Participation, Planning and Sustainability: Case Studies from Hinton and Wood Buffalo, AB

by

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Abstract

The Government of Canada introduced the federal Gas Tax Fund (GTF) during 2005 as an initiative to improve sustainable development in rural communities. One of the main requirements for accessing this fund was that each municipality formulate an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP). As part of creating these sustainability plans, both the federal and provincial governments made citizen participation an important requirement of the planning process. The main objective of this thesis is to understand the nature of citizen involvement in developing the ICSPs. This is achieved by focusing on two case studies, The Town of Hinton (2008-2011) and Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (2009-2010). This research has adopted a qualitative method, and used secondary data followed by 24 telephone interviews (2014) to learn more about the, methods, successes and challenges of citizen engagement. These case studies on citizen engagement in sustainability planning contribute to our understanding of theories of citizen participation, deliberative democracy and technocracy. Specifically sustainability planning in the Alberta appears to be a broader process of consultation. However, citizen participation frameworks such as Arnstein's Ladder of Participation do not necessarily account for all of the socio-economic factors (e.g., busy lifestyle, transient population, , citizens' lack of understanding of technical and complicated concepts, time and financial constraints, poor road and weather conditions) that affect people's engagement in planning processes. Sustainability planning is better understood as a longer term process of social

learning; simple consultation processes cannot necessarily facilitate the deep goals of sustainability.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Nusrat Jahan Dipa. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Integrated Community Sustainability Plans in Canada: An Analysis of Sustainability Emphases and Contributing Factors," No. MS2_Pro00041050, No. of ethics amendment/renewal Pro00041050_REN1. Some of the research conducted for this thesis forms part of a research collaboration, led by Professor Dr. Lars Hallstrom and Dr. Glen Hvenegaard at the University of Alberta.

The data analysis in chapters 4 and 5 was presented at the International Research Society for Public Management (IRSPM) conference in Ottawa on April 11, 2014, and at the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) conference at MacEwan University, Edmonton on May 26, 2014. To date, none of the content of this thesis has been published.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction*

1.1 Background of the Study

Sustainable development has become a significant issue in the field of planning and policy making throughout the world (Lafferty and Meadowcraft, 2000; Wackernagel, 1994; Kenny and Meadowcroft, 1999; Jepson, 2001; McDonald, 1996; Meppem & Gill, 1998; Wheeler, 2000; Termorshuizen et al., 2007; Blowers, 2013). Like many other nations, Canada has initiated the integration of sustainable development into planning and policy development. As a part of this initiative, Canada's government has introduced federal Gas Tax Fund (GTF) through its federal strategy in 2005. Within this strategy, sustainability has been recognized as an essential factor for improving the social, environmental and economic conditions of rural communities and small towns across Canada. Subsequently, the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta signed the Gas Tax Agreement (GTA) in May 2005. This agreement affirmed that municipalities must develop long-term comprehensive community sustainability plans in order to access the GTF (www.infrastructure.gc.ca; www.transportation.alberta.ca).

*A portion of this thesis was presented at the 2014 International Research Society for Public Management conference (IRSPM) in Ottawa and the 2014 Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) conference in Edmonton.

The "New Deal for Cities and Communities" (2005) declared that financial support (e.g., GTFs) would be provided to various municipalities to improve community residents' socio-economic conditions. The funding was to be used to create development interventions pertinent to public transit systems, sustainable waste management, water conservation, sustainable energy systems, community well-being and capacity building, and quality of life (e.g., health, education, housing, social cohesion) (www.transportation.alberta.ca).

According to the Gas Tax Fund and Public Transit Fund Outcomes Report (2009), a total of $477 million was to be funded through the GTF program to the municipalities of Alberta between 2005 and 2009. More specifically, all municipalities in Alberta have been allocated per capita funds based on how successfully they create sustainability planning structures that integrate social, cultural, environmental, governance and economy as the five main themes of sustainable development (The New Deal for Cities and Communities, 2005; Planning for Sustainable Canadian Communities Roundtable, 2005; www.infrastructure.gc.ca). These sustainability plans are known as "Integrated Community Sustainability Plans" (ICSP) (Planning for Sustainable Canadian Communities Roundtable, 2005). Although required in Alberta as per the GTA (2005), neither the Government of Alberta nor the Government of Canada provided guidelines, templates or toolkits to develop sustainability plans (www.auma.ca). However, both the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) created ICSP templates/toolkits (i.e., methods) to help municipalities

develop long-term and comprehensive sustainability plans for their respective communities, in order to fulfill the federal gas-transfer funding requirements (www.auma.com; mccac.ca/?page=72).

Since 2005, many Alberta communities, including small towns, hamlets and villages, have embarked upon the process of developing community sustainability plans with the goals of 1) integrating environmental, economic, cultural, social and governance dimensions as the five main pillars of the sustainability plan; 2) developing equitable societies for their communities; 3) encouraging people to adopt sustainable lifestyles; 4) promoting sustainable municipal infrastructure (e.g., public transit, general energy consumption reduction, water quality and conservation, road rehabilitation); and 5) strengthening community cohesion by engaging local citizens in the decision-making process of their town's future plans and goals (Planning for Sustainable Canadian Communities Roundtable, 2005; Integrated Community Sustainability Plan Template, 2010).

One of the major principles of developing ICSPs is to integrate environmental, economic, social, and cultural considerations of governance into community sustainability based on citizens' views, perceptions and local knowledge. ICSPs are expected to be based upon the principles of collaboration and mutual understanding between local citizens, planners and municipal representatives (Planning for Sustainable Canadian Communities Roundtable, 2005). Citizen participation in the planning process has been given significance by both federal and provincial levels of government not only to improve trust between municipal governments and local residents, but also to ensure citizens' acceptance and

support in the implementation of sustainability plans (Planning for Sustainable Canadian Communities Roundtable, 2005).

Citizen participation can, therefore, be seen as an integral part of environmental planning in terms of improving the representativeness, legitimacy, accountability and consistency of the public decision-making and policy analysis process at both urban and rural levels (Laurian & Shaw, 2009; Roseland, 2005; Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003; Silverman, 2005; Moore et al., 2003; Day, 1997; Masuda et al., 2008; Beierle& Konisky, 2000; Eden, 1996; Collins & Ison, 2006; Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Obar, 2010). Active participation of citizens in the political domain of decision making and policy formulation can strengthen "the rights of individuals to be informed, to be consulted, and to have the opportunity to express their views on governmental decisions" (Brody, Godschalk & Burby, 2003, p. 246).

Citizen participation has been given strong emphasis by both federal and provincial government in case of developing the ICSPs. More specifically, ICSPs are different from the typical planning process, in which local government administration is primarily responsible for making public policies and decisions; rather, ICSPs are unique in making citizen participation one of the core requirements of the planning process. It has been mandated by the Canadian government that planners, professional consultants, stakeholders, and municipal representatives will work together in developing the goals and objectives of the plan by exchanging local and technical knowledge. However, the empirical questions regarding how and to what extent citizens are engaged in making

decisions, and what the citizens' roles in designing the objectives of the sustainability plans are, need to be investigated to better understand the nature, causes and implications of citizen engagement in the ICSP process. This thesis aims to address these questions by analyzing the nature and effects of citizen engagement in the sustainability planning process of two rural Alberta communities: Hinton and Wood Buffalo.

The results of this study show that both municipal staff and planners in Hinton and Wood Buffalo perceive citizen engagement as a key issue for developing sustainability plans. Both communities used diverse techniques (e.g., surveys, newsletters, focus groups, discussions in coffee shops) to collect citizens' feedback about local sustainability; thus citizens of both Hinton and Wood Buffalo were given diverse opportunities to share their ideas and concerns regarding the goals and objectives of the sustainability plan.

According to the findings of this thesis, citizens of Hinton were involved in the implementation stage of the sustainability planning through the Citizens Engagement and Accountability Committee (CEAC), as they were invited to join this committee in order to give opinions at the final stage of planning. Thus, citizens were allowed to work with traditional power holders by being a part of the CEAC group. But planners and municipal staff were largely responsible to make final decisions. Arnstein (1969) calls this level of citizen participation "placation." However, the term "placation" is not appropriate for this thesis because (from a lay and public standpoint) it reflects undesirable implications (e.g., citizens were given false assurances to participate) which are not really

applicable to Hinton. According to the findings of this thesis, Hinton's citizen engagement process was complex in nature and it is not possible to understand this complexity through Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation.

In the case of Wood Buffalo, citizen participation predominantly occurred during Phase 1 (the initial stage) of the plan "Envision Wood Buffalo," and the Dillon Consulting Company was accountable for developing the framework of the plan. However, citizens were given the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns based on wide range of participatory methods. Arnstein (1969) categorizes this level of citizen participation as "consultation." However, it is important to note that contextual factors, including socio-economic influences like the presence of a more transient population, challenging logistics for meetings (e.g., poor road conditions), ambiguity of the concept of sustainability and busy working population were more evident in Wood Buffalo having the greatest limiting influence over citizen participation. Other factors that may explain citizens' limited engagement in the plan development process, specifically in the implementation stage are lack of political will and resources (e.g., human and capital resources) and time restriction.

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation cannot account for all of the contextual factors (e.g., time restriction, lack of financial resources, capacity constraint, citizens' busy lifestyle, transient population, citizens' lack of understanding of technical and complicated concepts) that affect people's engagement in planning processes. Citizen participation processes are not easily understood in a hierarchical form. As a result, it is important to note that this thesis does not seek

to make normative claims about participation, or to imply that the higher rungs of Arnstein's conceptual ladder are "better" (Collins & Ison, 2006; Connor, 1988).

The findings also indicate that the knowledge of technical experts and professional planners were given preference in sustainability planning of both Hinton and Wood Buffalo, especially at the implementation stage, in order to enhance the efficiency of the sustainability plan. According to the study respondents, citizens may not have the technical knowledge needed to make final decisions about the sustainability plan; thus, technical experts and experienced municipal staff were responsible to finalize the goals and objectives for the sustainability plans in both Hinton and Wood Buffalo. However, sustainability planning cannot be understood as a technical process only. Furthermore, the results of this thesis indicate that sustainability planning is a longer process of social learning and knowledge exchange; thus traditional participatory processes (e.g., open houses, town meetings, surveys) cannot necessarily facilitate the implementation of sustainability goals.

1.2 Research Goals and Objectives

The main objective of this thesis is to examine the nature of citizen participation in developing the community sustainability plans of Hinton and Wood Buffalo by exploring the roles citizens played in shaping the visions of sustainability planning, as well as to identify the underlying causes and potential implications of such role(s).

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question of this study is "What are the levels or degrees of citizen engagement processes in developing the framework of Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) in rural Alberta (specifically in Hinton and Wood Buffalo)?"

In order to address this question, some operational questions have also been reviewed. These questions have been considered for understanding the methods through which citizens were engaged in the planning process; thus, the following questions have been examined to comprehend and analyze the level of citizen participation in ICSPs of rural communities in Alberta:

1) Were citizens involved (at any stage) in the process of creating ICSPs?
2) What are the reasons behind involving citizens in the sustainability plan?
3) If citizens had an opportunity to participate in developing their community sustainability plans, then what was the level or degree (e.g., to what extent, stage of involvement, opportunity of deliberation) of that participation?
4) What types of participatory techniques were employed to involve citizens in the plan development?
5) What factors are needed to encourage citizen participation in the development of community sustainability planning?
6) Did citizens have the opportunity to influence the final decision-making process during the implementation stage? If yes, then what are the implications/effects of that opportunity?

1.4 Thesis Statement

Citizen participation has been considered an important factor in the field of planning, because active involvement can enhance the effectiveness of plans and public policies (Brody et al., 2003). In response to this fact, both the federal and provincial governments have given reasonable emphasis to the concept of engaging citizens in creating sustainability plans in rural Alberta. Various municipalities and towns in Alberta have taken steps to make local planning processes more participatory. However, beyond the federal and provincial governments' high expectations and requirements about citizen participation, citizen participation in both Hinton and Wood Buffalo needs to be understood in a nuanced fashion. Local contexts and developmental factors play a role in shaping engagement. On the one hand, both communities engaged a substantial number of individuals and events in the planning process. On the other hand, as plans move toward implementation, the expectations and opportunities for engagement decline, and these levels of engagement are further shaped by variables such as transient populations, citizens' busy lifestyles, the logistics of meetings (e.g., poor road conditions), and the concept of sustainability itself.

1.5 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

1.5.1 Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

This thesis is built upon the well-known conceptual framework (titled the "Ladder of Citizen Participation") proposed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. Many scholars (Baum, 2012; Garau, 2012; Laverack, 2004; Beierle& Konisky, 2000; de Souza

Briggs, 1998; Beckley & Korber, 1996; Twight and Carroll, 1983; Collins & Ison, 2006; Morford, 2004) have considered this framework effective in the case of studying citizens' roles in the public decision-making field. Despite being published 40 years ago, this model is one of the most widely used typologies for understanding the degree of citizen participation in planning and public decision-making processes. This model has been used by numerous academics (Silverman, 2005; Mohammadi et al., 2011; Dassah, 2013; Cornwall, 2008; Lane, 2005; Kopetzky, 2009; Haruta & Radu, 2010; Manetti, 2011; Castell, 2000; Healey, 2006; Frater, 1990; Pollack, 1985) to understand and assess the various levels associated with the citizen engagement process.

Arnstein (1969) presents citizen participation as a mechanism for attaining and practicing citizens' democratic power. She developed the theoretical typology of citizen participation as a response to a participatory planning approach where the involvement of citizens was mandated through legislation. Active citizen participation is linked to citizen empowerment, where citizens will not only have the freedom to express their suggestions, but also will gain the opportunity to take part in deciding policies and plans along with traditional power holders (e.g., elected officials). If citizens are not given power to influence final policies, then that kind of participation "is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless" (Arnstein, 1969; p. 216).

The degree of citizen participation ranges from zero (where traditional power holders make all decisions and citizens are merely informed and manipulated to accept those decisions) to full control over the final decision-making process. In

the latter case, power holders have to negotiate with citizens before making any policy or plans. More specifically, Arnstein (1969) lists three main stages of citizen participation, which cover the eight rungs of the ladder (Figure 1). The three main phases of citizen participation are: a) nonparticipation, b) tokenism, and c) citizen power. An illustration of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation appears on next page of this thesis.

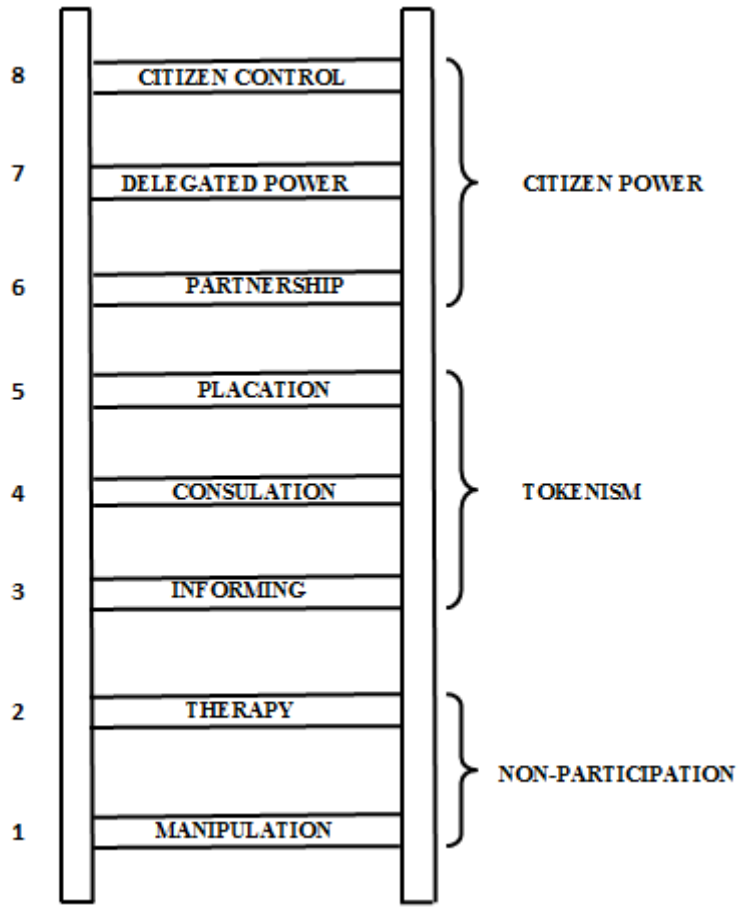

Figure 1: Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Description of the Eight Rungs of Arnstein's Model

Non-Participation

This rung includes two stages: manipulation and therapy. The first rung of the ladder is manipulation. This level does not allow citizens to participate in the decision-making process. Citizens do not even get the opportunity to express their views and ideas. On this level, citizens are merely informed about final decisions already made by traditional power holders, and remain powerless.

Therapy is the second rung of the ladder, where citizens are "educated" by traditional power holders. In this case, elected officials and expert planners make decisions, formulate policies and convince citizens to accept those policies. Both the manipulation and therapy rungs exclude citizens from being a part of the planning and decision-making process.

Tokenism

This level encompasses three rungs: informing, consultation and placation. Informing is the third rung of the ladder. On this level, citizens get various updates and relevant information about plans. This level is mainly based on one-way communication (Arnstein, 1969) where traditional power holders (e.g., elected officials) will provide information about the plan through newsletters, web advertisements, newspapers, and radio announcements in order to keep citizens updated. However, citizens do not receive any opportunity to use that information to influence final decisions. The fourth rung of the ladder is consultation. On this rung, citizens have the opportunity to express their views and feedback about policies and plans through surveys, workshops, open houses, town meetings, and focus groups. Citizens also discuss their ideas, concerns and interests with traditional power holders. At this level, both one-way (e.g., surveys) and two-way (e.g., open houses, town meetings) communication processes occur. However, the authority of final decision making remains in the hands of traditional power holders; thus, it is not guaranteed that citizen input will be considered at the final decision-making stage.

The fifth rung of the ladder is placation. At this level, citizens start to influence final decisions. Citizens (based on their social status, educational background, nature of employment) are "hand-picked" by traditional power holders to join citizen advisory committees, working groups or joint panels to take part in the final decision-making process. But the power of making final plans and policies still remains in the hands of expert planners, and elected officials. Arnstein (1969) also mentions that placation can become an effective level in terms of citizen empowerment if the number of local citizens and traditional power holders remains equal in the joint panel or citizen advisory committee. Otherwise the involvement of a few citizens as committee members can allow local government to overlook or ignore citizens' visions at the final stage of policy making.

Citizen Power

This is the highest level of the ladder and incorporates three rungs: partnership, delegated power and citizen control. The sixth rung of the ladder is partnership. Citizens gain the opportunity to receive power at this stage. On this rung, citizens work with traditional power holders and share decision-making responsibilities, and every decision is made based on the consent of both local citizens and traditional power-holders.

Delegated power is the seventh rung of the ladder. This level gives citizens more authoritative power than traditional power holders. At this stage, if disagreements occur between groups of citizens and elected officials about any specific policy or project, the citizens' views will take priority. This level of engagement requires

highly committed and dedicated citizens who will be ready to invest time and energy to work in the public decision-making field.

The eighth, final and highest rung of the ladder is citizen control. At this level the decision-making authority rests in the hands of citizens. Traditional power holders have to discuss and seek consent from a group of citizens before making any decision. This level can be considered as an "ideal-type." This rung of citizen engagement demands a high level of commitment and dedication from citizens.

