertise their interest in working with global companies and private organizations to solve pressing problems: AmericaSpeaks, whose mission invokes democracy and public citizenship,⁸ promotes its "21st Century Summits" to businesses and associations. One primer on public engagement concludes,

The work should thus always operate on two levels simultaneously: On one level it is about addressing a concrete problem... On another it is about building what philosopher John Dewey called "social intelligence"—the capacity for a democratic community to communicate and collaborate effectively in order to solve its common problems and enrich its public life. (Center for Advances in Public Engagement 2008)

Regarding whether deliberation facilitated by practitioners for private clients can produce substantive "social profits" as promised by deliberative proponents, evidence collected in this project certainly supports the recommendations of scholars to consider the civic possibilities unleashed in non-public spaces. Privately-sponsored deliberation processes routinely call into question the virtue of profit-seeking

and the sustainability of growth, asserting “the end of economics as we know it” and questioning the “dogma of materialism,” for example (Database files). Other samples of graphic facilitation used in sponsored settings and displayed at deliberation conferences reveal similar celebrations of civic and community values in contrast to “old” ways of doing business, as in descriptions of “a learning organization”⁹ with “shared ownership” for a Kodak visioning process, and a Unocal event that emphasized civic outcomes of deliberation such as “courageous conversations,” “doing whatever it takes together,” and “creating shared meaning” (See Figures 1 and 2, Database files).

For the purposes of this paper, however, the question is not the extent to which processes actually produce social capital benefits, creatively challenge convention, or empower stakeholder critiques that deliberation scholars would judge authentic.¹⁰ Instead, this project investigates the ways in which the discourses invoked by practitioners (and scholars) as protecting the civic spirit of deliberation draw on the same social critiques of capitalism that business organizations have already effectively integrated into the logics of the contemporary workplace (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007; Thrift 2005). As such, the “social value” of privately-sponsored deliberation is a readily-identifiable product with economic and political value for sponsors, even as practitioners take pride in scrupulously rejecting conventional political and economic logics as “fossil values.” A better question regards how the melding of civic rejuvenation and organizational problem-solving is negotiated in practice—particularly with respect to how readily “civic” discourses and critiques of “business as usual” familiar in the private sector are adopted in the public sector. The following section describes the ways in which consultants celebrate the uniqueness and irreducibility of their art, while at the same time embracing business practices that gauge the authenticity of deliberative transformations.

FROM CONSUMERS TO CITIZENS: SEEKING AUTHENTIC TRANSFORMATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN CIVIC SPACE

Much of the literature on deliberative democracy has focused on improving process design (Baiocchi 2003: 69), and enhanced process design is a major selling point for the added value deliberation

consultants provide to sponsors. In promoting these contributions, practitioners are at pains to assert the civic value of professionally-managed democratic interventions, and they do so by balancing claims about both the artfulness of their custom designs and the ways in which they revamp a civic space that is currently polluted by a “consumer” orientation on the part of demanding and disengaged publics. While critiquing business values and the failings of a consumption-oriented model of current politics, practitioners nevertheless invoke contemporary corporate models of accountability and devolved responsibility as providing resources on which to reframe citizen expectations and produce “authentic” attitudinal and behavioral change.

Crafting “Designer Democracy”

Practitioners emphasize that “good” public deliberation, as opposed to “fake public participation” (Snider 2010), is distinguished by high touch, long-term, artfully-designed facilitation substantially customized to the needs of individual clients and particular communities. One leading independent facilitator describes his projects: “Every single one of them has its own complexity to it, and every single one—none of them are cookie cutters and none of them are pre-designed. They’re all sort of unique in one way or another” (Interview transcript). One practitioner’s website emphasizes the “art” of meeting client needs through good process design: “The organization is our canvas” (Database files). Another website announces: “We do not offer the same prepackaged solutions to everyone. Our services are tailored to address the unique challenges facing each and every organization” (Database files).

The demanding settings of “designer democracy” (Mills 2007) should reflect the “localized democratic vernacular,” in contrast to the hollow “public rituals” represented by standard hearings and contentious politics, wherein citizens are treated as passive “customers.” In describing “Authentic Public Engagement vs. Business as Usual,” one leading organization lays out the connection between inauthentic forms of politics and business:

To the extent that citizens are considered at all, it is usually as consumers or clients of government... At worst, cynical, empty public relations gestures prevail, as in the rigged “town meetings” that are so common these days. With participants screened and questions carefully

controlled, such counterfeit engagement contributes mightily to the cynicism that is so prevalent among citizens today. (Center for Advances in Public Engagement 2008)

Here, the civic spaces of ordinary politics are framed as contaminated by virtue of being mass produced for passive consumption, with “cynical, empty” PR on government’s side mirrored by “cynicism” on the part of citizen-consumers.