Arsntein's framework (1969) can be used as a yardstick for measuring the extent of citizens' roles in policy making. However, the eight stages of this ladder are not mutually exclusive. The eight rungs of the "Ladder of Citizen Participation" are not entirely distinct and in some cases one level can overlap with another. On the other hand, this typology simplifies various complex issues (e.g., financial and time restrictions of participatory projects, citizens' willingness to invest time in policy-making processes, exclusivity and uniqueness of various policy-making processes) related to participation and bureaucratic policy making issues. This over-simplification can disregard the socio-economic challenges a community might face in case of citizen engagement and therefore places high expectation on society.

Limitations of Arnstein's "Ladder of Participation"

Redistribution of power is not the decisive objective of citizen participation; rather social learning, knowledge distribution and participation itself are some of the major goals of citizen engagement in the field of policy making (Collins &

Ison, 2006). It is highly unlikely that only one group of people (e.g., group of citizens or group of technical experts) can solve complex issues of policy making, especially in the field of environment (Collins & Ison, 2006). The integration of local and technical knowledge can generate various alternative solutions in case of making public policies and decisions (Tritter & McCallum, 2006). It is important to have partnership and collaboration among all groups (e.g., lay people, planners, government personnel, technical experts) to make effective and pragmatic decisions (Collins, 1988).

Arnstein has identified "power" as the main factor for defining the effectiveness of citizen participation which can be considered as a major limitation of her theoretical model (Collins & Ison, 2006; Connor, 1988). Arnstein first published her theoretical ladder in Journal of the American Planning Association in 1969 during her involvement in urban planning in the USA (Collins & Ison, 2006) where citizen participation was legally mandated by the government (Arnstein, 1969). Another limitation of Arnstein's ladder is that it is biased towards the American values and principles where citizen empowerment has received strong consideration. America is one of the first nations which believed that citizens should play direct role in shaping public policies (Dahl, 2005; Quijano, 2000) and Arnstein's ladder reflects that principle.

Another major limitation of Arnstein's (1969) ladder is the implicit assumption that full citizen control (the highest rung of the ladder) is the most desirable level of participation (Collins & Ison, 2006; Connor, 1988; Tritter & McCallum, 2006). However, full citizen control can be considered as one form of direct democracy.

It is not necessary that the higher levels of the ladder are better. To illustrate, partnership which has been situated at the bottom rung of "citizen power" stage can be more meaningful compared to the citizen control and delegated power because through the level of partnership lay people can work together with traditional power holders by exchanging knowledge and information.

Furthermore, Arnstein (1969) has identified placation, consultation and information as tokenism based on the principle of "redistribution of power." Basically, this ladder oversimplifies the complex stages and obstacles of a planning project by solely focusing upon power (Collins & Ison, 2006; Tritter & McCallum, 2006). To illustrate, it may not be feasible to involve citizens in some projects through partnership or other modes of participatory methods (e.g., joint panels, citizens' advisory groups, and focus groups) due to financial and time constraint. In this situation, information can be an applicable level of participation. Besides, in-depth information can play effective role in terms of educating citizens and enabling them to make informed decisions (Rowe and Frewer, 2000, In Arnstein's ladder information has been categorized as "tokenism" without mentioning the difference between giving citizens "in-depth and genuine information" and "poor information" (Burns et al, 1994).

Furthermore, the concepts of social learning and knowledge exchange (Collins & Ison, 2006) are missing in Arnstein's typology. By transferring the full authoritative power of decision-making to citizens can inhibit the process of knowledge sharing and learning because it is highly unlikely to solve community concerns and problems by one single group (e.g., group of citizens or group of

experts) (Collins & Ison, 2006). In order to make decisions about community's future plans and goals, a collaborative approach is desirable where lay people and traditional power holders will work together by sharing knowledge and information (Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Carpini et al., 2004; Abelson & Gauvin, 2006; Willis, 2008). However, these concepts of collaboration and social learning have not been discussed in Arnstein's ladder (Collins & Ison, 2006).

This thesis does not aim to establish the implicit assumption of Arnstein's typology that higher rungs of the ladder are better. In this thesis this typology has been used as a rough "yardstick" to understand the process of citizen participation, process of citizen engagement as well as reasons and challenges behind citizens' involvement in sustainability planning instead of evaluating the quality of citizen participation process.

1.5.2 Technocracy

Along with assessing citizen participation, I seek to understand the impact of technological knowledge in the field of decision-making (Fischer, 1990; Gunnell, 1982; Rabinow, 1989; Zito, 2001). More specifically, I seek to analyse how the presence of technical experts can affect the roles that citizens play in higher levels of the decision-making process.

Generally, the concept of technocracy implies that "scientists, technicians, or engineers" will dominate the public decision-making process because of their knowledge in technical fields (Gunnell, 1982; p. 392); thus, the technocratic approach can be defined as the prioritization and application of scientific

knowledge, technical expertise, bureaucratic experience and technology-based methods in terms of developing public policies, generating solutions for political problems and formulating plans for the community at large (DeSario and Langton, 1987). Technocrats attain political power based on "the product of knowledge and extraordinary performance'' (Winner 1977, p.139). In the technocratic approach, "knowledge and information technology" (Fischer, 1990, p. 19), and not consensus, values, and the local knowledge of people within the community, are what play key roles in policy analysis and the final decision-making process. Moreover, in the technocratic approach, political organizations depend on technical experts' knowledge and skills, as well as professional consultants to design participatory methods through which to communicate with citizens and engage them in the decision-making process for public policies and plans (Fischer, 1990).

Technocracy can be seen as a challenge to deliberative forms of the decision-making process because in the technocratic act, the concept of "method" rather than "representativeness" is prioritized to generate outcomes regarding plans and public policies initiated by the government (Fischer, 1990). In a deliberative democracy, lay people receive the right and power to make decisions regarding policies, which affect their lives both directly and indirectly (Carpini et al., 2004), but the technocratic act transfers that decision-making power to technical experts and professional consultants. If the experts and their scientific analysis dominate government actions, plans and policies, then the voices and logic of average citizens who do not possess technical degrees or technical skills can be easily

ignored and discounted (Obar, 2010; Eden, 1996; Espeland 1994). "Technical knowledge…serve[s] as the base of power" when technocrats take control of the public decision-making process (Fisher, 1987, p. 18) which can prohibit lay people with no technical training from influencing policy analysis simply because they do not have access to the pertinent fields of education (Obar, 2010).

There exists the possibility that both Hinton and Wood Buffalo would have hired professional consultants and expert planners to develop the plan; thus this thesis seeks to investigate that possibility. Citizen participation in planning and policy making can be impeded if citizens lack the necessary technical knowledge and academic backgrounds (McKenna and Graham, 2000; Day, 1997), so this thesis also intends to understand whether or not citizens with non-technical backgrounds are given adequate opportunity to participate in the planning process in Hinton and Wood Buffalo.

On the other hand, expert planners and bureaucrats have initiated new participatory techniques to gather citizens' feedback about plans and policies, and "new participation methods based around these technologies have been developed, making online participation possible" (Tang, 2006, p. 24). It is important to explore the impact of these technology-oriented participatory methods in the public policy decision-making process (DeSario and Langton, 1987). It can be expected that online surveys, and social media, like Facebook and Twitter, have been used locally to communicate with citizens.

1.6 Organization of Thesis

This thesis paper consists of six chapters. The first chapter is based on the background of how ICSPs have been initiated, as well as the principles and objectives of this initiation. Chapter One also outlines the goals and objectives of this study along with the research question and theoretical framework. In Chapter Two, a review of the literature that links the concept of citizen participation with deliberative democracy, sustainability planning and rural development is presented.

Chapter Three discusses research methodology, including the rationales behind conducting qualitative methods—the case study technique specifically—limitations of the methods, sampling and sources of data collection. This chapter also outlines the reasons for choosing Hinton and Wood Buffalo as the two case studies. Chapters four and five present the findings comprising the analysis of the two case studies, Hinton and Wood Buffalo, respectively. These two chapters explore the level of citizen participation in sustainability planning, outline the challenges of engaging citizens in the planning and the effects of citizen involvement at the implementation stage, and explain what lessons can be learned and the empirical implications of the existing citizen engagement level in the two communities. Chapter Six summarizes the findings of this study and gives recommendations for future research based on citizens' perceptions about community sustainability planning. The chapter also provides empirical suggestions for ameliorating the participatory nature of public decision-making and planning processes of rural Albertan communities.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Sustainability planning, in terms of predicting and acclimating future uncertainties of environmental, economic and social aspects of a community, can be enhanced and nurtured by integrating local citizens' traditional knowledge into the final stage of planning (Hartz-Karp & Marinova, 2011). Citizens can play a crucial role in the planning process by pointing out diverse issues from their own experiences in order to achieve a long-term sustainable lifestyle (Laurian & Shaw, 2009). Additionally, citizen involvement, democratic discussion, and mutual trust among citizens, planners, and municipal representatives are imperative for ensuring the long-term success of sustainability planning (Swanson and Bhadwal, 2009).

The idea of citizen participation has diverse meanings and implications (Bowen 2008). To illustrate, Schafft and Greenwood (2003) have quoted that citizen participation is "the inclusion of a diverse range of stakeholder contributions in an on-going community development process, from the identification of problem areas, to the development, implementation and management of strategic planning" (p. 19). Additionally, citizen participation can be defined as "a process in which individuals take part in decision making in the institutions, programs, and environments that affect them" (Florin & Wandersman, 1990, p. 43). On the other hand, citizen participation can imply citizens' determination to strengthen the accountability and legitimacy of the government decision-making process by engaging in voluntary actions within the fields of planning and policy making

(Gaventa, 2002). However, these definitions do not provide clarification about the level of citizen participation, tools of participation, reasons behind participation, and to what extent and how citizens can affect the decision-making/planning process.

In this thesis I will not focus on defining citizen participation. Nevertheless, I will consider citizen participation as a process where citizens willingly engage in planning through formal and informal methods such as meetings, workshops, focus groups arranged by citizens' advisory groups, discussions in community clubs arranged by citizens, and information sharing to acknowledge the diverse issues and interests of citizens. Furthermore, the terms such as citizen engagement, involvement and participation are used interchangeably in the literature, so these terms will be used interchangeably in this research as well.

Because of its emphasis on political representatives rather than the common public, the traditional practice of representative democracy (which is generally based on voting) is not enough to ensure the legitimacy of citizen participation (Agbude, 2011). A strong form of democracy is needed to justify the decisions made by democratic representatives as well as to reflect the concerns and opinions of citizens in the decision-making process. A deliberative democracy can be considered the strongest form of democracy (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Deliberative democracy is important in the field of public decision-making and planning, especially sustainability planning, where decisions will be made based on open public debate. This process of rational and constructive dialogue will help to recognize citizens' diverse values and perceptions (e.g., social, economic,

cultural, environmental), which are important for formulating community sustainability plans (Jacobs, 1997).

Deliberative democracy is not about mere consultation with citizens; rather, it is a process that enables citizens to express their views through constructive dialogue and to influence the decision by rationalizing their arguments (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001; Hartz-Karp & Marinova, 2011; Carpini et al. 2004; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). The level of citizen participation can take different forms in community planning approaches. For example, it may become difficult for citizens in Alberta to participate in a planning program if they cannot prove that the planning outcomes will have a direct impact on their lives (Boyd, 2003 cited in Hunsberger et al., 2005). It is crucial to investigate the level of citizen participation when any planning process is expected to be participatory in nature. The development of ICSPs in Alberta is based on the concepts of participation and collaboration; thus, the main objective of this thesis is to analyze the degree of citizen involvement in developing and implementing the goals and objectives of ICSPs. The purpose of this literature review is to investigate citizens' role in the field of sustainability planning within the context of rural development. The review also aims to explore the role of deliberative democracy within the broader context of citizen participation and sustainability planning.

2.2 Citizen Participation and Deliberative Democracy

Representative democracy does not often reflect citizens' concerns and interests soundly, as a lack of trust and respect exists between citizens and representative leaders (Weeks, 2000). Furthermore, the quality of decisions and solutions of

collective problems are often questionable in a representative democracy and these "ills of democracy" can be fixed through the practice of deliberative democracy (Weeks, 2000) because it is a form of responsible democracy (Carpini et al., 2004).

This section includes a review of the literature about deliberative democracy and its affiliation with citizen participation. A majority of that literature relies heavily on theoretical explanation rather than empirical application, and also reveals that deliberative democracy is used widely as a normative benchmark for evaluating citizen participation in the planning process. A gap exists in the current literature on deliberative democracy in terms of empirical research (Carpini et al., 2004) in planning processes, specifically sustainability planning processes. The "radical uncertainty, pluralism, complexity, and social inequality" which exists in the real world of the political decision-making field cannot be captured by simply keeping the approach of deliberative democracy in theory, instead of using it in practice (Chilvers, 2008, p. 157).

The theoretical explanation of deliberative democracy "tend[s] to a purely symbolic or cultural politics which fails to address the ways in which the structural imperatives of markets place constraints on the actual decisions of actors" (O'Neill, 2007, p. 186). So this study aims to contribute to the literature of deliberative democracy by providing empirical evidence within the context of citizen participation (e.g., how citizens can engage themselves in community planning, how the power is redistributed among technical experts) by conducting two case studies in a detailed manner. To enhance our understanding of

deliberative democracy, it is crucial to complement the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy with an empirical analysis (Thompson, 2008). Bohman (1998) has also emphasized the empirical research of deliberative democracy because "the best and most feasible formulations of deliberative democracy require the check of empirical social science" (p. 422).

Deliberative democracy can resolve the dilemma of the representative democracy mechanism by incorporating the voices of common people in the decision-making process, in order to enhance their quality of life, foster democratic skills among citizens and promote democratic leadership (Diamond 1999, Valenzuela 2002). Theories of deliberative democracy imply that citizen participation has a positive impact upon democracy (Carpini et al., 2004; Barber, 1984; Weeks, 2000; Michels & Graaf, 2010). Deliberation can enhance the legitimacy of a decision-making process (Carpini et al., 2004). In such a democratic model, "participants arrive at a decision not by determining what preferences have greatest numerical support, but by determining which proposals the collective agrees are supported by the best reasons" (Young 2000, p. 23). So, deliberation is a process that can generate collective decisions and citizens can engage themselves in formulating these decisions through constructive discussion (Carpini et al. 2004).

Deliberative democracy has been considered as a mechanism for incorporating the voices of marginalized people in mainstream society in order to enhance their quality of life, foster democratic skills among citizens, and promote democratic leadership (Diamond 1999, Valenzuela 2002). However, few scholars have

analyzed the application of deliberative democracy within the context of citizen participation in community planning, and especially in sustainability planning.

Planning is a rational and logical process where planners aim to generate rational outcomes by the logical analysis of obtained data (Healey, 2006). The planning process can be affected by the constriction of technical rationalism when expert planners, technocrats, scientists, and politicians possess all the power to decide the designs and strategies of a planning process and citizens are simply consulted, not engaged, in the planning (Healey, 2006). Social inequality, unfairness, environmental injustice, pollution, and class discrimination will prevail in communities if citizens cannot communicate with the local government regarding what they want from planning strategies (Healey 2006). In order to make a planning process legitimate and truly representative, that planning process has to be inclusive, deliberative and communicative, where citizens' concerns and needs will be discussed and justifiable outcomes implemented through rational, logical and constructive arguments (Dryzek, 2001; Healey 2006).

The existing literature mainly focuses on theoretical assumptions that explain how deliberative techniques can be improved to maximize citizen participation, instead of providing practical solutions. However, Innes and Booher (2004) have proposed a pragmatic model, the "Collaborative Participation Model," as a new method for maximizing citizen participation. The main features of this model consist of constructive discussion among citizens, experts and government personnel; enhancing networks; and capacity building. This "Collaborative Participation Model" is multi-dimensional and involves numerous stakeholders, in

addition to citizens, in the dialogue. Innes and Booher (2004) have stated that successful citizen participation depends on such a framework, as it has the capacity to function despite some particular impediments, such as time, restriction, administrators' concern with losing power, and the absence of proper facilities from social institutions. However, there are also ways to confront these hurdles, such as offering training and funding, and creating forums where discussions and negotiations can take place (Hajer, 1995). Deliberative opinion surveys/polls, citizen juries, and citizens' meetings are some examples of such forums (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Brown, 2006).

2.3 A Brief Overview of Citizens' Roles and Sustainability/Sustainable Development

The terms "sustainability" and "sustainable development" have numerous characteristics and definitions (Kenny and Meadowcroft, 1999; Gondwe et al., 2011; Bagheri and Hjorth, 2007; McDonald, 1996; Costanza and Patten, 1995; Robinson, 2004; Hunsberger et al., 2005). Theoretically the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development are different, but in terms of deliberating local actions these two concepts overlap (Hawkins and Wang, 2012) because "sustainability tends to go hand in hand with sustainable development" (Hawkins and Wang, 2012, p. 9). The term "sustainable development" was first introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (the chairperson was Norway's Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland) in its report named "Our Common Future" which was published in 1987 (WCED, 1987 cited in Achman, 2011). This Brundtland (1987) report also brought out the most

common and widely used definition of the term: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987; p.43).

The majority of early literature focused solely on the economic aspect of sustainability (e.g., how to maximize profit and employment opportunities, increase productivity of the industrial sector, and enhance consumption choices) (Kates et al., 2005). Gradually the focus has shifted towards other broad aspects of sustainability, such as increasing quality of life and improving life expectancy rates, education, and social justice, and eradicating poverty (Kates et al., 2005). Sustainable development therefore represents the ideologies of “equity, empowerment and environmentally sensitive economic development” (Manderscheid, 2012 p. 197). Furthermore, sustainable development can be seen as a “supreme goal of humanity” because it endeavours to ameliorate some crucial issues (e.g., social and environmental injustice, pollution, environmental degradation) (Pandey and Chauhan 2012, p.65).

On the other hand, Holling (2004) has dissected the term “sustainable development” and has pointed out those elements that merge the concepts of “sustainability” and “development.” According to Holling (2004) “sustainability” is based on the principle of “adaptive capability” and “development” is based on the principle of creating “opportunity.” Thus “sustainable development” refers to the process of nurturing adaptive capabilities and creating opportunities.

Many scholars have mentioned the significance of citizen participation for fostering sustainable development. For example, according to Hunsberger et al. (2005), Chen (2009) and Gibson et al. (2005**),** citizens should play an integral part in sustainability planning for future actions because their active involvement and input can improve the decision-making mechanism and lead to effective environmental policies (Beierle and Cayford, 2002). Additionally, Gertler (2001) has mentioned that according to the principle of sustainable development, it is the responsibility of human beings to amend their activities in such a way so that their affiliation with the surrounding environment remains stable. Thus, citizens can play significant roles "to reduce the potential for degradation or [the] catastrophic collapse of natural systems" (Gertler, 2001; p.3).

Furthermore, citizen participation can play a significant role in fostering sustainable development and environmental protection, as participation empowers citizens by enhancing their knowledge about sustainable lifestyles, raising public awareness (e.g. making citizens conscious about environmental degradation and resource management), and making them capable of addressing local concerns.

All of these factors can or will help to generate robust, legitimate and representative planning outcomes (Koontz, 2006; Hunsberger et al., 2005). Additionally, Agger (2010) has quoted that sustainable development cannot be executed as a top-down approach; rather, it has to be an all-encompassing approach that allows citizens to engage autonomously in its extension. So, civil society, comprised of NGOs, media, religious organizations, professionals, human

rights groups, and various corporations (Shaw and McLean 1996), should play a significant role in implementing sustainable development (Ezeanyika et al., 2010).