“Designer democracy,” by contrast, is led by “a host of organizations that are assisting communities with cutting edge processes which are custom-made to fit local contexts,” such that “communities are actually branding their unique civic processes as a special feature of community life” with names like “the Hampton Approach” or “the Arlington Way” (Mills 2007: 12). While by no means the norm in facilitation practice (Lee 2010b), designer processes produced by boutique consultancies are the state of the art, command the highest premiums in the field, and are highlighted repeatedly as models of good practice in conferences, trainings, and scholarship. The National Research Council’s definitive report on public participation in environmental decision-making devotes two out of nine chapters to the importance of understanding the contexts of the decision-making and community setting prior to designing a public engagement process (Dietz and Stern 2008). Practically, this takes the form of extensive individual conversations with community members and stakeholders prior to deliberative design, a subject covered intensively in the IAP2 public participation certification training.¹¹

It also takes the form of integrating the visual and performing arts into processes as a way of introducing a non-instrumental, one-of-a-kind, and creative culture of deliberation, whether through graphic recording of dialogue of the sort demonstrated in Figures 1 and 2 above, musical performances, drumming, collaborative poetry performances, individually-painted “peace tiles,” or “playback theater.” Creative process design should engender the creativity of participants as well; a facilitator dedicated to advancing the use of the “expressive arts” in facilitation describes how “people from all over the world participate in these transformative programs, awakening their creative juices and discovering the authentic self” (Database files). One consultancy argues that their services are:

An engine for creativity. From beginning to end, our work is infused with the use of multiple intelligences, principles of emergence and the power of play. An exciting environment with

engaged participants is created when all of these elements ‘fire’ at the same time leading to unimagined creative results in record time. (Database files)

While slick commercialism is contrasted with the authenticity of participatory, artistic, customized processes unique to particular contexts, business practices invoking accountability are key to framing the self-actualizing, expressive performances enacted in deliberation as morally rigorous and worthy of serious consideration.

Getting Rid of the “Vending Machine” and Adopting the “Business Case” for Citizen Accountability

A new workshop for public officials facing budget challenges teaches that from 1970-1999, the model of government that prevailed was a “vending machine” model in which “customer satisfaction” dominated; 2010 to the future is the age of “community as partner” and “citizen accountability” (Database files). In making themselves accountable to citizens and communities for process results, sponsors enact performance measurement routines that commensurate ostensibly just social outcomes (Espeland and Stevens 1998; Lampland and Starr 2009); they also invoke a reciprocal accountability from those being engaged for participating as requested. Hendriks and Carson celebrate the development of accountability standards as a positive potential outcome of commercialized deliberation: “A diverse deliberative profession emerges resulting in the development of international standards. Pressure to maintain quality standards rises, leading to a growth in training, accreditation and independent evaluations of deliberative processes” (2008:pp). Independent evaluations ensure that deliberative interventions are “real” and high-quality, systematically yielding the citizen empowerment and community action they promise.

Not surprisingly given the affective discourses of worker self-actualization in the “cultural circuit of capitalism” (Thrift 2005), administrators in business are typically understood to be ahead of the curve in abandoning a passive, consumption-oriented culture in favor of crafting reliably authentic engagement experiences for “citizen” stakeholders. A report on deliberative training offered to public administrators highlights the transformational nature of authenticity on the part of government bureaucrats: “Civic engagement involves ‘culture change’ and ‘authenticity’... There are inherent tensions in the idea of

government sponsoring citizens to do what citizens need to do for themselves. When this tension is handled well, public administrators are acting... ‘authentically’” (Database files). Deliberative methods guidebooks list Six Sigma, General Electric’s WorkOut method, and Ford’s Whole-Scale Change method as models for deliberative process, and survey respondents report Covey, IBM Jam, Scenario Planning, and other corporate trainings alongside public deliberation trainings like National Issues Forums. Businesses are regularly recruited as partners in supporting efforts to disseminate best practices and reward accountability; the IAP2 provides event naming rights and a number of other sponsorship opportunities to businesses for the Association’s “Core Values Awards,” a celebration of outstanding engagement projects.¹²

The effort to develop tools that regularly produce substantive social outcomes and cultural change across diverse contexts contributes to the emphasis within the public participation field on developing “best practices,” a trend that has produced industry-wide concentration around a few high-profile methods proven to garner quantifiably-effective results. Kristen Veach, the DDPA founder, describes performance measurement and convergence on best practices as a natural evolution for a developing and professionalizing field: “eventually it should follow the patterns of other fields where the more accepted methods of practice will stand out, and others that aren't as embraced, people will start migrating away from them and those who are pushing them” (Interview transcript 2006). Foundations have provided grants for the study of best practices, university centers and nonprofit institutes are explicitly “dedicated to building and improving best practices in public engagement” (Database files), and professional associations have been especially active in publishing handbooks of best practices and developing sets of core values and measurement tools for practitioners (Schuman 2005).