Sustainable development has received enormous attention globally, particularly in rural development discourse (Khoso, 2010). "The concept of sustainability and sustainable development—stressing the coordination of economic, social and environmental considerations—is an indispensable basic principle of all developments in the 21st century, including rural development" (Kis et al., 2012; p.34). In other words, sustainability not only focuses on the environment, it also deals with economic efficiency and socio-cultural factors. These diverse dimensions of sustainable development can contribute to enhancing rural development. Sustainability has been considered an essential factor in rural development discourse for ameliorating the lives of local citizens (Reid et al., 1992; Luda, 2009). Khoso (2010) notes that "sustainable rural development is the only means to achieve a measure of inter-generational equity, as we have failed to achieve till date" (p. 254), which implies, within the discourse of rural development, that ensuring environmental justice for present and future generations needs to be based on the principle of sustainability. Consequently, at the time of formulating plans and strategies for fostering rural development, the concept of sustainability should be a first priority because through the incorporation of sustainability we may harmonize the diverse nature and activities of rural economy, local ecology, economic development, socio-cultural diversity, social justice and environmental justice (Saric et al. 2011).

Working With People (WWP) (which is a well-known conceptual framework within the discourse of rural development) is based on the principle of promoting sustainability as a necessity for both present and future generations (Sastre-Merino et al. 2013). This model strongly supports citizen participation and sustainability for accelerating rural development (Sastre-Merino et al., 2013). This model emphasizes people as well as natural resources. Sastre-Merino et al. (2013) has mentioned that this model encourages the kinds of technological investments in rural areas, which ameliorate peoples' living conditions and, at the same time, promotes environmental sustainability.

This model also encourages citizen participation in all stages of planning for rural development projects and supports the inclusion of the social learning process, where planners and local citizens exchange knowledge through constructive discussion (Sastre-Merino et al., 2013). Similarly, Flora & Flora (2008) have formulated a "Community Capitals Framework" for analyzing how communities can promote sustainability. The authors have studied the functions and characteristics of sustainability communities and, based on their analyses, it was found that in developing sustainable communities while maintaining economic development, it is important to mobilize seven different types of capital:

- Natural capital (e.g., quality of air, water, land, biodiversity, renewable and non-renewable natural resources)
- Cultural capital (e.g., values, diversity, tradition, norms)
- Human capital (e.g., population, education, quality of life, expertise, gender, health)

- Social capital (e.g., respect, mutual understanding, tolerance, co-operation, network building, leadership, common interests, transparent and accountable political structure, deliberation, diverse perceptions)
- Political capital (e.g., transparency, accountability, integrity, opportunities of citizen participation, social justice, proper distribution of resources among community members/citizens)
- Financial capital (e.g., budget, tax, income, savings, investments, rate of poverty, funding, loans, financial institutions)
- Built capital (e.g., housing, transportation infrastructure, telecommunication, schools, hospitals, the construction sector).

Flora & Flora (2008) have also acknowledged that every community has its own unique characteristics in terms of economy, physical infrastructure, cultural diversity, social norms, and local government structure. All of these forces shape the behavior, attitude, living style and morality of community residents. As a result, it is important to invest, improve and enhance the cultural, social and human capital in order to understand the diverse perceptions of community citizens, as well as to help them recognize their own capability in bringing change to their community (for promoting sustainable development by improving natural capital). The local government has to facilitate this process by using political capital. The framework not only gives us a solid theoretical explanation regarding how a community can utilize its diverse capitals to "address a variety of issues and to expand options for responding to changes in ways that enhance the quality of life for all community residents," but also provides an empirical illustration of

how a community can implement sustainable development by using community resources productively (Flora and Arnold, 2012, p.3).

2.4 Citizen Participation and Rural Development

Rural development can be defined as a "multidimensional framework" through which residents of rural communities can attain progressiveness within socio economic and political fields (Kakumba 2010). Rural development also fosters "qualitative changes in attitudes, customs, improvement in institutional frameworks, resource mobilization and utilization, employment creation, and increased income to better rural lifestyles" (Kakumba 2010, p. 173). The significance of rural development in strengthening national economy and sustainable development has been discussed in development literature (Ibaba, 2011; Seetharam, 1990; Allahdadi, 2011; Singh, 2009; Cowan & Foote, 2007; Bruckmeier & Tovey, 2009; Flora & Flora, 2008; Sumner, 2005). Rural development plays significant role in improving the "productivity, welfare and quality of life of the rural dwellers" (Otto & Ukpere, 2013, p. 336). Rural development brings about positive change in the lives of rural inhabitants by facilitating their access to land, fostering technological advancement in the agricultural sector, improving infrastructure and transportation systems, conducting projects on the basis of grants/funds from the government to promote sustainability, and raising awareness about local political organizations as well as social and environmental justice among rural citizens (Otto & Ukpere, 2013).

Citizen participation can facilitate rural development because the practice of participation helps citizens to understand their role as agents who bring social

change to their respective communities. Citizens also offer diverse alternative plans, suggestions, and opinions through logical discussion with traditional power holders. Citizen participation, rather than being restricted by personal interest, promotes common interests. When citizens are given the opportunity to communicate with each other as well as with expert planners and government representatives, they develop a sense of self-empowerment as their opinions are being taken seriously, which further reinforces the democratic value of a community (Tacconi and Tisdell 1992, Allahdadi 2011; Uphoff et al., 1979; Oakley, 1988).

Rural development projects will cease to exist without the involvement of community residents (Aref & Ma'rof, 2009). Rural development can be difficult to attain if the local government fails to address citizens' concerns and interests in the case of formulating local plans and policies (Youmans, 1983). If rural residents have the opportunity to satisfy their needs, if they can become involved and are in control of their futures, then rural development is expected to occur (Fairbairn, 1998). Many scholars (Youmans, 1983; Mondros & Wilson, 1990; Seetharam, 1990; Oakly & Marsden, 1987; Allahdadi, 2011; Aref & Sarjit, 2009; Fawaz-Yissi, 2012; Chizari et al., 1997; Ahmad and Talib, 2011; Flora et al., 2008) have emphasized the importance of citizen participation in fostering rural development because citizen involvement can enhance the transparency, accountability and representativeness of local planning and policy-making processes. These positive impacts regarding citizen engagement, in terms of ameliorating local decision-making processes, have inspired local governments to

focus on enhancing and refining citizens' roles in the fields of planning and policy making (Ahmed and Talib, 2011). Therefore, proper attention should be given to developing effective and collaborative models/frameworks in order to engage citizens in the local planning and policy-making process.

According to Kakumba (2010), citizen participation can cause government decentralization through the transfer of some authority in decision making and, in this way, citizens can represent their concerns and opinions autonomously, which generates self-sufficiency and empowers citizens to make their own decisions. Through empowerment, citizens can present issues (e.g., poverty, waste management problems, water problems, pollution) that directly affect their living standard and provide input to fix these issues. However, in this framework, the issues of sustainability and deliberation have not been included. Deliberation is that process through which the legitimate representation of citizens is possible. In my research I have integrated the concept of deliberation in the field of sustainability planning. My study will analyze how representation and participation have been practiced within the context of deliberative democracy by understating the tools and methods of participation. Furthermore, the relevance and importance of sustainable development for fostering community development at the local level will be discussed on the basis of empirical evidence (e.g., on the basis of two case studies of rural municipalities in Alberta).

Local governments are giving enormous attention and effort to sustaining and upholding meaningful citizen participation in terms of attaining rural development (Bingham et al. 2005). According to Shepherd (1998), one of the important

mechanisms for fostering rural development is to nurture trust and collaboration among local citizens. Through participation, citizens can build up robust socio-cultural networks within a community. As Midgley (1986) has said, "participation creates a sense of community which gives meaning to human existence and fosters social integration" (p.3). So, citizen participation helps to assimilate diverse perceptions and opinions, which helps to cultivate rural development.

Saric et al. (2012) has cited Sumner's (2005) idea that "rural development is a qualitative change in what we know to do in a certain rural area and, also, a change in the quality of life of its community" (p. 1217). The authors have also mentioned that development is not only about achieving economic growth, and that is why they have used the term "qualitative" for defining the concept of rural development. Rural development should be conceptualized in terms of developing the standard of living, quality of livelihood, management of natural resources, and quality of the environment (Saric et al., 2012). Hence, local citizens should have proper access and opportunities to express their concerns regarding any type of policy, plan, or strategy related to promoting rural development, because at the end of the day the local residents are those who will suffer (from the failure of rural development) or benefit (from the success of rural development projects). Brooks (1970) has also observed that citizen participation implies a process where citizens have the opportunity to design those polices and decisions "which affect their own welfare" (p. 283). Saric et al. (2012) have built upon the concept of "local rural development partnership" which was first introduced by Meyer-Stamer (2008). According to this concept, one of the significant characteristics of

sustainable rural development is “effective participation” of community members (Saric et al. 2012, p. 1219).

Pandey and Chauhan (2012) conducted a case study in the village of Gurawal, located in Madhaya Prodesh of India. Their focus was on a rural development project, “Practising sustainable agriculture through techniques of vermin compost,” initiated by a local NGO. This project was successful, but it did not last long. Local residents were not engaged, as they were not even consulted in any way since they were merely considered beneficiaries. Sometime after the project was implemented, the number of residents involved started to decrease, until eventually only 10% of the community was participating. According to the authors, the “lack of ownership and attachment of local residents” were the main reasons that their rural development project failed. In other words, projects that consider citizens as “mere beneficiaries” and prevent them from being involved in project planning and intervention are not sustainable. Rural development cannot be achieved with these kinds of projects (Pandey and Chauhan, 2012).

Seetharam (1990) has listed four elements through which we can better understand the concept of citizen participation in rural development:

- the purposes for promoting citizen participation,
- what activities are being practiced for fulfilling the purposes behind citizen involvement,
- who is participating (the common demographic traits of participants),

- the agencies, institutions, and organizations (e.g., NGO) for facilitating participation.

According to Molnar and Purohit (1977) the crucial questions regarding rural development projects are 1) who will participate? and 2) based on what criteria? The authors have suggested some strategies through which citizen participation can be effectively incorporated into rural development projects. These include "education-therapy strategy" (this will help citizens to learn about the project and increase their awareness by making them productive) and "behavioral change" (this will help citizens adapt to new ideas and decisions, even if they do not agree with those decisions).

A lack of appropriate knowledge and absence of an organizational base for supporting participation (Kakumba, 2010) are considered major obstacles in practicing citizen participation (Ahman and Talib, 2011). Local authorities and planners often use these two reasons (e.g., citizens are ignorant and do not have pertinent knowledge about planning and development, and lack organizational support for making participation valid and justifiable) as excuses for avoiding citizen engagement (Kakumba, 2010). Nevertheless, rural development projects should not only encourage citizens to engage in the development process, but also establish robust organizations for facilitating and representing citizens' interests (Oakley, 1988; Seetharam, 1990).

Initiatives are being taken to engage citizens in the planning process at local levels, including the Government of Canada's initiation of the ICSP program,

which aims to build up long-term sustainable communities based on collaboration and partnership with community members for promoting rural development (Planning for Sustainable Canadian Communities Roundtable 2005). This project also recognizes the importance of citizen participation in cultivating rural development. One of ICSP's visions is to meet communities' needs through knowledge sharing and social learning among planners, citizens and municipalities. ICSPs have been developed on the principle that community residents should have a full right to shape the future of their respective communities, and that this process will also generate social capital (e.g., network, trust, community bonding). This literature review section has discussed the rationale of citizen participation in rural development, strategies for promoting citizen participation in rural projects, and the benefits of participatory rural development. This study will contribute to the literature in terms of assessing the level of citizen participation in rural sustainability planning.

2.5 Sustainability/Sustainable Development and Planning

Sustainability and planning can be considered two sides of a coin, as the planning process works as a main catalyst for ensuring future growth and development based on the principle of inter-generational equity (Baer 1997). That is why Pearce (1991) has mentioned that "we desperately need a planning system that puts the environment on a level playing field" (p. 288). Sustainable development cannot be attained successfully if ambiguity and uncertainly exist in the planning process regarding the concept of "sustainability." Planners must take proper

initiatives to understand the empirical implications of the terms "sustainability" and "sustainable development" (Berke and Manta-Conroy 2000).

McDonald (1996) argued that many planners think "sustainable development is what good planning is about" (p. 230). Consequently, according to Jepson (2004), sustainability planning not only incorporates the objectives of sustainability into the planning process, but also clarifies the meaning of sustainability. Various nations, including Canada, have taken steps to integrate the principles of sustainability into local planning processes. The local planning process creates "a collaborative, integrated approach to community planning that steers a community toward the implementation of local and global sustainability goals, using a long-term perspective in an adaptive institutional framework" (Sustainable Community Planning in Canada: Status and Best Practices, 2008; p.2). Numerous towns and municipalities across Canada are putting great efforts into promoting comprehensive sustainable community plans based on collaboration and partnership between local citizens and the municipal government. However, until the 1990s, Canadian community planners did not consider the importance of environmental issues and used to focus on maximizing short-term economic development within communities (Grant, 2000; Gerald, 1998; Roseland, 2000 cited in Sustainable Community Planning in Canada: Status and Best practices, Final Report, 2008).

During the energy crisis periods in the 1970s and 1980s, many planners realized the importance of incorporating environmental aspects into the community, and emphasis was given to promoting environmental development (e.g., addressing

the issues of climate change, loss of bio-diversity, resource depletion, energy consumption, wetlands) rather than focusing on the economic interests of communities (Gerarld, 1998; Roseland, 2000 cited in Sustainable Community Planning in Canada: Status and Best Practices, Final Report, 2008). Currently, environmental issues receive proper attention in the field of municipality planning processes in Canada.

For example, in 2005, Canada's federal government set out to promote sustainable development by taking an initiative in making local planning and decision-making processes more participatory in order to achieve sustainable communities. Canada's Federal Gas Tax Fund (GTF) has endorsed sustainability as one of the main components of socio-economic development for rural communities.

"Conscious human strategy and design" are required to achieve inter-generational equity and that is why the affiliation between sustainability and planning is crucial (Kenny and Meadowcroft 1999, p.4; Mohebbi and Mohebbi 2010 in Gondwe et al. 2011). Kenny and Meadowcroft (1999) have also mentioned that planning can be considered a "practical and logical" mechanism for promoting environmental sustainability because according to environmentalists, the existing apprehensions regarding environmental damage and resource depletion should be addressed through tasks and plans of human agency. Moreover, for tackling ever-increasing environmental concerns (e.g., depletion of resources, degradation of air and water quality, pollution), a broad range of targets and goals needs to be fixed as well, and citizens also must modify their economic and social behavior by following the path of more environmental consciousness and responsibility. Therefore, this

broad re-orientation and transformation need systematic and strategic management, which requires the practice of planning (Kenny and Meadowcroft, 1999).

Many scholars (Cormick et al., 1996; Innes and Booher, 1999a; Innes and Booher, 2004; Owen, 1998) have emphasized that in order to achieve sustainability, it is crucial to formulate a planning strategy that is participatory and inclusive in nature (e.g., follow the principles of deliberative democracy). A well-co-ordinated planning process can address diverse environmental, social and developmental issues through stakeholder and citizen participation, where stakeholders and citizens can engage in interactive and constructive discussion to design a sustainable future (Akhmat et al., 2011; Cowell, 2013). A communicative and participatory planning approach is also an effective type of social learning, knowledge exchange, and problem solving. This productive method minimizes the communication gap between expert planners and common citizens, who are likely to be affected by the plans (Owen 1998).

Planning can also map out those locations that are in need of environmental reform (Cowell, 2013). In this way planners can concentrate more on those areas for promoting sustainability development instead of wasting time in areas that are already in a good position in terms of environmental value. Besides, cost-effectiveness can be attained if sustainability planning is based on achieving long-term goals (e.g., ICSP is a long-term planning approach) by facilitating long-term savings (Sustainable Community Planning in Canada: Status and Best Practices, Final Report, 2008). Planning helps communities contribute to their local

development, as well as shape their future (McDonald 1996), because planning provides "an opportunity to engage citizens in a dialogue about what they value about their communities and what they want their community to look like in the future" (AUMA, 2009). For all these reasons, it is important to a have a well-organized and clearly articulated planning process. Bagheri and Hjorth (2007) have argued that sustainability planning should follow the "process-based" approach rather than the "fixed-goal" approach, because "the most important product in planning is the process" (p. 85). Bagheri and Hjorth (2007) have suggested the following characteristics of a "process-based" approach:

- Sustainability planning should be based on learning rather than predicting. According to the authors, the planning process of sustainability should involve all stakeholders, experts, planners and citizens in order to prompt the process of social learning. This knowledge sharing and learning process makes the planning system an effective strategy for sustainable development.
- Sustainability planning should be based on perceiving and adapting to change. In traditional planning systems, the planners fix some optimal goals for the future based on rational and calculated projection. But for handling the environmental issues, planning should be able to perceive the uncertain changes of the future and be prepared to adapt to these environmental uncertainties (e.g., climate change). The social learning process can help build up the adaption capacity and that is why sustainability planning has been defined as "a collaborative, integrated approach to community planning that steers the community towards" the path of an environmentally sound future by

> "using a long-term perspective in an adaptive institutional framework" (Marbek Resource Consultants 2008, p. 33).

McDonald (1996) has proposed two sets of criteria (e.g., Substantive Criteria and Process Criteria) for including the principles of sustainable development in planning discourse. Substantive criteria demand that sustainability plans have to consider the "regenerative capacity" of renewable resources, reasonable use of non-renewable resources, maintenance of bio-diversity, and ensure basic human needs (e.g., food, clothing, and housing) and social and environmental equity which will equally distribute the costs and benefits of the planning outcome among citizens. Process criteria focus on the issues of effective citizen participation in the planning and decision-making. These criteria are based on the combination of environmental, social, economic and ecological (the elements of substantive criteria) aspects of sustainability and adaption capacity. Furthermore process criteria promote the importance of social learning in case of facing the uncertainties of the natural environment. McDonald (1996) specified that these two sets of criteria can be used as benchmarks for evaluating planning systems.

Berke and Manta-Conroy (2000) have proposed some recommendations for fostering sustainable planning, including a focus on pragmatic information (e.g., community concerns, environmental conditions of a particular community, the role of citizens) rather than a theoretical approach to sustainable development. Furthermore, it is not enough just to incorporate the goal of achieving sustainability in planning and decision-making without having a clear understanding about what sustainability means and what the implications of

achieving sustainable development are (Gunder, 2006; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010).

Most of the literature on sustainability planning does not explain the main principles of sustainability; rather, it adopts traditional definitions that are based on achieving intergeneration equity through nurturing economic, social, cultural, and ecological aspects of sustainability. But instead of simply following the existing definitions, planners must define these aspects within the context of specific planning projects (e.g., urban/rural or private/public). Beatley and Manning (1998) have also pointed out this gap in the planning literature by stating that sustainability, within planning discourse, "requires definition and elaboration" (p. 3). Such studies reinforce the importance of promoting "ecological literacy" among the planners to acknowledge the true objective of sustainability (Sandercock, 1997).

2.6 Citizen Participation and Sustainability Planning

Research on citizen participation is a growing trend within contemporary academic discourse. This research encompasses a wide range of areas (e.g., participation in urban and rural planning, environmental policy making, sustainable development, water management, heath care) (Korff et al. 2012). Fraassen (2012) has studied the status of citizen participation in the development of sustainability planning in Alberta by using the method of environmental scanning in 20 small-to-medium-size Alberta communities. His study showed that one of the main factors behind the success of sustainability planning is trust among citizens, stakeholders and the municipality.

Participation has received generous attention within environmental planning discourses in both local and international fields (Collins and Ison, 2006). The majority of sustainability conferences followed by the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 made a commitment to strengthening citizen participation in sustainability planning and policy-making processes. Forty nations signed the Arhus Convention, which agreed to promote "access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters" (Newig 2007, p. 51). Active citizen engagement in planning and decision making has been recognized as a fundamental goal of sustainable development (Gasparatos et al. 2007). The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) has also identified citizen participation as a crucial component in the case of decisions in the sustainability planning process (Geczi 2007).

An extensive amount of literature exists explaining the importance of citizen participation in the field of sustainability planning. According to some scholars (Goldstein et al., 2000; Kelemen et al. 2008), sustainability plans need to be participatory since long-term sustainable development can be difficult to achieve (especially at the local level) without integrating social values, traditional knowledge and local interest in the decision-making stage of sustainability plans. Citizen participation can also contribute to environmental planning by focusing on citizens' concerns and their experiences regarding environmental injustice, resource depletion, and pollution (Masuda et al., 2008). Citizen participation may facilitate the planning process by promoting direct communication, enhancing the quality and acceptance of decisions (Korff et al., 2012), reinforcing public trust in

expert planners and undertaking more robust, legitimate and justifiable planning and policy outcomes (Masuda et al., 2008).

Rowe and Frewer (2000) have outlined three levels of citizen participation: a) the government provides information to citizens without consulting them, which can be labelled a communication level; b) citizens provide views, opinions and concerns to the government, which can be considered a consultation level; and c) the government and citizens exchange knowledge and information with each other through constructive dialogue (e.g., deliberation). Furthermore, Arnstein (1969) introduced a theoretical framework reflecting the fact that citizen participation can fall into various levels if applied to decision-making processes, including from non-participation to full participation where the issues of information, communication, consultation, manipulation, deliberation, and power play crucial roles. A majority of the reviewed literature has mentioned the conceptual framework of Arnstein (1969), but did not give the practical application of this framework within the context of environmental planning at the local level.

According to both theoretical and empirical research, citizen participation in planning and decision making can play a significant role not only in developing effective plans, but also in implementing them successfully (Portney 2009; Davidoff, 1965). Citizens want to engage in the planning process by presenting their concerns, instead of merely being informed regarding the planning approach (Gilat and Blair, 1997); thus, some specific issues, including who should participate in the planning, at which stage of planning citizens should get involved, and to what extent they should get access to information, require

clarification before engaging citizens in the planning process (Carter and Darlow, 1997; Blair, 2004). Citizens should also have the opportunity to play important roles in the decision-making stage for planning (Blair, 2004).

On the other hand, a variety of studies have emphasized a need to clarify the meaning of sustainability before engaging citizens in sustainability planning. According to some scholars (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Robinson, 2004, Barge, 2006), effective sustainability planning requires a common perception and language regarding the term sustainability. When an organization adopts sustainability planning, it tends to follow the widely used and dominating definition (e.g., the Brundtland Report's (1987) definition), without explaining its rationality and without justifying how it fits within the context (local or urban, private or public) of that organization (Geczi, 2007).

When citizens involve themselves in sustainability planning, they often do not get the chance to explain what sustainability means to them. They just have to follow the pre-determined theoretical concept of sustainability which can vary from their own concept. This perception gap may discourage citizens from actively engaging in the planning process. Mutual understanding, exchange of knowledge, and sharing information based on rational discussion (e.g., deliberative democracy) can remove the ambiguity about the concept of sustainability (Dietz et al., 2001). However, a majority of the reviewed literature does not give satisfactory attention to the practical issues of how to integrate the diverse viewpoints of various groups (e.g., scientists, technocrats, sociologists, economists, politicians, and citizens) in sustainability planning.

On the other hand, citizen participation has been considered an important factor in the development of sustainability plans. For example, Hunsberger et al. (2005) has mentioned the significance of citizen engagement at the local level of planning sustainable development. Further, sustainability planning can be seen as a collaborative learning process (Calder and Beckie, 2013) where not only stakeholders, planners and experts, but also citizens, are expected to participate. When developing a sustainable plan, local citizens, planners and municipal staff should begin collaborating at the initial stage of planning (Hirsch Hadorn, 2008). However, the empirical questions regarding what tools or methods should be used to involve citizens in sustainability planning, what inspires citizens to participate, what kind of challenges can emerge during the course of citizen engagement and the impacts of citizen participation in the final decision-making stage have not been discussed adequately in the reviewed literature.

It is crucial to analyze the characteristics of participatory planning based on empirical evidence. Calder and Beckie (2013) have analyzed the issue of "proper alignment and communication strategy" in order to understand the nature of the participatory planning approach. These two academics have used comparative case study techniques in their research by choosing two rural communities in Alberta: Olds and Chauvin. These two communities were chosen because of their involvement in the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association's (AUMA) sustainability planning program. The researchers found out that communication plays a crucial role in terms of citizen participation in sustainability planning. Moreover, communication allows the local government to acknowledge multiple

and diverse issues from both the majority and minority within the community, which also paves the way for sharing ideas, views and suggestions among citizens and the local government. This shared knowledge and collaboration simplifies the planning process and guides the communities toward positive change.

Sinclair (2002) has highlighted an important issue about public "consultation" and "participation" by noting that generally, the Canadian government considers public consultation at the "operational" (which means at the implementation) stage where planners are already making decisions, and citizens are simply invited for consultation. The process of consultation consists of information sharing, discussing and gathering suggestions from citizens regarding the goals and objectives of planning, whereas participation allows citizens to contribute in the actual design of planning and the decision-making process (Sinclair, 2002). Geczi (2007) has proposed a planning process in which public consultation will occur during the initial stage of planning, to identify local concerns and interests, rather than at the implementation phase.

The review shows that extensive literature exists regarding the role of citizen participation in sustainability planning and "one would be hard-pressed to find today a public decision or public initiative referencing the concept of sustainability that does not also emphasize the importance of democratic participation" (Geczi 2007, p. 375-376). Based on the literature review, it can be said that citizen participation plays a positive role in the planning process. For example, Gibson et al. (2005) has mentioned that citizen engagement can be considered an essential factor for developing the goals and objectives of

sustainability planning. Beierle and Cayford (2002) have articulated that environmental planning and policy have been improved through citizen participation. The authors have analyzed data from 239 cases to assess the success and impact of citizen participation in environmental decision making, and have come to the conclusion that citizen participation has a positive impact in this field.

However, the literature has given less attention to the analysis of how the process of citizen participation actually happens (e.g., tools, methods, mechanism) at the local level (Kim & Lee, 2012). It is useful to illustrate the positive impacts of citizen participation, but the empirical questions require more attention. These questions include why do citizens participate in planning, what are the degrees of citizen involvement in policy making, what are the stages of involvement (e.g., initial or final stage), and what are the socio-economic factors (e.g., education, income, class, age, gender) that contribute to participation (Crosby et al.,1986). This research aims to provide empirical evidence regarding these questions (e.g., how and why citizens participate in community sustainability planning) by analyzing the methods, challenges and impact of citizen engagement.

2.7 Conclusion

The reviewed literature shows that the term sustainability needs to be understood in the context of its practical applicability in the field of planning, instead of in terms of abstract theories (Gibson et al., 2005). The literature review has also indicated that sustainable development can bring about positive change in society, but the literature did not provide adequate empirical evidence. Furthermore, the literature review reveals that citizen participation has been considered an effective

tool for enhancing the democratic value and principles of the political decision-making process. The process of citizen participation can also help to ameliorate mutual trust, respect and rapport between the local public and traditional power holders (e.g., municipal government, municipal staff, professional planners and consultants) (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

Various scholars (Weber et al., 2003; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Ebdon, 2002; Sarno & Wagner, 2002; Hunsberger et al., 2005; Beierle & Konisky, 1999; Devas and Grant, 2003; Fraassen, 2012; Masuda et al. 2008) have highlighted the importance of evaluating citizen participation and have outlined potential benefits of citizen participation. But these scholars did not provide adequate answers for some critical empirical questions, including what levels or degrees of citizen participation are needed to ensure the benefits of citizens' local knowledge. A majority of the reviewed literature has emphasized illustrating theories regarding citizen participation instead of providing empirical explanations of how those theories work in reality. This study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence based on the citizen engagement process of ICSPs in rural Alberta communities.

This study has analyzed the role of citizens in the development and implementation of ICSP plans by focusing on the diverse participatory methods, challenges and barriers in terms of engaging citizens, on the scope of deliberation, and on the role of citizens in the final decision-making process. In order to make the process of citizen engagement successful and productive, it is important to give citizens the power to influence final decisions; thus, the implementation

stage of planning has to be designed in a way that lay people, expert planners and municipal representatives will be able to share knowledge based on representative, accountable, justifiable and inclusive dialogue (Beierle & Konisky, 2000). This research intends to investigate whether this collaboration (if present in the case studies) among expert planners, municipal staff and local citizens can contribute to the creation of community sustainability planning.

CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze the level of citizen participation in sustainability planning for rural Alberta communities. This research contributes to the literature about citizen participation and sustainability planning by conducting an empirical study based on rural Alberta communities. Specifically, this thesis seeks to understand how and why citizens participate in rural sustainability planning. The results of this study also aim to find out the potential challenges of citizen engagement, significant factors which inspire citizens to participate, advantage and disadvantage of various participatory methods and impact of knowledge and expertise upon citizen engagement process. This study can also enhance our understanding regarding the impact of citizen participation in sustainability planning and how citizens can contribute to rural development through participation.

This thesis seeks to determine the level of citizen participation in the planning (e.g., sustainability planning for their respective communities) process as well as whether or not citizen input was incorporated into the implementation of plans (if they were implemented). It will achieve these goals by focusing on the following concerns:

1. Were citizens involved (e.g., at any stage) in the process of creating an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP)?

2. If citizens had the opportunity to participate in developing their community sustainability plans, what was the level or degree (e.g., to what extent, stage of involvement, opportunity of deliberation) of that participation?
3. What types of participatory techniques were employed to involve citizens in developing sustainability plans?
4. What factors are needed to encourage citizens to actively participate in developing community sustainability planning?
5. Did citizens have the opportunity to influence the final decision-making process during the implementation stage?

This chapter intends to present the research methods applied in the study. Specifically, this chapter outlines the reasons for selecting specific methods by underlining how apt these methods were for the research. A qualitative method, specifically a case study technique, has been adopted for this study. Purposive sampling has been used to select the case studies. The study is based on using qualitative data to explore the level of citizen participation. Both primary and secondary data were collected on the basis of qualitative data collection techniques. Primary data was collected through key informant interviews based on semi-structure questionnaires. Reviews of official documents and relevant research papers, journals and books were the main sources of secondary data. The limitations of this research are also presented in this chapter.

3.2 Rationale for Qualitative Methods

Research methodologies help us to understand and analyze a phenomenon as well as give us proper guidance about how to explain a phenomenon in a legitimate

and comprehensible manner (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Basically, there is no inherent superiority to either qualitative or quantitative methods (Silverman, 2010). Whether a researcher should adopt quantitative or qualitative research methods should depend on the research questions and objectives, time available and resources, rather than on issues of convenience and preference (Marshall et al., 2013; Kumar, 1999; Hakim 1987: Morse, 1994; Neuman, 1997).

The qualitative approach has pragmatic underpinnings (Morrow, 2005), as it focuses on "hearing what others have to say, seeing what others do and representing these as accurately as possible" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 43) by providing a "holistic description" as a way of "describing in detail all of what goes on in a particular activity or situation" (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001, p. 432-433).

According to some scholars (Silverman, 2010; Berg & Lune, 2012; Ryan et. al, 2007; Burnard, 1991; Punch, 2005; Hakim, 1987; Creswell, 2013), a qualitative method is an effective technique for investigating a phenomenon through an exhaustive and profound process based on comprehensive and rich information. Furthermore, the qualitative method offers a broader scope to enhance our understanding about the empirical world by focusing "on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspective of those being studied" (Merriam, 1998, p. 1). This method can help a researcher unleash the complex underlying facts and diverse meanings of an event on the basis of empirical details (e.g., experiences, perceptions, beliefs of individuals associated with the event) rather than focusing on abstract theories and calculations (e.g., statistical analysis, regression,

percentages) (Kumar 1999). The research questions in this study are designed to examine the empirical experiences, beliefs and opinions of the expert planners, municipal staff and professional consultants who were not only involved in the development of ICSPs, but also participated in the process of conducting citizen engagement in order to comprehend citizens' underlying roles in the planning and decision-making process; thus, a qualitative method has been chosen to analyze the phenomenon of citizen participation in creating Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs) in rural Alberta communities. Additionally, the data has been analysed within the context of this study's theoretical framework; thus a theoretically based evaluation of participatory processes has been presented in this thesis. More specifically, the research questions of thesis have been answered not only from the perspective of the research participants, but also from a critical perspective based on theories. The data has been critically evaluated and interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks of this thesis.

This study focuses on the level of citizen participation and explains why and how citizens participate. In the case of exploring "why" and "how" issues, a researcher needs in-depth information where words, as opposed to statistical numbers, work efficiently (Bryman, 2008). Moreover, the nature of this research is explanatory, so qualitative methods, and specifically a case study methodology, have been chosen. Furthermore, the literature review notes that a majority of the studies (Kakumba, 2010; Pandey and Chauhan 2012; Fraassen, 2012; Korff et al. 2012, Law, 2013; Calder and Beckie, 2013; Masuda et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2002; Geczi, 2007) regarding citizen participation have used a qualitative approach.

However, many (quantitative) researchers and academics do not take the results of a qualitative study seriously because they think this method lacks validity and reliability (Meyer, 2001, Miles and Huberman, 1994, Anderson, 2010; Silverman, 2006; Bryman, 2008). However, Hakim (1987) argues that the validity of data can be considered one of the biggest strengths of qualitative research, since qualitative methods (e.g., ethnography, case study, discursive analysis, narrative) allow a researcher to gather rich, accurate and wide-ranging data by interviewing a person through open-ended and comprehensive questions which bring out in-depth information. This argument has also been supported by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) because qualitative research methods can foster the validity of data, as such methods "are designed to ensure a close fit between the data and what people actually say and do" (p.9).

In qualitative research the volume of data can be large. Data analysis, transcribing large number of recorded data, and writing up the findings in a systematic way can be time consuming and tiring for some researchers (Miles, 1979). The issue of generalisation can be considered a limitation, especially in this project, since it will conduct only two case studies, which might narrow the results (Bryman, 2008). Nevertheless, this study does not plan to make generalizable conclusions. The purpose of this study is to learn about and understand the citizen participation process of creating an ICSP.

3.3 Rationale for Case Study Methodology

The main goal of this thesis is to explore the level of citizen participation in planning, and to determine its impact. As a result, I have chosen a case study

methodology. The case study approach is considered "a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (Berg 2007, p. 283). Case studies can also be defined as an exhaustive and detailed study method "of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units" (Gerring, 2004; p. 342). In this definition the term "unit" implies a specific event, individual or phenomenon such as "a nation-state, revolution, political party, election, or person—observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time" (Gerring, 2004; p.342).

Various scholars (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994; Yin, 2003; Gerring, 2004; Flybjerg, 2006; Patton, 2005; Stake, 1995) have considered case studies as an effective way to understand a phenomenon based on comprehensive and detailed analysis. Case studies can be defined as "an all-encompassing method—with the logic of design incorporating specific approaches to data collection and data analysis" (Yin 2003, p. 13). In other words, Yin (2003) has explicitly declared that case studies can be considered a complete and all-inclusive research method, which not only guide a researcher in developing a theoretical framework and research design, but also support data collection techniques and data analysis because "the case study inquiry relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion; and…benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (Yin 2003, p.13-14). Various scholars and researchers from multiple disciplines have used case studies. This method has gained popularity in the field of social science research, including psychology, sociology, political science,

anthropology, history, urban planning, public policy, management science, and social work (Yin 2003). Specifically, case studies are considered an appropriate technique when a researcher wants to analyze a complex situation in a detailed manner along with an aim to reveal the holistic explanation of that situation (Meyer, 2001). Case study methods also provide a researcher the opportunity to investigate a phenomenon through manifold observations, insights and sources (Gummesson, 2000).

Yin (2003) has pointed out that case studies can be characterized as the most appropriate research method when the researcher intends to find out the "how" and "why" queries of a phenomenon under study. He also mentioned that the/a case study method could contribute greatly to enhancing our knowledge in terms of understanding social phenomena as "the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin 2003, p.3). Moreover, according to Yin (2003), it is crucial to analyze contextual conditions for understating a specific process or action (which is under study) and in this situation the case study approach is appropriate. To illustrate, this study will explore the level of citizen participation, the factors that inspired citizens to participate, and how they eventually participated in developing an ICSP. Thus I have chosen a case study approach because in this research the process under study is "citizen participation" (which is the main theme of the case) and it is not possible to explore the level of citizen participation without analyzing the the contextual conditions (e.g., sustainability, planning, rural development, the decision-making process, deliberative democracy).

Yin (2003) and Berg (2007) both mentioned that case studies can be made valid and reliable by using multiple sources of data collection. This research project attempts to do that. According to Berg (2007), in using case studies, researchers attempt to "reveal slightly different facets of the same symbolic reality" and by compiling "several lines of sight" researchers can establish a holistic "picture of reality" (Berg, 2007; p.5). In this way, using various sources of data and data collection procedures allows researchers to get rid of the problems related to reliability and validity. Moreover, one of the biggest benefits to using a case study method is that it gives us a more complete understanding of the subject under study as the comprehensive explanations help a researcher to investigate a phenomenon from multiple and diverse angles (Gummesson, 2000). Researchers often prefer case studies because they are illustrative and provide clarity to complex settings (Stake, 1978).

3.4 Case Study Selection

3.4.1 Sampling

Sampling is a crucial part of research design because through the sampling procedure, researchers select subjects to be studied and analyzed in the "research investigation on the ground[s] that they provide information considered relevant to the research problem" (Oppong, 2013). Sampling is a challenging procedure for both qualitative and quantitative researchers (Silverman, 2010, Marshall et al., 2013; Coyne, 1997). However, in qualitative research the sampling procedure is more flexible and straightforward (Coyne, 1997). The timeline and financial condition of a research project tend to affect the sampling procedure of a

qualitative study (Coyne, 1997). Generally, there are no complex or definite rules in the qualitative research method in the case of choosing the process and sample size (Bell, 2005; Coyne, 1997). In the case of qualitative methods, if the selected sample size is adequate enough to understand a social event or phenomenon by studying specific groups of people who hold in-depth information and knowledge about that phenomenon, then that sample size can be considered as effective and appropriate (Mays & Pope, 1995; Bell, 2005; Sandelowski, 1995; Fossey et al., 2002; Gerring, 2007).