The extent to which this search for “best practices” draws on the institutional logics of accountability in the private sector is often explicit, as when a contributor on a listserv argues that deliberation practitioners should take a page from corporate social responsibility:

I believe that our field of community engagement is at a very, very basic stage when it comes to measuring, evaluating and reporting on performance (ie: most people are not doing it at all!). The CSR field while relatively new, has a lot more experience when it comes to reporting and

measuring things that are largely intangible. It made me realise that we should look at the lessons from the CSR industry's experience with reporting when we look at how we can implement some evaluation and reporting in our industry. (Database files)

In shorthand, evaluations of performance are typically referred to as “the business case” for deliberation.

One training webinar for “P2 Planners and Practitioners,” “Elected and Appointed Officials,” and

“Nonprofit and NGO Leaders” is called “Building a Business Case for P2” (Research files J-10). The session is described as follows:

In this class, participants will learn: (1) a basic understanding of “return on investment” for participation processes, (2) a five-step process for developing a business case for P2, and (3) how to anchor a business case to organizational performance standards or measurements. A worksheet and fact sheet for developing a business case for P2 will be provided. (Database files)

Inasmuch as performance measures and accountability standards are employed to make a “business case” for public deliberation, the moral virtues of accountability are typically framed in terms of fiscal responsibility. In selling its management services, AmericaSpeaks claims that it is “the leader in managing large public events that ensure effective citizen engagement *and wise use of resources*” (Database files, emphasis mine). A report from the UK entitled “Democracy Pays: How Democratic Engagement Can Cut the Cost of Government” defines the contrast between fiscal responsibility as a civic and legal imperative for administrators and good governance as a “moral” imperative for societies:

Usually, the case for stronger local democracy is framed in moral terms, and this is entirely appropriate. Citizenship is a moral as well as a legal construct, and widening and deepening democratic engagement is a worthwhile cause. However, given the fiscal crisis and the demands of front-line services for public funding, *making the moral case for work on this area is not sufficient*. This is why it is also important to make the case that better democracy produces better governance and reduces costs. (Zacharzewski 2010, emphasis mine)

Notably, business principles such as return on investment (ROI) are not framed as a contrast to the “art” of democracy, but as wholly compatible outcomes of the non-instrumental creativity unleashed in deliberation. For example, the consultancy highlighting creative output at “record speed” above advertises that “participants are not only highly productive, they also generate a common language and have a shared experience working together in deep collaboration” (Database files). In facilitated deliberation, creative participation is civically productive and profitable, and the moral value of

democratic governance cannot stand alone. Civic and fiscal outcomes are not idiosyncratic, but are predictable and measurable. The same consultancy points out that they are “able to systematically and repeatedly bring out the highest levels of thought, performance and collaboration within the organizations we serve” (Database files). How, exactly, are civic qualities of authentic engagement like deep collaboration, shared experience, and improved civic capacity linked to fiscal accountability? The next section demonstrates that the quantification of “authentic” engagement entails tracking the transformation of stakeholders from demanding consumers to active citizen partners.

“More Feathers with Less Squawking”: Deliberation as a Technology for Aligning Shared Interests

Intensive information-based democratic engagement could enable councils to, in Richelieu’s metaphor, pluck more feathers with less squawking.

“Democracy Pays” report (Zacharzewski 2010)

As discussed in the first section of the analysis, deliberation practitioners believe that the power of deliberation to enact transformational conversions is key to promoting deliberative democracy as an anti-commercial, quasi-spiritual practice. Converting stakeholders from demanding consumers to civic partners is indeed an explicit goal of deliberative sponsors across sectors, but we argue that these transformations are framed as morally worthwhile not only because of their self-actualizing dimensions but because of their fiscal implications. In practitioner discourse in a wide variety of settings, stakeholder preference change is linked to improved surveillance, greater worker and taxpayer discipline, and enhanced organizational legitimacy. The cost savings reaped through these results are generally framed as contributions to the collective good, inasmuch as they reduce conflict and contention and render publics more tractable in efficient ways. As such, we argue that the forms of action empowered by deliberation may provide authentic engagement opportunities at the same time that they produce disciplinary outcomes akin to “quiet” regulation of cultural conflict (Tepper 2009; see also Earl 2003). “Bad” citizens are reframed not as loud citizens but as expensive citizens, and citizen action is not repressed outright but is channeled in structured venues where non-participation or exit is framed as un-civic behavior (Lee 2007).