Generally, qualitative researchers prefer a small sample size in order to get a profound and holistic view of the social process (Gerring, 2007; Sandelowski, 1995; Mays & Pope, 2007; Marshall et al., 2013). In this research, a small sample size has been selected due to time and financial restrictions. This study has chosen to conduct two case studies (out of 307 cases in Alberta). This thesis aims to understand the level of citizen participation in terms of developing sustainability plans in rural Alberta based on an in-depth analysis of the two selected cases. The two cases have been selected based on "purposive sampling."

In the case of qualitative research, purposive sampling is often preferred by researchers (Teddlie and Yu, 2007; Gerring, 2007; Maxwell, 1997; Devers et al., 2002; Silverman, 2010; Tongco, 2007; Marshall et al., 2013; Patton, 2005; Patton, 1990; Coyne, 1997). This sampling technique can be seen as an appropriate method for finding accurate and comprehensive explanations from a qualitative research project because through purposive sampling "particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide

that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1997; p. 87). In qualitative research the main aim is to understand the variations and underlying facts of a social process instead of ensuring statistical representativeness for validating a theoretical model (Mays & Pope, 2007); thus, purposive sampling instead of random sampling is more appropriate for qualitative research methods. Moreover, the sample size of this study is small (n=2), so in this case random sampling may create problems of unreliability and a lack of proper and pertinent information (Gerring 2007).

On the basis of a purposive sampling procedure, this study has focused on Hinton and Wood Buffalo for conducting the case studies. Hinton and Wood Buffalo are two diverse communities in terms of economy, demography and geography. The town of Hinton is situated in the west-central side of Alberta in Canada. Besides, the location of this town falls within the Municipal District of Yellowhead-94 and Highway 16, "The Yellowhead Highway" (Hart, 1980). According to the Federal Census of 2011, the total population of Hinton is 9,640. Hinton's tourism industry is renowned. This town is well-known as an entryway to various recreational sites, predominantly Jasper National Park in the Alberta Rockies. According to The Canadian Business Journal, Hinton's economic sector is fairly diversified. In addition to the tourism industry, this town also has a coal mining industrial sector, forestry sector, oil and gas sector (e.g., some local organizations such as Alstar Oilfield Contractors and Trican Well Services are located in Hinton), and a pulp and paper industry (The Canadian Business Journal, 2014).

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, situated in Northern Alberta, is known as one of Alberta's fastest growing municipalities, specifically in terms of economic growth (Statistics Canada, 2010; Municipal Census, 2012). Wood Buffalo has experienced significant economic development due to the oil and gas industry. This rapid economic growth has made Wood Buffalo one of the largest growth areas in North America (Municipal Census, 2012). It is also well-known for having the world's second largest national park, "Wood Buffalo National Park" (Smandych, & Kueneman, 2010). The population of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is 116,407 (Municipal census report of 2012).

These two diverse communities can be considered ideal examples for understanding the level of citizen participation in the creation of ICSPs, because both have successfully completed their sustainability plans and those plans have been adopted by local councillors. Moreover, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) provided funding to Hinton and Wood Buffalo to help them create the sustainability plans. Calder & Beckie (2013) have also used the AUMA as a parameter for choosing two case studies (e.g., Olds and Chauvin were involved in a sustainability planning pilot project led by the AUMA) in order to understand the citizen engagement process in sustainability plans.

Both Hinton and Wood Buffalo are also economically stable in terms of developing sustainability plans and, most importantly, conducting citizen participation sessions for integrating citizens into the creation and implementation of the ICSPs. Hinton and Wood Buffalo were selected for this study based on purposive sampling. This specific sort of purposeful sampling is known as

"intensity sampling" (Patton, 1990) and it can provide valuable insight, rich description and a clear articulation of a phenomenon (Miles & Hurberman 1994). This project aims to analyze the role that citizens play in the plan development and decision making process of ICSPs in Hinton and Wood Buffalo; thus, two diverse and exemplary case studies have been chosen for generating in-depth information about the participatory methods, scope of deliberation, challenges of citizen participation and important factors for fostering the engagement process in rural Alberta.

Hinton's sustainability plans revolve around the idea of improving the quality of life in the community. The main aspect of Hinton's planning process "is rooted in the community and belongs to the community as a whole" (Hinton Community Sustainability Plan 2011), which indicates that citizens within the community have been recognized as an integral part of the sustainability planning process. Hinton has attempted to establish full and fair representation of the community's vision of sustainability by inviting citizens to join a citizens' advisory group, as well as by appointing community volunteers to support the process and develop a community sustainability plan. Several focus group discussions have been conducted for the planning process to allow citizens to share their dreams, perceptions and values. In order to engage the community with the planning process, municipal staff of Hinton organized coffee shop roundtables, workplace meetings, stakeholder focus groups and internet surveys.

Wood Buffalo's sustainability plans emphasize balancing the economic, cultural, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability in the context of regional

growth. Wood Buffalo's ICSP plan, known as "Envision Wood Buffalo," has three phases. Phase One is based on "Public Engagement," which is the issue of interest in this research as it seeks to find the level of, and influential factors concerning, citizen participation. In this phase a total of 24 engagement sessions took place throughout the region, allowing citizens to express their views and opinions about the Envision project, and to discover how their visions could be related to the social, cultural, environmental and economic aspects of sustainability. Phase Two was about plan development where municipal staff and expert planners were responsible for finalizing the goals and objectives of the plan. Then, Phase Three of "Envision Wood Buffalo," consisted of implementation process where the municipal staff and expert planners were responsible for executing the proposed actions and objectives of the sustainability plan.

This thesis seeks to examine whether the level of citizen participation in Hinton and Wood Buffalo's ICSPs are really as inclusive and effective as they have been portrayed. Case studies are the best way to conduct these investigations.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection techniques depend on a number of factors (e.g., type of research question, research methodology, financial and time restrictions, accessibility) (Meyer, 2001). In a qualitative method, researchers collect empirical data from various sources such as participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, literature reviews, pertinent official documents, and historical contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2010; Neuman, 1997). Yin (2003) has also considered

data collection techniques that are especially suitable for case study approaches, including surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and an analysis of documents and pertinent literature. Face-to-face interviews, surveys conducted by sending questionnaires through the mail, and field observation are not appropriate for this project since time and money are limited; thus, the data collection method of this research consists of telephone interviews based on semi-structured questionnaires.

3.5.1 Primary Sources of Data

The primary source of data collection is "key informant interviews." This method was used to collect additional first-hand and authentic information through key informant interviews, as these key informants played crucial roles in the development of community sustainability plans. Specifically, the key informant interviewees consist of expert planners, professional consultants, councillors, sustainability co-ordinators, planning supervisors, members of the citizens' advisory group, chief administrative officers, and other municipal staff. Confidentiality has been maintained in terms of the names and positions of the key informants in this research. Two methods were used to choose the interviewees. One method was snowball sampling (Robinson, 2014), in which study participants were asked to provide names of acquaintances (e.g., colleagues, associates, friends) who not only hold key positions in the communities, but also were involved in developing community sustainability plans (e.g., planners, councillors, sustainability co-ordinators). To collect contact information about potential interviewees, I carefully reviewed the official websites and planning

documents of both Hinton and Wood Buffalo. I conducted a total of 24 interviews (12 from Hinton and 12 from Wood Buffalo) for this research.

3.5.2 Secondary Source of Data

Apart from key informant interviews, this study has used diverse secondary sources for data collection purposes, including academic literature in the form of published journal papers, thesis papers related to the concept of this research, books, official planning documents and reports from Hinton and Wood Buffalo. A majority of the journal articles and research papers were searched on and downloaded from the University of Alberta library's online database. The books were also collected from the Rutherford Library at the University of Alberta. The Canadian Sustainability Planning Inventory (CSPI) website was used as another significant secondary source of data collection. This text-searchable database, developed by the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) contains over 1,000 sustainability plans from all 13 Canadian provinces.

This project used a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix A) for data collection, since both quantitative and qualitative researchers consider questionnaires the most common tool for data collection (Gholaminejad et al., 2013). Moreover, when time and financial constraints exist (which is the case in this research), questionnaire-based interviews are cost effective (Phellas et. al, 2001). The questionnaire for this research consists of both pre-determined and open-ended questions (e.g., what inspired you to participate in the ICSP, do you want to continue your involvement in ICSP and why/why not?) in order to get in-depth information about the level of citizen participation in the ICSP. Open-ended

questions, rather than mere "yes or no" answers, make up most of the questionnaire. This was done in to get a wide-range and diverse set of answers, as well as to show the interviewee that his/her opinion is important. To analyze the strengths and weaknesses of participatory tools adopted by the municipalities, the interviewees were also questioned about their experiences (both positive and negative) in terms of practicing citizen participation. The language used in the interview questions was kept simple and precise for the convenience of the respondents (Bryman, 2008).

Interviews, as opposed to surveys or self-completed questionnaires, are effective ways of data collection in qualitative studies because if the interviewee does not understand a question or has some confusion about it, then he/she can ask the interviewer for clarification, or can ask for a justification of the question, including "what do you mean by this/why are you asking it/why is it important?" In this way, rich data can be generated along with exhaustive information, which is beneficial for enhancing the validity of an interviewee's answers in a qualitative study (Phellas et. al, 2011). This interview method is flexible and can generate new emerging issues (e.g., issues that were not previously considered by the researcher). It can also expose some sensitive experiences, like issues regarding power in citizen participation, and the impact that education level has on effective participation, as discovered through the interactive conversation between the interviewee and interviewer (Bryman, 2008). Since this qualitative research aims to achieve an in-depth understanding on the basis of "rich and detailed answers" (Bryman, 2008 p.437), the interview is an appropriate method for data collection

in this study. In terms of time and financial limitations, a qualitative interview is appropriate for its relative cost-effectiveness (Silverman 2006).

For data collection purposes, interviews have taken place over the telephone. “In a telephone interview the interviewer administers the questions (from a structured questionnaire and within a limited period of time) via a telephone” (de Leeuw 1992, p.3). Some researchers have criticized telephone interviews, because unlike face-to-face interviews, they cannot generate insightful data by the observation of visual indications of interviewees (Novick, 2008). Telephone survey methods lack the process of flexibility and ability to analyze non-verbal communication, as they do not allow researchers to see the interviewees’ faces in order to apprehend their reactions or comfort level while answering the questions (de Leeuw, 1992).

Qualitative researchers think that conversation through the telephone limits researchers’ ability to build rapport with the interview subjects, and that a lack of visual signs in telephone interviews may cause a loss or misrepresentation of data. However, there is no empirical evidence to support these assumptions (Novick, 2008). Face-to-face interviews are flexible in terms of allowing the interviewer to ask lengthy and complex questions and capture facial expressions in order to understand a respondent’s comfort level with the questions, but at the same time, these interviews are time-consuming and expensive (de Leeuw, 1992). When time and finances constrictions are a consideration, telephone interviews are a suitable process, as researchers do not have to travel anywhere to visit interview subjects (Novick, 2008; Carr & Worth, 2001). Besides, through telephone interview methods, interviewees can get more “personal space” because they do not have to

face the interviewer directly, which allows them to relax, answer the interview questions comfortably and share "sensitive information" (Argyle & Dean 1965; Novick, 2008). According to Smith (2005), interviewees can concentrate more on productive conversation with the researcher over the phone, as they do not have to worry about their attire, looks, or body language, which might be cause for distraction. These are the reasons that telephone interview method has been selected for this research project.

Each telephone interview was 20 to 40 minutes long and was tape-recorded, after obtaining consent from the interviewee, to preserve the precision of data (King & Horrocks, 2010). Participants were ensured that their names and positions will remain anonymous. After the interview phase was completed, the conversations were transcribed verbatim. The telephone interviews were conducted in my study room, in a quiet environment, using a digital tape recorder. Only the researcher was present in the room at the time the interviews were conducted, so as to avoid distraction and maintain the confidentiality of participants. I also maintained a research journal during the entire research period, in order to keep track of every participant. The journal includes notes written after each interview (e.g., the participant paused too often, sounded happy/angry/disappointed, was afraid or willing to share his/her experiences) which helped during data analysis. This process of taking notes helped to enhance the transparency and quality of data analysis. More specifically, I followed constant comparative analysis (Morse & Field, 1998; Thorne, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Boeije, 2002) approach for analyzing the data. Based on this approach, I took one interview transcript and

compared that piece of data with all other interview transcripts to generate common themes. To illustrate, during comparing the interview transcripts I found out that one municipal staff mentioned "decision-making authority can add extra burden for citizens." Another interview transcript contained similar issue where a different municipal staff stated "Implementation stage is complicated.....citizens' have busy lifestyle you know...hectic work schedule.....it is tough for them to get involved in decision-making process." At the time of comparing these two transcripts one common theme emerged which is "making life easier for citizens." I continued this process of comparison until each and every piece of data (e.g., interview transcripts) has been compared individually (Thorne, 2000; Morse & Field, 1998).

3.6 Validity and Reliability: Triangulation

This project has employed the strategy of triangulation for establishing the validity and reliability of data. Triangulation has received considerable attention for enhancing the quality (validity and reliability) of a qualitative study (Golafshani, 2003; Mathison, 1988; Patton, 1990; Johnson, 1997; Konecki, 2008, Creswell, 2013). Triangulation includes collecting information from multiple sources to study one particular framework in order to justify its findings (King & Horrocks, 2010; Konecki, 2008). Triangulation is crucial because "the more sources tapped for understanding, the richer the data and the more believable the findings" (Glesne 1998, p. 31; Olsen, 2004). Denzin (1978) has proposed four types of triangulation: triangulation of data, triangulation of

researchers/investigators, theoretical triangulation, and methodological triangulation.

Data triangulation process includes collecting data from multiple sources. This project attempts to collect data from key informant interviews, and a review of pertinent literature and documents. Data collected from all of these sources was cross-checked in order to verify their validity and consistency. The second approach which is triangulation of researchers/investigators is such a process through which a researcher obtains help from other researchers to evaluate the quality of the study. Multiple observers, auditors, and researchers check the validity of the findings. Then theoretical triangulation implies that researchers can use various theoretical frameworks to analyze a single study's findings. Finally, methodological triangulation is such an approach where researchers can use diverse methods (both qualitative and quantitative methods) to explore and understand a specific phenomenon.

For this study, data triangulation has been used. Triangulation of data sources gives the researchers the unique opportunity to evaluate the strength and validity of their claims and perceptions (Konecki, 2008). Triangulation of data can establish truth by using multiple sources for data collection (Golafshani, 2003) where truth can be defined as the validity of a qualitative study (Silverman, 2010). Hence, triangulation can be considered a tool to measure the validity of the data, as this project will collect data from key informant interviews and a review of pertinent literature and documents. The findings from all of these sources will be

cross-checked in order to verify their validity and consistency (Web et al., 1966; Denzin, 1978).

3.7 Limitations of the study

This section highlights the limitation of this research. There are theoretical, methodological and empirical limitations to the study. This research is based on qualitative method. In qualitative research the volume of data can be large. Data analysis, transcribing large number of recorded data, and writing up the findings in a systematic way can be time consuming and tiring for some researchers (Miles, 1979). The issue of generalisation can be considered a limitation, especially in this project, since it will conduct only two case studies, which might narrow the results (Bryman, 2008). Nevertheless, this study does not plan to make generalizable conclusions. The purpose of this study is to learn about and understand the citizen participation process of creating an ICSP.

Additionally, this thesis does not aim to establish any theory or generate any rigid conclusion through which we can accept or reject that citizen participation is positive or negative in the process of designing sustainability planning in rural development. This study does not intend to provide information about the quality and effectiveness of citizen participation; rather, it aims to comprehend and analyze the participatory nature of ICSP by determining the level of citizen participation as well as the reasons behind the presence or absence of that participation in the development and implementation of a sustainability plan.

Additionally, in terms of limitations, due to time and financial restrictions, the research has conducted only two case studies. It would be better to conduct three or four case studies to generate richer information, as two cases may not provide sufficient generalizable outcomes. It has also not been possible to interview the local citizens regarding their participation in the sustainability planning as well as how they perceive their municipalities' efforts to engage citizens in the planning agenda, due to time and financial restrictions. The interview results are based on conversations with key informants (e.g., municipal representatives, planners, town managers, members of the citizens' advisory group, various individuals in the planning department of the municipalities). The findings are based on the experiences and views of municipal personnel and planners, a pertinent review of literature, and numerous official and planning documents of the two communities; thus, this research does not intend to draw any definite or decisive conclusions about the effectiveness of citizen participation in terms of developing and implementing sustainability plans in rural Alberta. However, the results of this research are empirical and can be useful if anyone wants to conduct future research regarding the citizen participation aspect of an ICSP on a large scale (with a larger sample size and extended period of time).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explained that a qualitative study, specifically the case study method, has been used in this research project. The two case studies, Hinton and Wood Buffalo, have been selected based on purposive sampling. Both primary and secondary data have been used in this thesis. Primary data has been collected

through key informant interviews, and secondary data has been collected based on the review of official documents and relevant literature. The findings of the two cases studies are outlined in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 4: Case Study 1 - Hinton

4.1 Introduction

The Town of Hinton, situated in west-central Alberta, Canada, is a resource-based community. This town is well known as an entryway to various recreational sites, including Jasper National Park in the Alberta Rockies. Tourism, coal mining, forestry, oil and gas, and pulp and paper are some of the major industrial sectors in Hinton (The Canadian Business Journal, 2014), making it economically diverse.

This study indicates that economic diversity is not Hinton's only overarching priority; rather, environmental stewardship, and social and cultural diversity are also important to the town's future plans and goals, which is why the community sustainability plan has received considerable attention from the municipal government and community residents (The Hinton Community Sustainability Plan, 2011). More specifically, Hinton's sustainability plan has been prioritized in order to minimize the town's ecological footprint, manage balanced economic growth, strengthen social inclusion and community cohesion, preserve cultural heritage and, finally, to promote civic engagement (The Hinton Community Sustainability Plan, 2011).

This study shows that in the case of creating a sustainability plan, citizen participation has been considered a key factor by both planners and municipal staff. This chapter aims to understand the level of that collaboration and participation by analyzing the participatory methods, stages of citizen engagement

(e.g., early stage or final phase), scope of the citizens' deliberation, impact of citizen engagement, challenges and barriers in terms of engaging citizens in the planning, and the citizens' role (if any) in the final decision-making stage (e.g., implementation stage). This study has found that the town used diverse methods to engage citizens in the sustainability plan development process. However, the planners and municipal staff adopted a minimalist approach to engaging citizens in the implementation stage. The authority of making final decisions remained in the hands of expert planners and experienced bureaucrats. Citizens did not receive enough power to influence the final decisions of the sustainability plan. The study has also found that one of the main reasons for inviting citizens to participate in the plan development process was to legitimate the local government's decisions regarding Hinton's sustainability plan.

The official name of Hinton's ICSP is the "Hinton Community Sustainability Plan." This plan was adopted by the Town Council on May 17, 2011. Community well-being (e.g., health and education), economic growth and recreational facilities are some of the overarching themes behind the creation of community sustainability plans like the ICSP. Hinton's ICSP is a long-term plan, as its objectives are based on the vision of "how Hinton will look in 30 years or where Hinton will be in 30 years" (www.hinton.ca). My interview findings also show that the sustainability plan not only covers the Hinton town, but also includes the Yellowhead County within a fixed boundary around Hinton. The proposed actions of the sustainability plan have been prioritized by integrating Hinton's ICSP into the Town Council's strategic plan.

According to the results of this study, citizen participation was considered significant in developing the sustainability plan. The interview results also indicate that the main themes of the sustainability plan are: 1) Culture and Recreation; 2) Education and Wellness; 3) Governance and Partnerships; 4) Local Economy; and 5) Natural and Built Environments. All of these themes have been defined based on citizens' visions of the community. Citizens' expectations, comments and ideas, which were gathered through the process of citizen engagement, have helped the town design its sustainability principles.

The main priorities of the sustainability plan are promoting economic development, building parks and recreation infrastructures, increasing affordable housing, advancing the post-secondary education system and improving the medical care system. The interview results show that a total of 134 actions and 22 strategies were finalized under the five main pillars of sustainability during the phase of plan development. According to the respondents, Hinton's ICSP is a very comprehensive document and is easy to understand. All action items are listed in a table in the appendices and it is very easy for local citizens to understand what the priorities are (e.g., the actions are labelled as "high-low-medium" priorities and categorized under short-term and long-term time periods).

Moreover, Hinton's ICSP is not just a municipal government plan. The planners in Hinton characterized the ICSP as "unique, collaborative and transparent" as this plan was not solely controlled by the municipality; rather, Hinton took a "unique approach" in developing the sustainability plan, whereby County Council or the county administration did not necessarily have the final say. Twelve other

partners in the business community and the hospital were key players in the development of the ICSP.

4.2 Summary of Findings

This study shows that citizens received the opportunity to express their visions and concerns though a wide variety of participatory methods—from coffee house meetings to online surveys. Along with these, other face-to-face sessions including open houses, town meetings, focus groups and workshops were organized for the purpose of communicating with citizens and gathering their thoughts about sustainability goals and objectives. The results indicate that it was difficult to attract citizens' attention to discuss sustainability issues. Citizens only showed interest in participating if the topic of discussion was directly related to their everyday lives (such as housing and recreation facilities). The idea of "long-term" planning diminished citizens' interest in participating, as did the fact that citizens had busy lives and other priorities (e.g., jobs, recreational activities).

The findings indicate that a majority of the participatory sessions took place at the beginning of the planning process, when citizens were engaged to identify problems and areas of concern. However, citizens were not actively involved in the implementation stage. The results of this study do not show any evidence that citizens, along with planners or municipal staff, solved a problem or designed a specific project together. This result implies that citizens did not receive enough opportunities to influence the actual decision-making process. According to the respondents, ambiguity around the concept of sustainability and lack of expertise among community residents were the main reasons that citizens were given

limited opportunities to participate in the implementation stage. Expert planners and experienced municipal staff were primarily responsible for making decisions, and the role of citizens in terms of policy analysis and final decision making was not adequate. The findings of this research indicate that citizen engagement process of Hinton can be characterized as complex and this complexity is not easily understood through Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation.

The decision-making approach in Hinton is consistent with a technocratic or bureaucratic act rather than a deliberative one. The results show that citizens hold ambiguous definitions of the term sustainability, which led municipal staff to think that it was not possible for citizens to contribute much to the complicated task of finalizing policy or sustainability action. However, the study did not find any initiatives for educating citizens about the practical applicability of sustainability; rather, citizens' limited knowledge of sustainability was used to justify their limited involvement at the implementation or final stage. On the other hand, time and financial constraints also discouraged municipal staff from engaging citizens in the final stages of planning (Dassah, 2013). The study also indicates that one of the main reasons that Hinton focused on citizen participation was to gain citizens' acceptance and co-operation in case of project implementation (Innes & Booher, 2004).

In case of Hinton where financial constraint was not present (e.g., funding was provided by AUMA), more initiatives could have been taken to actively engage citizens in the implementation stage and the level "Partnership" could have been

achieved. However, this town made diverse participatory methods to ensure citizens' involvement in the plan development process.

4.3 Citizen Participation

In order to enhance the representativeness of citizens in the public decision-making process, it is crucial to use a diverse and wide range of participatory methods, including informal meetings, surveys, interviews, and public hearings (Abelson & Gauvin, 2006). A variety of methods were used to engage citizens in the development of the community sustainability plan. According to the report of the "Standard Committee Meeting Agenda" (2012), the town council mandated the presence of citizen participation on principle topics (e.g., culture and recreation, education, community well-being, local economy) of sustainability planning based on diverse participatory methods. This section will investigate the implementation of those methods by analyzing citizens' roles in the plan development process.

The members of the citizens' advisory group were largely responsible for engaging citizens in the sustainability plan development process. This group was supported by the local administration. The interviewees mentioned that the Hinton Town Council selected a variety of people for the group, to ensure that different aspects of the community were represented. The ten group members included educators, business people, and news reporters. For the chairperson, the town councillors selected a senior citizen (retiree) (www.hinton.ca).

All members of the citizens' advisory group agreed that citizen participation was a key factor in formulating the plan. Three members of the citizens' advisory group emphasized that town councillors would not easily approve the sustainability plan if the participation level of citizens was not adequate. The attendance rate of citizens was satisfactory (the rate was not specified by the respondents) in open houses, town meetings, coffee shop sessions and surveys. Furthermore, Hinton's municipal staff said that the rate of citizen participation exceeded expectations (specific statistics and percentage rates were not mentioned), which is why the town councillors adopted the plan. However, the process of citizen participation received more attention during the "plan development" phase than the "plan implementation" phase.

Members of the citizens' advisory group used diverse participatory techniques to engage citizens in the sustainability plan formulation. Information about progress was published in both regional and provincial newspapers to keep citizens updated. Moreover, if citizens wanted to work directly with the municipal government, they were allowed to do so both formally (e.g., through formal boards and committees with council) and informally (e.g., surveys, open houses, town meetings).

Access to information played a crucial role in facilitating citizen engagement at the local level (Devas and Grant, 2003). My findings indicate that various methods were employed for keeping citizens well informed. All of the respondents agreed that numerous ways existed for citizens to access relevant information about the sustainability plan. One interviewee mentioned that "the

plan was posted on the town website and citizens could read it if they wanted." Another respondent stated that "Hinton has put it (sections for citizens' feedback) on its homepage.....under Hinton Listens or Notify Me section.....All this type of communication, I mean, multi-faceted communication. Certainly when I was growing up, you either wrote a letter or you begged your parents to borrow the phone for about 30 seconds or you actually went to somebody's house and knocked on the door. That was a pretty novel idea but I mean, there's so many different ways to communicate now and you have to go to the people."

The interview findings show that citizens were given regular updates and information about the progression of the plan, via various techniques and social media, including mail sent to community residents, website posts, newsletters, presentations by planners at open house meetings, online surveys, radio announcements and newspaper advertisements in the community. In this context one senior planner stated that "Well, typically we you know, we do notifications in our local newspaper or if it's a mail out, if it's something that affects certain residents, right?" The municipal representatives used different systems through which people were automatically notified (if they signed up for those notifications) about news or updates pertinent to the sustainability plan. Additionally, print media (the local newspaper) was used as a tool to keep people updated. Both "The Hinton Voice" and the "Hinton Parklander" published updates and information regarding various sustainability actions and new government initiatives. Through these methods citizens were informed and updated about the plan. However, they did not have any power to use that

information to influence the final outcome. These techniques are considered nominally participatory (White 2000) where the authority of making final decisions predominantly lies in the hands of traditional power holders.

Hinton administrators also arranged for surveys to give citizens the opportunity to comment on various actions of the sustainability plans. The interview results show that a total of 700 community surveys were collected to gather citizens' feedback. However, surveys can be considered as another "one-way communication method" where citizens can give their feedback, but not verbally. Surveys allow citizens to agree or disagree with the pre-determined questions designed by planners and members of a citizens' advisory group. However, citizens do not have an opportunity to ask for justifications and clarification.

Apart from these surveys, members of the citizens' advisory group arranged 111 stakeholder meetings. According to the respondents, the municipality organized a lot of open houses and town meetings (a specific number was not mentioned). The respondents in this study considered the town meetings and open houses well attended, as the number of participants for each type of gathering varied from 20 to 50 people. However, the respondents could not give any other sources to verify this participation rate, since there was no formal record of attendance (e.g., attendance sheet) of citizens who actually participated in the open houses or town meetings.

The interview results indicate that both planners and members of the citizens' advisory group considered coffee shop sessions an effective and structured

participatory method. According to the interview findings, a total of 76 coffee shop sessions were held to engage citizens during the plan development phase. The members of the citizens' advisory group considered that the total number of coffee shop sessions was adequate enough to ensure a reasonable rate of citizen participation. One member of citizens' advisory group mentioned that more than 2000 people participated in the coffee shop sessions. Other respondents also stated that a great amount of time and resources (both human and financial) was invested to carry out these coffee shop sessions. The sessions were informal and easy-going. People could come and go whenever they pleased, and could sit with municipal representatives (and thus engage in one-to-one discussions) to talk about their interests and issues of concern. Moreover, free coffee was served for citizens who participated in the sessions.

This "coffee shop method" can be considered as "instrumental" based on White's (2000) typology of participation. Citizens were mainly asked to identify various problems in their community, as well as discuss alternative options for solving those problems. Citizens also expressed their expectations and gave feedback on various topics (e.g., housing, rec centre services, transportation). These sessions were useful for planners to understand citizens' local knowledge, experiences and suggestions in the case of preparing final policies.

Another medium of citizen participation in Hinton was the formation of the Citizen Engagement and Accountability Committee (CEAC). This committee was mainly responsible for aligning citizens' input at the final stage of the decision-making process. Local citizens were eligible to apply to this committee in order to

actively work as citizen representatives. To be a part of this group, citizens had to fill out an application form. Based on the availability of vacant positions, citizens could become a part of the committee after being evaluated and approved by the town councillors. This gave citizens the opportunity to take part in the implementation stage to some extent. After the sustainability plan was approved, this committee was formed to implement the goals and objectives, as well as to collect and analyse citizen feedback before executing any new action. Based on citizen input, the CEAC prepared final recommendations for the town council.

4.4 Challenges of Citizen Participation

The results of this study indicate that Hinton's municipal staff and planners faced numerous challenges during the course of citizen engagement in the sustainability plan. This section outlines those challenges.

Representation

The interview findings show that the planners and municipal staff identified "representativeness" as a challenge. A member of the citizens' advisory group also mentioned that one of the difficult elements of the process was to make sure that the plan would reflect the interests and expectations of the majority. To illustrate, the interview findings show that when planners wanted feedback from citizens regarding building a new recreation centre and incorporating soccer fields into the recreation centre (since there are currently no soccer fields in the recreation centre), they only heard from citizens under 50 years old. It was extremely challenging to obtain feedback or suggestions from senior citizens.

Conversely, if planners wanted to hear concerns about the impact of Hinton's current healthcare system, the group aged 50 and older came forward.

Ensuring representativeness becomes more challenging when responses are collected through "internet surveys." Online surveys and social media were two common ways in which municipal staff of Hinton collected citizen input. According to the respondents, the risk of conducting online surveys or using social media (e.g. Facebook) was that only people who had access to computers would come forward. In that case "you are not going to hear from the single moms that live in the apartments perhaps" (stated one member of citizens' advisory group), or "from seniors who do not know how to use computers" (said a senior planner) or "from a shift worker who works the whole night and sleeps during the day" (said a municipal staff member). Such comments reinforce the notion that one of the main obstacles in this process is hearing from everybody in the community.

Administrative Change

The interview results showed that there had been a recent election, where a new mayor and councillors were elected. According to the study respondents, this administrative change could present a big challenge to upholding the accountability of the sustainability plan (or maintaining the incorporation of citizens' visions at the implementation stage of planning). One member of citizens' advisory clearly mentioned that "As you know, we've just gone through Municipal Elections, so we have a whole new mayor-council in the community. I

think one of the big challenges and opportunities to make sure that the mayor-council take up the plan and run with it and don't attempt to go and do their own thing. That scares me a little and we have to work closely with mayor-council council to continue that." According to another senior municipal staff "Well because we just went through an election as well, we have a brand new council.....that changed everything."

The original plan is based on citizens input; adopting new policies or actions would therefore not reflect the vision that citizens described at the operational stage of planning. Interviewees were worried that if the new authority were to begin implementing its own policies and rules, instead of carrying on where the plan left off, the aim of citizen engagement, the flow of plan progression, and the implementation of sustainability action would be hindered.

Citizens' Lifestyle

A busy schedule also presented an obstacle to the citizen participation process. Both planners and citizens' advisory group members said that the duration of town hall meetings and open houses had to be limited to accommodate citizens' time restrictions and tight work schedules. According to one member of citizens' advisory group "citizens' time is very valuable and we have to respect that so keeping our meetings short as well.....and that was a challenge." Time restrictions posed a big challenge for municipal representatives, who needed to discuss broad issues surrounding sustainability. Busy work schedules meant that citizens of

Hinton did not get enough time to explain their ideas or to conduct question/answer sessions.

The interviewees also mentioned that in order to actively participate in sustainability planning, people need to spend a lot of their free time doing research (e.g., reading the plans and other related documents, looking at the Town's statistics, as well considering other municipalities' plans for learning about different models and alternatives) and people simply do not have that amount of time available. Citizens' busy lifestyle has been identified as a challenge by majority of the respondents in Hinton. To illustrate, one councillor explained that "I think it's just the way our lifestyles are today; you know two parents working full time, raising families. Quite often now you have grandparents helping parents with daycare and things like that. A work day in its own is a full day when you have children..... when you're asking them to be a visionary and all of that, people don't necessarily want to be a part of creating the vision." Within this context, one member of citizens' advisory group mentioned that "Well everybody is busy.....that's a big challenge." Another municipal staff stated "it takes a lot of work to get citizens involved, because everybody is busy."

The interview findings show that many community residents work different shifts; some work through the night. Others have inconsistent schedules; they work three hours in the morning, then another three during the evening. This makes it hard for them to participate in surveys or open houses. Thus, the busy life-styles of citizens pose a big challenge to the process of citizen participation.

Long-term Planning

Another significant challenge identified in the Hinton case study was to convince people to commit to long-term planning. One municipal staff member said that most people are "not focused on longer term at all and that starts to create a problem off the bat." According to other respondents, many senior citizens (who are generally keen to participate and share their experiences) noted that by 2040 they would be dead, so there would be no point to their participating in the long-term strategy. The interviewees also mentioned that longer term planning, like "Hinton 2040," is always a challenge for any municipality, especially if the project requires or relies upon getting input from citizens. The findings show that citizens are not interested to give feedback about a project which is based on long term vision (e.g., 10 years plan or 15 years plan). Citizens are more inclined to see quick impact of plans (e.g., how a plan will affect their lives in next five years).

Topics of Interest

According to the planners, citizens are only interested in talking about "specific topics." In other words, citizens only actively give their input about those topics or issues that have a direct effect on their lives. Otherwise, the citizens do not show much responsiveness in terms of participation. In the words of a planner: "if people don't see a critical issue or a fire burning in their own backyard … they don't care."

According to the report of the "Regular Meeting of Council" held on February 18, 2014, the main action items presented during the public hearing part of the

meeting were waste management, landfill capital budget, water conservation, and the results of an appointment with the Hinton Municipal Library Board. The "Citizens' Minute with Council" section of the report showed that no citizens stood up or came forward to discuss, ask questions or give suggestions regarding the presented action items.

The interview findings show that local citizens are primarily interested in issues of housing, transportation, and recreation services rather than broad areas of action, such as the sustainable use of energy, waste management or climate change. More specifically, for a majority of the residents, "the recreation facilities" are the most demanding issue.

Self-interest

Citizens' "self-interest" has been identified as a big challenge in terms of the problem identification stage. For example, the interview results show that in one open house meeting, the majority of the citizens wanted the municipality to build a new swimming pool for the community. After analysing this issue, the planners came up with a project implementation proposal and informed the community about the probable tax increase if the project were to be implemented. When community residents realized that they would have to pay money from their pockets as extra tax amounts, then they started showing discontent and refused to support the project.

Political Issues

Some respondents mentioned that another challenge was trying to "define the Hinton community." According to the interview findings, Hinton is considered a hub for some regional communities, and it was challenging for the planners to create a plan that acknowledged the fact that it was not just Hinton residents who would be impacted by the sustainability plan, but also the residents of Yellowhead County.

The interview findings indicate that Yellowhead County administrators did not show much interest in the plan, as they especially did not want a Hinton-based plan dealing with the local residents of Yellowhead County. So, politically, it was somewhat challenging for Hinton's planners and municipal staff to devise a plan that was realistic, in the sense that their offer would not stop at Hinton's corporate borders.

In order to overcome these challenges, municipal staff of Hinton had to overlook some input received from the Yellowhead County residents, especially those input which were not agreed upon by the County administration. The County said that it would like to see a process by which it would have the right to add to Hinton's decisions. The County government and administration did not want to discuss any of the input from County residents, which would contradict the County's image or reputation. After some deliberation and discussion, Hinton's planners and municipal staff eliminated some of the suggestions provided by County residents in order to maintain good political rapport with Yellowhead County.

Vague understanding of "sustainability"

According to the results of this study, one of the major challenges of citizen engagement was citizens' vague understanding of the term "sustainability." Within this context one municipal staff mentioned that "it's (sustainability) still kind of new people....they don't understand properly and that's a challenge." Another member of citizens' advisory group mentioned that citizens understand the concept of sustainability "only superficially. That's a complicated concept." According to one senior planner, in case of citizens' understanding of sustainability "probably some do, but again I wouldn't say a high percentage do. It's a concept that's very difficult actually and I don't think we do a good job on that in general." Citizens' limited understanding regarding the meaning and implications of sustainability has been identified as one of the main reasons for not largely involving them in the final decision-making stage of planning.

Despite being troubled by the above-mentioned challenges, the planners and municipal representatives continued the citizen participation process. But this continuation was not strong in the implementation stage, when citizen involvement, according to a majority of the respondents and one senior planner, "kind of went off the rails." The interview findings indicate that the interviewees did not trust the citizens' technical knowledge, which is required for policy analysis. The municipal staff and planners designed the final policies, using the citizens' vision. However, there is no guarantee that these visions would have any influence on the final outcome

On the other hand, some respondents also said that when the plan was in its initial stage of creation, local people felt quite empowered, but they ceased to be

assertive, as their sense of involvement and empowerment diminished, which is a result of their priorities and interests changing over time. The respondents indicated that local residents were so caught up with their own lives and problems that two or three months after a participatory session, they seemed to forget about it. The study shows that although the process of broad citizen engagement was strong in the early stages of plan development, it weakened with time.

4.5 Degree of Citizen Participation: Deliberative or Technocratic Approach

The results of this study show that Hinton took diverse approaches to engage citizens in the formation of sustainability planning. The respondents in this study emphasized the fact that everyone's input and suggestions were valued and taken into account to integrate into the main visions of sustainability planning. The study findings also indicate that citizens were invited to join the CEAC and were involved in the final stage. However, the findings do not show any evidence regarding how many citizens were a part of that group, or specifically, in which projects citizens were involved in the final decision-making stage.

The results of this study have shown that various participatory sessions were arranged for citizens, with an aim to involve them in the planning. However, within the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy, it is not enough to simply invite citizens to town meetings to get them to share their problems, or to gather citizen input by distributing online surveys (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). Deliberative democracy implies that citizen engagement is a process in which

citizens will not only express their views, but also listen to the logic and opinions of municipal staff and other citizens, and through this process of constructive discussion, will evaluate various alternative policies, defend their arguments based on rationality, and ultimately reach a final outcome (Carpini et al., 2004).