As described in the prior section, measurable effectiveness is typically defined through cost-savings; how these cost-savings are articulated is generally in terms of, as one listserv member puts it, “pay now, or pay later” (Database files). This was elaborated in the same discussion thread as “time to effectiveness” or “the time spent undoing, redoing and selling - nobody really measures that....upfront investment has long term payoffs” (Database files). Deliberation is constituted as a more manageable form of citizen empowerment than not empowering citizens and hoping that they don’t “squawk,” increasing litigation and erecting costly obstacles to governance and project implementation. In the “Democracy Pays” report, Zacharzewski argues that “there is a good deal of evidence that greater democratic involvement in decision making leads to lower costs” (2010: 7).

While administrators and managers worry that deliberation will empower demanding consumers and organized interests, deliberative proponents argue that these are exactly the reasons to undertake a proactive deliberative process:

Officials fear that the demands of the public, both for spending and for information, will be insatiable. They worry that pressure from special interest groups or self-interested voters will warp the messages coming through... Officials... often assume that more democratic engagement will lead to more demands for greater spending, with citizens not considering the trade-offs. In fact, practical experience suggests that consultations where citizens are given opportunities to discuss issues and wider scope to make trade-offs produce much richer and more thoughtful results... (2010: 3-4)

This claim mirrors Martin’s finding (2010) that the expansion of “anticipatory consultation” is driven by increases in state resource extraction. Not least, deliberative processes may save time for administrators by forcing organized activists to engage in small group discussions with non-activists, diluting their voices and minimizing their access to the press and high profile targets (Polletta 2010). Deliberation organizations in the U.S. similarly promote the ability to solicit the engagement not of “the usual suspects,” but of those not yet mobilized: AmericaSpeaks advertises their “unique strategies for engaging a demographically diverse group of unaffiliated citizens to participate in your public forums” (Database files).

Practitioners argue that once engaged, citizen stakeholders in facilitated deliberations will abandon self-interest for co-creative solutions aimed at collective benefit; AmericaSpeaks claims on its website that “A comprehensive engagement strategy can transform your participants into stakeholders with sustained involvement in your project” (Database files). That deliberative consultancies advertise such outcomes is no surprise given the substantial academic literature on the social benefits of deliberative democracy and the ways in which deliberative culture creates new civic capacity (see Delli Carpini, Huddy, and Shapiro [2002]; Gastil and Levine [2005]; Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini [2009]; and Gastil [2008] for reviews on the promise of deliberation). However, we argue here that such benefits are explicitly and actively linked by practitioners to cost-savings and fiscal discipline, at the same time that these practitioners argue for their civic benefits. One consultancy advertises, “We look for concurrent results in not just performance and economic prosperity, but also in individual well being and societal contribution” (Database files).

The extent to which economic outcomes are achieved in the form of disciplinary containment of existing or potential challengers is usually articulated in the language of decreased resistance or reductions in cynicism. Decreased resistance can take the form of greater willingness to accept cuts in public budgets or in workplace benefits (see Lee and Romano [2010]), in addition to greater sympathy for the “tough choices” administrators face. One consultancy’s website asserts that “leaders need to know how to involve staff in decision-making. Staff involvement, *not just superficial consultation*, is key to tapping into what they know and winning their enthusiastic support” (Database files, emphasis mine). This more authentic form of engagement may require “new techniques for reinforcing group commitments, and shifts in organizational culture and norms” (Database files). Zacharzewski argues that “the more involved people are in democratic discussions of financial matters, the more they can be relied upon to support targeted cuts,” and the greater their “tax morale,” or “willingness to pay tax” (2010: 2-3).

The social learning and collaborative listening that occurs in sponsored deliberation reliably causes participants to adopt less self-interested outcomes, and these are routinely highlighted by both deliberation practitioners and deliberation scholars in process evaluations and on deliberation listservs.