Thomson (2001) has enlisted three central criteria for a participatory program to be deliberative: first of all, planners or municipal staff have to be involved in face-to-face conversation with the local public in order to discuss various issues of the plan (e.g., asking for feedback and suggestions). Another feature of the deliberative program is that planners or municipal staff have to discuss with citizens topics or issues which affect the citizens'' lives both directly and indirectly and, most, importantly (without this feature deliberation fails to be effective), citizens should have the power and opportunity to affect the final decisions or polices by being engaged in the implementation stage. In other words, traditional power holders should not have sole control over the decision-making and policy analysis process.

The study results show that the first two criteria of deliberation were present in Hinton's participatory planning program. According to the findings, municipal staff of Hinton conducted a variety of participatory sessions to directly communicate with citizens, as all members of the citizens' advisory group, planners and the local administration staff made an effort to physically meet people by going to various public venues instead of merely inviting people to join open houses or attend town meetings to discuss their concerns and expectations, and to gather feedback.

The results do not show any strong evidence that citizens actually took part in plan formulation or project design, which shows weak citizen influence during the final stage. Based on the findings of this research, it can be said that the third condition of Thomson's (2001) participatory or deliberative framework model is not consistent with Hinton's participatory approach because according to the respondents of this study, citizens did not actually participate in decision-making, nor did they influence the final decision. Not one of the respondents interviewed could provide a single empirical example of where citizens "actually" participated in decision-making, or influenced the final decision.

For example, affordable housing is a growing demand for Hinton's residents. Based on citizens' feedback, the issue of housing was identified (at the initial stage of planning) as one of the big problems in the community. However, the final proposal (e.g., housing structure, cost) and specific location (e.g., 234 Baker Street) for building low cost housing was chosen by the administration, as mentioned in the report of Standing Committee Meeting on January 22, 2013: "Administration has created the proposed Project Work Plan which, if supported by Council, will be used as a base to create a Request for Proposals to inform the general public and to engage local and regional interest for the development of this site." This statement implies that administrative personnel were primarily responsible for designing the structure of the housing project. Citizens were not engaged in this phase. The local public was informed about the project, and did not have the power to work with the local administration in making decisions about it. One of the main principles of deliberation – engagement in constructive

discussion or dialogue with traditional power holders – is not present in this example, because citizens were not engaged that way. .

However, dialogue exchange is not the only principle of deliberation. This study indicates that citizens were involved in the planning by expressing their views through both two-way (open houses, town meetings, coffees shop meetings) and one-way (newsletters, web advertisements, radio announcements) communication techniques. However, the results do not present empirical examples of where citizens were involved in the final decision-making stage, or how their input influenced the implementation stage. Nor do the study findings demonstrate whether the final outcome of the planning process was collective in nature. Thus, the main principles of deliberation (e.g., representativeness, collectivity, influence in the final stage, legitimacy) were not present in the creation of this sustainability plan.

The development and implementation of Hinton's ICSP was a technocratic act because members of citizens' advisory groups and expert planners played key roles in interpreting citizens' feedback about the sustainability plan, and then made final recommendations to the town council based on that feedback (Ambruster, 2008; Ribbhagen, 2010). According to some scholars, (Hubbert, 1974, Howard, 2005, Ambruster, 2008; Ribbhagen, 2010), technocracy is about enhancing the efficiency of planning based on technical analysis as opposed to social values. In this process the citizens are not individuals; rather, they are considered a group that can set the background or vision of a process by sharing common problems and ideas. Once the background has been set, and common

issues and concerns have been identified, people with specialized knowledge, expertise and experience (e.g., planners and municipal staff) will work together to analyze, interpret and evaluate (as a whole) the issues raised by community residents. Through this technocratic or bureaucratic process, only experts or technocrats will have the authority or managerial power to make final recommendations and policies.

According to this study, the task of integrating citizens' input into the final decision-making process (e.g., at the implementation stage) is challenging. Specifically, the issue of "weighing down" citizens' input is complex since the diversity of citizens' expectations are wide-ranging (e.g., one group of people might want a performing arts center and another group might want an aquatic center) and expert planners and consultants with specialized knowledge are best suited to fulfill this complex task. However, none of the respondents could explain the methods used to narrow down citizens' input in the implementation phase, though both municipal staff and planners did emphasize that everybody's input was considered.

Based on the interview results, municipal representatives were motivated to engage citizens in the planning process in order to get public support (in terms of implementing various actions of the plan) as well as to avoid community protests or conflicts (Sheedy et al., 2008). Moreover, the results indicate that citizens are a valuable source of local knowledge and that they have empirical experience with various problems or issues (e.g., transportation, housing, education) that can benefit both planners and municipal staff (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004). The

interview findings also show that municipal representatives are keen to maintain a relationship of trust with citizens (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004), which inspired them to form the citizens' advisory group and the CEAC.

4.6 Conclusion

Citizen involvement in developing plans and determining policy alternatives can be considered a significant element for attaining sustainable development, especially at the local level (Cassidy, 2006; Gasparatos et al. 2007; Bell and Morse, 2001; Davidoff, 1965; Hebard, 1998). Citizen engagement plays a significant role in promoting sustainable development for rural communities since local residents can be recognized as the best source of information regarding the needs and concerns of a local community (Dassah, 2013). The process of citizen participation will become more successful and effective when the stakeholders, local administration, and expert planners work together with local citizens in a collaborative manner "in an on-going community development process, from identification of problem areas, to the development, implementation and management of strategic planning" (Schafft and Greenwood, 2003; p. 19). This implies that citizen participation can have a strong impact on a public decision-making process with a continued engagement process (e.g., from problem identification to problem solving) (Cuers and Hewston, 2006). When citizens have the opportunity to engage in the final stage of planning and receive some degree of authority over the decision-making process, the scope of deliberation is enhanced. This helps local residents better accept the final outcome (Beierle and Cayford, 2002).

The findings of this study show that the effect of citizen participation is "much narrower" in terms of influencing the final policy or decision-making process. The interview results show that both planners and municipal staff consider the level of citizen participation "much narrower" at the implementation stage. One senior planner stated that the level of citizen participation is "about 20-25%" in the final phase of planning, where decisions are being made about what actions will be executed, and how. Based on the interview findings, it can be said that the role of citizens in making final recommendations to the town council is weak, since the respondents mentioned that the final draft of the plan was created mostly by planners, members of the citizens' advisory group and the CEAC. The mayor and town councillors then evaluated the recommendations and approved them.

The planners and members of the citizens' advisory group were accountable for interpreting citizens' feedback in order to finalize the sustainability plan's goals and objectives. The respondents mentioned that the plan's final draft was sent to local citizens after the plan development phase, where goals, objectives and sustainability actions were finalized. The planners and municipal staff wanted to get feedback from citizens regarding the completed ICSP document. The municipality received a 90% endorsement and 2% disagreement rating from community residents regarding the plan's content, according to one member of the citizens' advisory group. However, the respondent did not explain the reactions of the remaining 8%. The interview findings also show that when the final draft of the plan was sent back to the community for feedback, the municipality did not hear any complaints or disagreement from the local public. In

fact, no interviewees mentioned anything about protests or citizen complaints against the sustainability plan. But again, this is just one side of the story.

The interview findings do not give any robust evidence as to whether citizens' visions influenced the final outcome. Though respondents mentioned that through the CEAC, citizens were able to influence the final decisions to some extent, respondents did not answer questions like "how?" and "in which project?" So, the role of citizens in the CEAC remains vague, since none of the interviewees gave any example in which citizens, along with planners and municipal staff, made final decisions. In this case, the level of citizen participation can fall back to a non-participation level if municipal staff do not consider citizen input at the last moment (White, 2000).

This study has found that citizens can apply to join this committee, but respondents have not mentioned the number of seats reserved for citizens. None of the interviewees specified the number of citizens who actually sat on the board with municipal representatives. The findings simply indicate that if vacant spots were available, citizens could apply to sit on the committee, but none of the respondents said whether there was a fixed number of seats for citizens. The respondents also mentioned that final stage of decision-making is complicated, and that the process of aligning citizens' feedback with the interests and objectives of both stakeholders and the municipal government is an intricate process that requires expertise. According to the respondents, average citizens do not have the training or skills to determine and scrutinize the method of policy

analysis in order to come to a final decision, which is why the experts and planners were hired to administer the implementation stage.

Thus, the power of making decisions and finalizing the sustainability actions lies mainly in the hands of planners, experts and municipal staff. This mechanism of policy analysis is consistent with a technocratic or bureaucratic decision-making approach. This sort of mechanism, where citizens have been given the opportunity to speak up through various methods, though the nature and content of their input is interpreted and analysed by skilled planners and municipal staff, helps the local administration maintain the status quo (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Dassah, 2013).

This approach also shows that citizens are led to believe that they are being taken seriously, as they are contacted by municipal staff to express their suggestions and are invited to join working groups or committees (like the CEAC, in this case). When citizens do not see their feedback included in the final plan, they can easily lose trust in and respect for the local administration (Carpini et al., 2004).

If local residents do not see themselves as part of the plan, then they will not feel accountable or obligated to follow it. For example, imagine that a new policy is passed, as part of a sustainability initiative, wherein people must use public transportation during rush hours (e.g., office time in the morning). Now imagine that there was no citizen involvement during finalization. Because local residents were not involved, they will not be inspired to change their behavior, which, in this case, would be their habit of using personal cars (Hebard, 1998). In short, it is

highly unlikely that citizens will accept an action or policy if they play no part in that policy's creation (Hebard, 1998).

It is important to adopt a learning-based approach whereby an initiative will be taken to educate and train citizens on relevant issues of a project in order to have an effective outcome of citizen participation, especially at the local level (Hebard, 1998; Dassah, 2013). Local citizen involvement in all stages of planning (from problem identification to problem solving) is crucial for rural development projects, as the continual inclusion of local residents will generate a social learning process in which both planners and local citizens can enhance their understanding about controversial and complicated issues through constructive discussion and knowledge exchange (Sastre-Merino et al., 2013). The case of Hinton's "ambiguity" regarding the concept of sustainability (among community residents) has been identified as a big challenge for both planners and municipal staff. One reason behind this may be citizen participation, which was strong at the beginning of the project, but faded away with time, and became weak during the implementation stage. In this case, the process of citizen participation was mainly focused upon gathering citizens' input, rather than educating them. The concept of knowledge sharing is shallow in this case, since the main theme of the "sustainability" project remained unclear for a majority of the community residents (all respondents unanimously acknowledged this issue).

On the other hand, as part of a data collection, an initiative was taken to contact some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to understand their views and perceptions about the sustainability plan. A total of five NGOs were contacted

and employees of three of these organizations admitted that they were not aware of any formal sustainability plans in their communities. Some of the employees had never heard the term "Integrated Community Sustainability Plan." Senior administrative officers of the other two NGOs were familiar with the community sustainability plan, but did not participate in any sessions. Due to time restrictions, this initiative was not carried out, but these findings indicate that not enough is being done to contact citizens during the implementation stage. Moreover, even though 76 coffee shop sessions, around 2000 surveys and numerous open houses or town meetings were conducted for discussing sustainability issues with local citizens, the level of citizen awareness and knowledge about sustainability is weak and shallow. The results also indicate that Hinton's plan development approach could have been more participatory and effective if it followed the "process-based" approach (Bagheri and Hjorth, 2007). One of the main features of this approach is that the development of any community sustainability planning should focus on learning, rather than solely concentrate on fixing goals and objectives (Bagheri and Hjorth, 2007).

CHAPTER 5: Case Study 2-Wood Buffalo

5.1 Introduction

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, situated in northern Alberta, is known as one of Alberta's fastest growing municipalities, specifically in terms of economic growth (Statistics Canada, 2010; Municipal Census, 2012). This municipality was created when the Government of Alberta decided to merge the City of Fort McMurray and Improvement District No. 143 on April 1, 1995 (Order In Council, 1994; Municipal Census, 2012; Envision Wood Buffalo Plan, 2010). The population of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is 116,407 (Municipal Census Report of 2012). Wood Buffalo has undergone significant economic development due to the oil and gas industry in the area, and this rapid growth in economy has made the municipality one of the largest in North America (Municipal Census, 2012).

The findings of this study show that this municipality is very concerned about protecting its cultural diversity, enhancing environmental stewardship and creating diverse economic opportunities, which has inspired the municipal government to adopt an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP). The official name of Wood Buffalo's ICSP is "Envision Wood Buffalo." The councillors adopted this plan on March 9, 2010. "Envision Wood Buffalo" is a long-term comprehensive plan (Envision Wood Buffalo Plan, 2010). According to the results of this research, "environment and social" problems were given precedence as core pillars of sustainability in the plan. Specifically, the study

respondents said that land acquisition, quality of life, infrastructure development, water treatment, waste water treatment, sustainable waste management, education, housing and health were some of the key priorities of the Envision Wood Buffalo project, and that these priorities were identified through the process of citizen engagement.

According to the findings of this research, as in Hinton, citizen participation played a part in creating Wood Buffalo's ICSP. In Hinton's case, the level of citizen participation was analyzed by examining the participatory methods, challenges of citizen participation, scope of citizens' deliberation, and the role citizens played in the implementation stage. Hinton's citizen engagement process is complex in nature and this complexity is not easily understood through Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. This chapter aims to understand the nature of citizen participation in Wood Buffalo by using Arnstein's (1969) conceptual framework. Moreover, this chapter intends to investigate the nature of the participatory methods used by the municipal staff of Wood Buffalo, barriers in terms of engaging citizens in the plan development process, and the effects of citizen involvement (if any) in implementing the sustainability plan. Moreover, this chapter points out the reasons behind the existing level of citizen engagement, the nature of the participatory approach (e.g., deliberative or bureaucratic/technocratic) and the implications of plan development and the citizen involvement process.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The main goal of this chapter is to investigate and analyse the level of citizen participation in the Wood Buffalo ICSP, based on Arnstein's (1969) conceptual framework of citizen participation. The major findings of this chapter are: 1) citizen participation was present in the creation of Wood Buffalo's ICSP, but citizens' roles were minimal during the implementation stage; 2) there was no participatory method where stakeholders, citizens, planners and municipal staff could work together (e.g., the engagement process consisted of municipal staff and citizens or planners and citizens); 3) Citizens were not empowered enough to influence final decisions. Here empowerment does indicate full citizen authority (e.g., highest rung of Arnstein's ladder); rather partnership (lay people and traditional power holders work together to make decisions) can be considered as an ideal type in case of Wood Buffalo's citizen engagement process; 4) the concept of sustainability remained vague to community residents, as well as municipal staff; and 5) citizens' roles were not clearly defined in the case of plan development and the implementation stage.

The findings show that both planners and municipal staff perceived citizen participation as a key factor in creating the sustainability-planning framework. The analysis of this research indicates that citizens were largely engaged during Wood Buffalo's plan development process. Diverse participatory methods (e.g., town meetings, open houses, surveys, social media, focus groups) were used to collect citizens' input about the plan. But the level of citizen engagement was robust during the initial level (e.g., problem identification stage) of planning

compared to the implementation stage. In Hinton, citizens were given the opportunity to join the Citizen Engagement and Accountability Committee (CEAC). To some extent, local people were engaged at the implementation stage through this committee. But in Wood Buffalo, no such committees were formed through which citizens could sit and actively take part in discussion, and share planning responsibilities at the final stage with traditional power holders such as expert planners and municipal staff.

In Wood Buffalo, citizens were allowed to express their views by both one-way (e.g., social media, online surveys) and two-way (e.g., focus groups, open houses, town meetings) communication methods. But the dominance of one-way participatory sessions was evident in Wood Buffalo, in comparison to Hinton. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that the implementation stage of the plan was a bureaucratic rather than deliberative act, where the values and decisions of expert planners were given precedence over the input of local people.

Based on Arnstein's (1969) theoretical ladder, Wood Buffalo's citizen engagement process can be categorized as "consultation." In this stage, citizens have the opportunity to express their views, but they do not enough power to influence the final decision-making process. However, this level can facilitate the process of dialogue and enhances the possibility of knowledge exchange (Collins and Ison, 2006). This level can be effective when citizens' views are integrated into the final decisions.

Citizen engagement process can be a challenging job in a community like Wood Buffalo where majority of the population is transient in nature. People who come to the municipality for contractual job purposes do not show much interest to get involved in long term community planning like ICSP. Arnstein's (1969) ladder does not emphasis on such cultural aspects; rather solely focus on "power" to determine the effectiveness of citizen participation. This thesis does not aim to draw conclusions about the quality of citizen engagement based on Arnstein's (1969) ladder (e.g., by merely focusing on power); instead the goal of this thesis is to understand the level of citizen participation by analysing the reasons and challenges behind the process of citizen involvement in ICSP.

Municipal staff preferred a technocratic approach rather than local citizen involvement in the final decision-making stage. This was done to enhance the efficiency of the sustainability plan. Citizens' lack of technical knowledge, specifically their limited understanding of the concept of sustainability, was identified as one of the main reasons for not giving them the opportunity to take part in the final decision-making process. Moreover, the municipal staff pointed out that citizens were not interested in committing to any long-term involvement because of their busy lifestyles. The respondents to this study also stated that citizens were apathetic about participating. Their busy lives and lack of motivation to engage in the plan development process were two important considerations for not including them at the implementation stage.

The study suggests that citizen participation could have been broad during the implementation stage. Even though this municipality received Alberta Urban

Municipalities Association (AUMA) funds to create the ICSP, there was still a lack of initiative among the municipal staff in creating proper opportunities through which citizens could actively take part in the final stage of planning. Local citizens may not benefit from the sustainability plan in the long run if a bureaucratic approach dominates the implementation of sustainability actions.

5.3 Citizen Participation

This section outlines and discusses the various forms, nature and technique of public participation, in order to determine the role citizens played in developing the sustainability plan of Wood Buffalo. This section also summarizes the challenges faced by municipal staff during the period of citizen participation.

The municipality took a number of different steps to engage citizens in the development of the sustainability plan. The study shows that both planners and municipal staff considered citizen participation a significant aspect of creating a community sustainability plan, but they did not consider it crucial enough to give citizens the authority to make final decisions. However, the interviewees emphasized that the final recommendations were based on citizens' views and feedback. This section aims to justify this argument by investigating the nature and forms of the plan development process, specifically the participatory sessions used by municipal staff.

5.3.1 Envision Wood Buffalo Project

The Envision Wood Buffalo project had three stages: the Citizen Participation stage (Phase One), Plan Formulation Stage (Phase Two) and, finally, the

Implementation, Monitoring & Assessment Stage (Phase Three) (Envision Wood Buffalo Plan, 2010, www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca). The initial stage, in which problems were identified (Phase 1), was based on conducting citizen engagement sessions for gathering local citizens' feedback and suggestions. At this stage, 24 participatory sessions were held, including open houses, town meetings, surveys, and focus groups.

According to the municipality's official website (www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca), the plan development (Phase 2) stage was based on the concepts of defining sustainability goals and objectives, finalizing sustainability indicators and principles and, most importantly, developing a model or framework through which local residents, stakeholders, planners and municipal staff would work together to evaluate the values and goals of the plan. But in reality no such collaborative model, where citizens and traditional power holders could share planning activities, was built.

The final stage of planning, the "Implementation, Monitoring & Assessment Stage" (Phase 3), was formed by municipal staff, who developed the plan's final goals and objectives based on citizen input (www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca). At this level, citizens were not engaged in making final recommendations. The interview findings indicate that expert planners and municipal staff were responsible for formulating policies at Phase 3. However, citizens did not receive enough opportunity for engagement at this stage of planning.