Zacharzewski reports that such processes can help administrators distinguish entitlements that are truly “off-limits” from less sacred cows, engendering greater administrative flexibility: at the end of one process, “participants had expressed a willingness to cut several high-cost areas of expenditure, such as highways maintenance, libraries, museums, and residential services for older people... It is worth noting that the directions in which opinions shifted did not follow a pattern of self-interest or prejudice” (2010: 5; see also Lee and Romano [2010] for analysis of citizen interest negotiation in deliberative retrenchment exercises).¹³ The results of deliberative “choicework” may reflect shared preferences and a willingness to sacrifice, but they also have value for administrators to the extent that they provide efficient feedback on which administrative goals are feasible and likely to be accomplished with the least amount of resistance from stakeholders and advocacy groups. In this sense, deliberation can help administrators anticipate or counter resistance, and large-scale deliberations typically go through a number of pilot iterations with focus groups to diminish the potential of topic framings to provoke contention.¹⁴

But decreased resistance (minimization of grievance construction and organized opposition) is simultaneously paired with an increased proclivity to “positive” forms of civic mobilization. Advertising copy on one consultancy’s website claims that “Cynicism and resistance are replaced with a renewed sense of discovery, possibility, commitment, joy and positive action” (Database files). Similarly, Appreciative Inquiry is promoted as “a collaborative strengths-based approach that is proving to be highly effective in thousands of organizations, colleges and communities in more than a hundred countries around the world. The AI approach heightens energy, sharpens vision and *inspires action for change without resistance*” (Database files, emphasis mine). Genuine processes will yield not only genuine enthusiasm for administrative goals but activate citizen stakeholders to help achieve them.

The extent to which deliberation can prompt citizen accountability to the extent that citizens actually are willing to assume ownership of functions previously performed by administrators reflects neoliberal governance principles of devolved and individualized responsibility for collective outcomes. These civic benefits are extensively highlighted in deliberation marketing, and discussed on listservs as motivation for strapped administrators to resort to deliberative solutions. Zacharzewski argues that

“deeper democratic engagement can increase productivity, both in pure economic terms, and in terms of ‘civic productivity’ – where neighbourhood and social civic action replaces higher-cost state intervention” (2010: 8). In a listserv discussion on quantifying the benefits of deliberation, one practitioner reports from the front lines:

We are finding agencies becoming interested in our work because their budgets are being cut so much that they need to find truly different and more effective ways to get their work done. They can no longer pay for inefficiency. They are having to make huge cuts in staff, which means depending more on community collaborations. Paying for process to get community engaged is cheaper than paying for staff. (Database files)

Another listserv member responds: “Now *that* is fabulous. Just in from the Department of Unexpectedly Cheery Unintended Consequences of the Economic Downturn! If you have any kind of documentation about this that you could share, I would find it tremendously useful” (Database files). The civic transformations reaped in deliberation entail attitudinal and behavioral changes predicted by deliberation scholars, and these outcomes are enthusiastically promoted to clients as both fiscally and socially responsible remedies for a challenging economic and political landscape of consumer capitalism.

Nevertheless, the marketing of deliberative solutions as enhancing “reputational capital” and advancing conventional social control functions, despite the explicit questioning of social control functions and authority within deliberative processes, suggests that the deliberation market serves client interests by achieving regulation in a “quiet” manner. For example, the use of Open Space Technology, and the injunction in the technique that the civic space created entails free choice among participants to take charge of their passions, involves predictable tensions when used in a private setting. “The essence of OST is invitation” and one of the four principles is “whoever comes is the right people” (Database files), but participation is typically not optional in sponsored deliberative settings. As such, two practitioners on a listserv discuss how to frame a compulsory event as optional:

I am currently working with such an agency to prepare an invitation for ‘all staff’ to come to the annual ‘retreat day’ which will be held in OS... this has traditionally been a compulsory attendance event and the sponsor is having ‘serious fun’ working through the implications of ‘invitation’—and I think that this I think that this is the key part of the process - get the question and the language of invitation right and the rest will happen - regardless of the implicit or explicit requirement to be there.

This day is usually called All Staff Meeting and is mandatory. Their question to me is how do they balance the mandatory nature of this meeting with the ‘invitation’ approach of Open Space that sounds optional. (Database files)

Critics from the “hostile” markets standpoint might argue that the tensions involved in mandatory invitations reveal that deliberation in these settings is window-dressing. For the purposes of this paper, the fact that it is important to clients and practitioners that deliberation be undertaken in an authentically voluntary way by stakeholders and not be seen as window-dressing reveals the extent to which sponsors seek to create spaces that both look and feel authentically “civic” rather than business-like.

As the concluding section of this analysis has argued, the citizen transformations reaped in authentic deliberative processes may be no less real or civically-spirited for being in the direction of support for administrative goals, but the extent to which such projects redefine the collective good in terms of how civic discourse and citizen actions reflect administrator priorities and economic efficiency deserves further scrutiny by deliberation scholars. Simply determining which processes are “real” or “good” deliberation versus which are “fake” or “bad” will not suffice, inasmuch as the value of processes for clients stems from the social authenticity, civic productivity, and demonstrable accountability they are able to claim.

CIVIC-IZING MARKETS?: DELIBERATIVE ANTI-COMMERCIALISM AND THE SELLING OF POLITICAL AUTHENTICITY

What is clear is that we have reached a point in which the kind of divides that kept capitalists and anti-capitalists apart are not easily separated linguistically and, in some cases, even practically... In other words, capitalist firms are increasingly utilizing the weapons of the weak—contextual fleeting practices—to make themselves strong. (Thrift 2005: 4)

Even though you may want to launch a large-scale public dialogue effort, you may also feel overwhelmed or that you want to start creating change right away. You may feel discouraged by the fact that that the kinds of changes you’re hoping for may be realized too far into the future. Or you may desire to get your feet wet on this approach but you’re not sure how to begin walking down this path. Have no fear! Here are some things you could do right now, which will soothe your anxieties because you will be doing something to address the issue you deeply care about. But also because the pressure isn’t on your shoulders (yet) to organize a large effort or produce systemic community changes.

Deliberative guidebook (Database files)

Deliberation facilitators with a personal commitment to the production of transformative, authentic experiences on the part of citizen stakeholders pursue such outcomes despite the professional risks involved in alienating clients, and often perform volunteer facilitation at personal cost to their own livelihoods. Such actions indicate that the pursuit of profit is not the sole, nor even the primary, motivation for deliberation practitioners—and deliberation scholars who focus on practitioners’ self-sacrifice and passionate evangelism can be excused for understanding deliberative innovation as a progressive reform movement. But unpacking the multiple ways in which deliberation consultants construct their activities as morally meaningful provides traction on the complex nature of specifically civic moral markets, and the ways in which the construction of a civic-ized market for facilitated deliberation in particular may have consequences not only for conventional economic aims such as profitability but for political, social, and economic equality.

This paper takes up such a challenge in two ways. First, we articulate that practitioners’ moral discourses of “destructive” and “civilizing” practices—their simultaneous embrace of anti-commercialism and accountability—both have their roots in the contemporary “cultural circuit of capital” defined by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007), Thrift (2005), and others. Second, scholars of deliberation should avoid distinguishing “bad”/commercialized or “good”/civic-ized deliberation in favor of paying attention to the ways in which the moral framing of the deliberation market as civic is itself a mechanism for greater market attachment (McFall 2009) and enhanced, if “quiet,” management of publics—and not just on behalf of capitalist firms, as Thrift suggests in the above quote. Authentic civic action and enhanced technologies of management are by no means mutually exclusive, nor is their creative combination restricted to civic-ized settings in the private sector. This finding corresponds with recent research investigating the fiscal (Martin 2010) and managerial implications of deliberation as it has been employed in particular historical contexts (Hajer 2005; Head 2007; Hendriks 2009; Maginn 2007; Segall 2005).

The protective halo reserved for deliberation as a “real utopian” political activity has kept deliberation from being considered alongside other forms of stakeholder management and public relations, except as an idealized alternative (Wright 2010). Removing that halo to research deliberation’s

moral claims allows us to make connections with scholarship investigating the normative practices and larger consequences of other forms of subsidized participation, citizen empowerment, and civic partnerships (Boyle and Silver 2005; Kreiss 2009; Soule 2009; Walker 2009). This task is even more urgent because scholars have yet to connect these democratizing practices and their potentially regressive outcomes in a systematic way (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2010), despite the fact that there is evidence that deliberation is used strategically in tandem with grassroots lobbying, digital campaigning, and other top-down “empowerment projects” (Eliasoph 2010).

Additionally, investigating the enduring power of civic ideologies of governance, and their transit back and forth across sectoral boundaries, can help us to place the moral stakes of deliberation in even broader historical context: as part of “dynamic and contested processes of institutionalization and institutional change” (Schneiberg and Clemens 2006, 195), whose throughlines can be traced as part of a larger project of American political development. Much contemporary scholarship emphasizes the blurring of sectoral boundaries in “the social movement society” (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). State targets seem to have declining significance in “multi-institutional politics” (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008), at the same time that contention is increasingly “non-political” (Earl and Kimport 2009) and “political consumerism” (Kadanoff and Haydu 2010) brings into being consumerized dimensions of citizenship and civic action. Current trends would seem to indicate an emptying out of political content in contemporary social action, such that distinctions between business, government, and civil society become less and less meaningful. But as Kadanoff and Haydu point out, “political consumerism” has been around in a variety of strikingly similar forms at least since the 19th century, and a number of scholars have demonstrated that business has regularly engaged civic values at many times in American history, even as the organization of “business citizenship” and business/community relationships have varied (Haydu 2008; see also Berk and Schneiberg 2005; Haveman and Rao 1997; Haydu and Lee 2004; Lee 2010a; Mizruchi 2010). “The Great Consultation” may be one significant rearrangement of these relationships, but it is by no means the first or the last.

Such a focus might cause us to turn away from claims about “mass moral engineering” (Thrift 2005), in order to marvel at the resemblance the contemporary cultural circuit of capital bears to Clemens’ “Rube Goldberg”-like state (2006), where today’s version of wise, responsible, and effective governance entails New Age wisdom circles, sophisticated digital surveillance apparatus, Gestalt psychology, homespun testimonies, flag-waving patriotism, opinion polling, strategy games, art therapy, artlessly didactic videos, extensive backstage politicking, and recorded clips of 1970s and 1980s pop hits played at top volume to get citizen stakeholders fired up and in the mood to deliberate. That the response to these proliferating, persistent, and discordant invitations to “join the conversation” is often a self-serious, diligent civic performance on the part of employees, consumers, and “unaffiliated” members of the public, in spite of their suspicions regarding administrator intentions, indicates that the meaningfulness of distinctively civic action is content-rich and enduring. The ad hoc, tightly-delimited citizen actions and civil attitudes that result have nevertheless restricted the boundaries of possibility in contemporary civic spaces of all kinds. Inasmuch as researchers have a moral obligation to these engaged publics in their deliberation research, it is less to make deliberative empowerment ideals “work” in practice than to imagine more ambitious opportunities for the “systems change” deliberation repeatedly offers, and rarely delivers—even, and especially—when it works as promised.

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NOTES

¹ In a 2003 survey, Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini found that 25% of American adults sampled had participated in a “face-to-face deliberation” on a public issue (2009: 37); the percentage in this survey is likely higher due to the fact that this question did not require deliberation to occur at a “meeting” or with others with diverse views.

² Growth in the outsourcing of public deliberation management is evidenced by the training budget of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). Demand for facilitation training from IAP2 has increased over the 2000s, with the number of licensed public participation facilitation trainers tripling between 2004 and 2005 (Kyriss 2006) and training revenue, the largest source of income for the association, increasing 538 percent from 2001 to 2008, the most recent year that annual report data is available (McCallum 2009).

³ As in the deliberation literature, scholars of politics who address market influences typically assume the “destructive markets” perspective, with arguments fearing the commercialization and commodification of public life through media conglomerates and interest groups. The approach used in this paper draws on the recent work of institutional scholars such as Walker (2009) and Kreiss (2009) on the extent to which markets and technologies may produce civic opportunities at the same time that they channel them in particular directions.

⁴ Leighninger notes that: “In common usage, ‘deliberation and democratic governance’ = active citizenship = deliberative democracy = citizen involvement = citizen-centered work = public engagement = citizen participation = public dialogue = collaborative governance = public deliberation. Different people define these terms in different ways – and in most cases, the meanings are blurry and overlapping” (2009:5). While public “consultation” connotes one-way processes in the U.S., in the Commonwealth countries, it generally connotes more deliberative methods.

⁵ A 2009 membership survey by the IAP2 found that 68% of respondents preferred to communicate with the association through an online method (N=169; Database files).

⁶ Thrift (2005: 10) refers to these discourses as part of the “mass moral engineering” of “soft capitalism.” As the analysis here illustrates, however, civilizing and destructive discourses may stem from similar sources but are actively differentiated in practice.

⁷ Despite practitioners’ limited preference (17%) for “movement” terminology, scholars themselves typically assume dialogue and deliberation actors constitute a social movement (Lee 2010b), but the terminology of “social movement industry” (Zald and McCarthy 1980) more accurately reflects the level of interaction and competition within the field.

⁸ AmericaSpeaks’ mission is “to reinvigorate American Democracy by engaging citizens in the public decision-making that most impacts their lives” (Database files).

⁹ See Thrift (2005) for an extensive analysis of “learning” as a managerialist discourse.

¹⁰ The question of whether deliberation as practiced meets normative ideals as developed in political theory has preoccupied deliberation researchers (Thompson 2008) to the exclusion of an investigation of the ways in which “real” deliberation, practiced with scrupulous attention to remedying inequality and challenging authority, might be useful in particular historical and institutional settings in managing or marginalizing the challenges it produces. Not incidentally, deliberative democratic theory is a useful validation tool in these efforts (Mutz 2008).

¹¹ For this reason, “high quality” deliberative processes actually move stakeholder grievances out of public view; most, but by no means all, stakeholders are willing to trade increased decision-making power for less access to public claims-making (Lee 2007). Note that this relocation of politicized negotiation is accompanied by an increase in creative expression, as described in the next paragraph.

¹² That business support for accountability and performance measurement has reputational value might provoke cynicism from “hostile markets” critics. Nevertheless, the Core Values Awards are so rigorous that no awardee was selected for Organization of the Year in 2009 because none of the organizations entered met the IAP2 award committee’s standards.

¹³ The institutionalized elderly are generally underrepresented in deliberative dialogue, although those over 65 are typically overrepresented.

¹⁴ In cases where issues are highly contentious and resistance is already organized, processes are advantageous in providing administrators with evidence of support for administrative goals from a substantial portion of “unaffiliated” citizens.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Sample of graphic facilitation of deliberative meeting regarding a coalition between Unocal and Fielding Graduate University, which offers a graduate degree program in deliberative democracy. Unocal has since merged with Chevron.

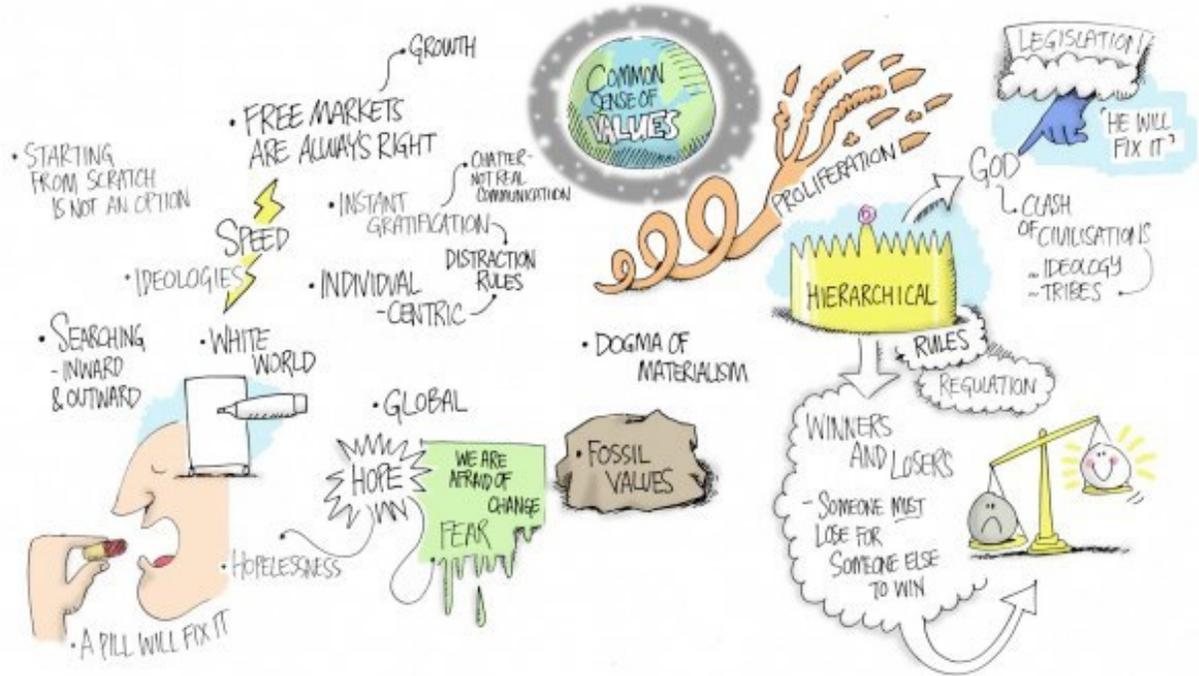


Figure 2: “Fossil Values”: “Free Markets are Always Right” vs “Legislation ‘He Will Fix It’”: Sample of graphic facilitation from a deliberative meeting.