The level of citizen participation mainly occurred during Phase 1 (the problem identification stage). Citizens had no direct roles in Phase 2 and Phase 3. The findings show that all of the participatory methods were designed in a way that citizens and municipal staff, citizens and planners, or municipal staff and stakeholders were engaged in discussion, but not all together. Citizens' roles were trivial (e.g., problem identification at the initial level) compared to the roles and responsibilities of the planners and municipal staff.

Moreover, a majority of the respondents mentioned that the level of citizen participation was "minimal" at the plan development stage and "lower" at the implementation stage. One senior councillor said, "I would suspect that there was some mild success in public participation but probably not a lot." Another former municipal staff member stressed that the participation process "is an actual joke and kind of an illusion." The process of citizen participation included asking citizens about their expectations and ideas, which did not give local residents the opportunity to take part in designing the actual plan.

5.3.2 Forms and Types of Participatory Sessions

Wood Buffalo's planners, consultants and municipal staff adopted a variety of participatory methods to gather citizens' input in the development of the sustainability plan. Some of the common participatory methods included "community leaders meeting[s] and focus groups, online surveys, facilitated community workshops, telephone interviews, comment sheets, open houses and town meetings." (Envision Wood Buffalo Plan, 2010; p.41). The study shows that citizens had the opportunity to be informed (e.g., in every open house or town

meeting, citizens could ask for more detailed information if they wanted). Apart from these methods, the use of social media including "television, newsprint, radio, mail-outs, local tradeshows and events, presentations at corporate meetings, rural communities' telephone campaigns, and attendance at the community association" (Envision Wood Buffalo Plan, 2010; p.41) were used to communicate with citizens.

The municipality also used some interesting initiatives to encourage citizens to participate in developing the sustainability plan. For example, high school students were hired to survey local citizens, using iPads. The students received iPads from municipal staff and went to various public places including Walmart, shopping centres, local diners and playground zones to collect citizen feedback about various actions on the sustainability plan. The students also informed the people they met about open houses and focus groups. In this way, citizens' awareness was increased about opportunities to express their ideas and feedback regarding the sustainability plan. However, this method is simply a one-way flow of information. Though citizens were being contacted face-to-face, they did not get the chance to express their own thoughts. This method exists on more of a "information-sharing" (Arnstein, 1969).

The respondents to this study favored Facebook as a way to receive input about Envision Wood Buffalo. One senior planner mentioned that "traditionally most municipalities have open houses where people go [to] see some material and respond, but I think talking to social media literally takes that opportunity to your desktop, to your home." Social media, especially Facebook, was chosen as a

popular site for communicating with citizens, as a majority of people have Facebook accounts and it is easier for people to post comments on Facebook than to physically attend open houses and town meetings. The respondents also mentioned that Facebook helped them to increase the number of citizens in terms of obtaining feedback. But the issue of citizens who did not have access to computers at home was not mentioned or clarified by the respondents.

Both planners and municipal staff prioritized one-way communication techniques. The study shows that online surveys and Facebook were two main methods through which citizen feedback was gathered. Citizens provided ideas about materials that were posted on Facebook, and answered various questions through online surveys. A committee of planners, municipal staff and professional consultants was developed in order to categorize and sort ideas and answers (collected via Facebook and surveys) provided by the public. The categorization and sorting process of citizen feedback was done based on common themes (e.g., housing, transportation, education). After finishing the sorting process, some common themes emerged, and these common areas of concerns (e.g., those mentioned by majority of the participants) were integrated into the final recommendation by municipal staff and planners.

Citizens did not have the opportunity to join the decision-making committee that formulated the final proposals. They gave their input online. This level of participation is based on a one-way flow of information and feedback, where citizens could not justify their opinions. Citizen participation can become effective and productive when citizens do not simply identify problems, but also

receive the managerial power to influence final decisions (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001).

To summarize, in Wood Buffalo 1) Citizens were not actively involved in the implementation stage; 2) Like Hinton, citizens did not get the opportunity to join any working group or committee where they could sit and work with traditional power holders (e.g., CEAC committee in Hinton); 3) Citizens were predominantly engaged in problem identification stage (e.g., Phase 1 or initial stage of plan development) and 4) The authority of making final decisions largely remained in the hands of municipal staff and expert planners.

5.4 Challenges of the Citizen Participation Process

Planners and municipal staff faced diverse challenges during the period of the citizen engagement process. Those challenges can be identified as crucial factors contributing to citizens' minimal role in developing the sustainability plan, specifically during the implementation stage. This study intends to identify the contributing factors (e.g., challenges) behind the existing level of citizen participation. These factors have been outlined below:

Transient Population

According to the interviewees, a majority of Wood Buffalo's population is transient in nature, as most residents work in the local energy sector. These people come from other communities or provinces, and come to this municipality for a short time. They primarily move to Wood Buffalo to earn money. Moreover, the findings show that half the workers that come to Wood Buffalo maintain their

official home and residence in other provinces, including Newfoundland, and Manitoba. Thus, they do not feel a sense of belonging to Wood Buffalo and are rarely interested in engaging themselves in the municipality's long-term planning and policies. One senior municipal staff stated that "it's a constant struggle to get them to call this place home when a lot of people come here with a five-year plan to make a quick buck and leave." Another municipal staff member agreed: "They're transient. They still don't see themselves as being resident[s] even though they've lived there for years." This transient population was one of the biggest challenges in getting citizens involved in sustainability planning.

The respondents also mentioned that a large portion of the transient population is male. These men, who rent rooms in multifamily developments and boarding houses, spend two hours on a bus to get to their work place in the morning, work 12 hours in a camps or project site, and spend another two hours on the bus back to their living place. That is how they spend 16 hours each work day. They spend the remaining eight hours sleeping and resting. Given this tight schedule, it is very difficult to get these workers to discuss the municipality's future plans and goals.

Lack of Understating about Sustainability

According to the interview findings, local citizens were not clear about the meaning and implications of sustainability. There was also a lack of understanding among the citizens about what needs to be done to achieve sustainable development in Wood Buffalo. According to the respondents, most people's understanding of sustainability revolves around the idea of

"environmental sensitivity," particularly in Fort McMurray. For some people, sustainability is about energy efficiency, for some it is about transit, and for some people it is only about recycling. According to the respondents, there was no consistency or clear idea among the locals regarding the term sustainability.

Distance and Weather Conditions

Other barriers preventing municipal staff from encouraging citizen participation were distance and weather. The study shows that there are numerous small villages and hamlets in Wood Buffalo that are located in distant places. Sometimes planners were forced to cancel participatory sessions for the residents of those hamlets due to harsh weather and bad road conditions. These cancellations made local citizens angry. Respondents did not specify what hamlets were affected in this way, but they said the citizens in hamlets whose events were cancelled then refused to participate in later sessions. Planners and municipal staff were also discouraged from re-scheduling participatory sessions in those specific areas, due to citizens' lack of interest.

Difficulty of Integration

A majority of the respondents mentioned that, generally speaking, citizens are not very responsive in terms of any sustainability-related discussion, unless some of the issues directly impact their lives. According to the findings, citizens were interested in discussing certain topics, including health, recreation facilities, housing and education. The biggest challenge for planners and municipal staff was to identify the connection between the goals of the plan and those topics.

Planners also had to recognize what kind of actions would directly affect citizens' lives, and what factors would inspire citizens to actively participate in the planning process. Due to this process, the planning conditions and criteria for promoting citizen engagement could differ from the sustainability priorities.

Both planners and municipal staff recognized these challenges as the main reasons for not including citizens in the final stage. The respondents to this study pointed out that because citizens did not have a clear understanding of sustainability and adequate technical expertise regarding planning, it would not have been efficient to let them decide the final outcome. According to the municipal staff, educating citizens about sustainability requires a long period of time. Neither planners nor municipal staff considered it efficient to spend time educating or training citizens.

The municipal staff also claimed that citizens' busy lifestyles prohibited them from investing the amount of time needed to prepare final recommendations, though the staff provided neither evidence nor sources for this perception. Moreover, the municipal staff mentioned that average citizens do not have adequate technical knowledge to analyze the feasibility and cost efficiency of the proposed actions in the sustainability plan, which is why professional consultants were perceived as competent to monitor the implementation stage of planning.

To sum up, it can be said that despite being engaged in the early stage of planning, citizens could not continue their involvement till the end. The study findings also indicate that the issue of transparency was given reasonable attention: citizens were kept well informed and updated through social media,

newspapers, and radio announcements (Rowe and Frewer, 2000), but none of that ensured that citizens' values and perceptions were integrated into the plan's main objectives. The authoritative role of the municipal staff and professional planners did not allow the level of citizen participation to go beyond the point of "consultation." Limited time and finances did not allow this study to gather information about citizens' perceptions regarding their experiences in terms of their involvement in the ICSP (e.g., what was their experience, did they observe the operationalization of their feedback and were they empowered enough to make complaints or express disagreements to the planners and municipal representatives?). However, the available findings clearly indicate that technocratic expertise and "practical" considerations were given precedence over citizens' involvement in the implementation stage. The participatory methods were designed to help technical experts identify areas of community concern, and systematically excluded citizens from achieving the power to determine their community's future plans and goals.

5.5 Degree of Citizen Participation: Deliberative or Technocratic Approach

This section intends to investigate the nature of the ICSP decision-making process. Specifically, this section examines whether the technocratic approach was more dominant than the deliberative approach to developing the plan. This section also aims to investigate how technocratic approach affects citizen participation in the development of sustainable plan.

Dominance of Technocratic/Bureaucratic Approach

Dillon Consulting Company directed Wood Buffalo's plan development and implementation process. This company is well known for its technical proficiency; according to its web site, it "look[s] for people who are not only technically proficient but also strive[s] to remain at the forefront of the latest technologies and processes" (www.dillon.ca). Dillon is technology-oriented and highly professional in terms of developing community plans. The respondents in this study emphasised that it was significant to hire consultants from Dillon to enhance the efficiency of the plan. Since Wood Buffalo received funding from AUMA to create the plan, so it was easy for the Wood Buffalo administrators to hire expert planners in order to develop the plan. The study shows that Dillon's strong involvement minimized the role that citizens played in the plan development and implementation process.

Wood Buffalo's official website explicitly states that Phase 3, which is "Implementation, Monitoring & Assessment," was mainly conducted by municipal staff and expert planners. Citizens did not get the opportunity to work with technical experts and professional consultants in a collaborative manner, specifically in the final decision making stage. This research shows that citizens were invited to participate at the beginning of plan development (e.g., Phase 1). The consulting company's expert planners and a few municipal staff were responsible for using various participatory methods. They were also responsible for making final recommendations to councillors based on citizens' visions; thus, one of the main principles of deliberative democracy (that lay people should have

the opportunity to influence final decisions through constructive discussion (Carpini et al., 2004; Dryzek, 2001)) was not evident in the case of Wood Buffalo.

Representative vs Deliberative Democracy

A deliberative decision-making process can enhance the legitimacy and representativeness of the final outcome (Dryzek, 2001). The process of deliberation can also strengthen mutual trust and respect between traditional power holders and ordinary citizens (Kaufmann et al., 2004). However, the municipal staff and planners of Wood Buffalo were inclined to favor the principles of representative democracy, where elected officials (e.g., selected by the citizens) would fulfill the accountability of making public polices and plans. The municipal staff considered it important to consult with citizens, but were not ready to transfer the decision-making power to lay people (Scarrow, 2001).

Various participatory sessions were conducted in Phase 1 of Envision Wood Buffalo where citizens receive the opportunity to participate in surveys, open houses, town meetings. However, citizens were not actively involved in final decision making stage (e.g., implementation stage). Deliberation can be found in the participatory strategy of Wood Buffalo to some extent because citizens were able to express their ideas through diverse participatory sessions; but the responsibility of integrating those ideas (on behalf of citizens) remained in the hands of municipal staff. One of the main principles of deliberation that citizens should be able to influence the final decision was not present in this case as it was not guaranteed that citizens' views were integrated in the implementation stage.

A majority of the interviewees believed that local government is organized by elected officials who are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the citizens who elect them (Elster, 1998; Agbude, 2011; Kornbergm & Clarke, 1992; Urbinati, 2006; Urbinati and Warren, 2008). One senior planner said that, "They (citizens) want us to do our job...it is our job to decide what's best for the community....they (citizens) have elected us so that we can work on behalf of them." This kind of traditional practice of democracy (e.g., based on voting) is not enough to ensure the representativeness of citizens' interests and concerns in public decision-making process (Agbude, 2011).

Making Life "Easier" for Citizens

The respondents in this study considered citizens liberated from the tasks of making policies or political decisions by electing the mayor and councillors who would decide what was best for the community on behalf of its residents. The municipal staff assumed that citizens also preferred local government to take care of policy-making issues, as citizens were apathetic when it came to participating and giving time to discussions about sustainability planning. Citizens' busy lifestyles were identified as one of the main factors contributing to their apathy towards the engagement process. Along with a majority of the respondents, one senior planner said that, "it's a hard lifestyle and not everyone wants to get involved in anything because of that."

Moreover the respondents in this study characterized the process of sustainability planning as a complex and time-consuming task. According to both planners and

municipal staff, giving citizens the responsibility for decision making would add extra stress to their hectic lives, and they did not wish citizens to have the stress of formulating final plans and policies. The interviewees specifically mentioned the busy lives of transient citizens who live in the municipality only because of work (e.g., oil sands workers). This shows that municipal staff preferred to make life easier for local citizens, especially those citizens who work in camps. The municipal staff did not want to add work by involving citizens in the final stage of planning. However, this is just one side of the story. If citizens' views were gathered, which was not possible due to time and financial restrictions, a more holistic picture would emerge in terms of the municipal staff's assumptions. It was the municipal representatives, not the citizens themselves, who identified citizens' apathetic behavior and the complex nature of the sustainability plan as two major reasons to give decision-making authority to professional consultants and expert planners.

Technocratic Features of Participatory Methods

A majority of the participatory methods (e.g., surveys, social media) which were preferred by the municipal staff were designed in such a way that citizens could not directly engage in discussion (with municipal staff and expert planners) about the plan (e.g., deliberation) (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). For example, iPads were used to take surveys in various public spaces, like grocery stores or restaurants. Using iPads for surveys was perceived as a quick and green method for gathering citizens' comments. In the iPad electronic survey, the questions were fixed by planners, and citizens had to put one line comments or tick marks to

simply answer the pre-determined questions. These kinds of processes inhibited citizens from justifying their opinions, conducting rational discussion or asking questions, which made the scope of deliberation highly unlikely.

Both planners and municipal staff saw citizens as an empirical source of information to help technical experts and staff to identify local issues and concerns, as opposed to a source for solutions. The findings indicate that most of the face-to-face participatory sessions were facilitated by expert planners. The municipality also invited notable speakers to participatory sessions to raise people's awareness about the sustainability plan. From 2006-2007, at open houses, town meetings and workshops in Fort McMurray, notable Canadian academics and professional consultants delivered keynote speeches about sustainability planning. These sessions were designed to allow guest speakers to give lectures regarding a certain discussion topic (e.g., sustainable waste management or energy efficiency), not to promote citizen engagement. Indeed, there was limited time and scope for citizens to discuss and express their concerns. Through these types of participatory methods citizens received one-sided information, instead of opportunities to use that information for critical discussion and deliberation.

Municipal staff and planners facilitated conversation in a majority of the open houses, town meetings and focus groups. They chose a topic for discussion and provided questions to citizens to gather feedback. A majority of the interviewees felt that, due to a lack of knowledge and experience, it was highly unlikely for citizens to come to a consensus about a specific solution. Given that, the

interviewees said, they agreed with the municipality's decision to hire professional consultants and experts to lead citizens in the "right direction" in terms of providing feedback. On the other hand, the implementation stage (Phase 3) was dominated by technocrats because of the citizens' lack of technical knowledge and understanding. This indicates a technocratic, rather than deliberative, approach. Because the integration of citizen input was not guaranteed, Wood Buffalo's sustainability planning approach violated one of the principle values of deliberative democracy: that the citizen participation process must influence the final decision-making process (Carpini et al., 2004; Dryzek, 2001). Technocrats were given major responsibilities, not only in facilitating the citizen engagement process, but also in making decisions about environmental management and planning. This kind of technical knowledge-based planning method can be considered a threat to the deliberative approach (Backstrand, 2004).

"Manufacturing" Consensus among Citizens

The results of this study indicate that there was a tendency among planners, professional consultants and municipal representatives to highlight consensus when citizens agreed with and supported the municipality's proposed actions. None of the respondents mentioned any complaints, protests or disagreements from the local public. As one senior councillor said, "you only hear the good when making a decision, you don't really get the negative feedback and it's harder for the decision maker when you are only hearing that one side of the story." Another senior planner discussed the same issue, and said that, "We heard

we had 70% of the people come out and speak in favour of the plan. You never hear about what those 30% said and what the issues were." An approach that sees planners and municipal staff deliberately not including citizens' opposing viewpoints can be seen as a threat to the process of representation and legitimation of a decision-making process (Healey, 2006; Carpini et al., 2004). The final outcomes of a planning process have to be inclusive, deliberative, and communicative: traditional power holders must discuss and consider citizens' concerns and needs (both positive and negative) using rational and logical conversation (Dryzek, 2001; Healey 2006; Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). These issues of deliberation were not present in Wood Buffalo.

The municipality favored the technocratic approach, because according to the municipal staff, citizens were not capable of solving complicated or technical issues. One councillor used, as an example, the case of planning a traffic design. He said that community residents would not/might not be the appropriate source of input because they don't fully understand roads, traffic lights, 24-hour traffic patterns, which is why technical issues like these really need the help and opinions of experts. Furthermore, all of the interviewees in this study emphasized that technical expertise ensures efficiency of a decision-making process in a way that seeking public opinion won't or can't. The interviewees also mentioned that seeking opinions from public is time consuming. Moreover the interviewees considered that due to lack of proper technical knowledge average citizens would not be able to provide appropriate and efficient decisions about the sustainability plan; thus the decisions of technical experts were given precedence over common

public. When the decision-making process is dominated by technocrats, citizen participation is impeded (Day, 1997). In a technocratic approach, people with access to information, knowledge and resources will get priority in terms of participation, which can violate the issues of representation and legitimacy in a decision-making process (Day, 1997).

One of the most important questions arising from this research is this: Why did the municipality made the effort to contact citizens if technical experts were in charge of making the plans? Based on the interviews, it can be said that one of the major reasons for involving citizens in the planning process was to follow the requirements (Innes & Booher, 2004) set by the federal government in creating an ICSP. To illustrate, according to the "Integrated Community Sustainability Plan Template" (2010) published by the AUMA and its official website (www.auma.ca), "If your municipality completes AUMA's 2010 ICSP template, you will in our view have fulfilled the requirements of the ICSP that are laid out by the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada" (p.3). The respondents in this study said that the municipality followed the AUMA template for developing the ICSP. In this template, which is present on page four of the "Integrated Community Sustainability Plan Template" document (2010), there is a section, "Community Consultation," which has been incorporated as a basic requirement to create the ICSP plan. The study shows that the citizen participation process was mainly conducted to follow that requirement.

Moreover, according to the gas tax template agreement, the ICSP is "a long-term plan, developed in consultation with community members, that provides direction

for the community to realize [the] sustainability objectives it has for the environmental, cultural, social and economic dimensions of its identity" (Planning for Sustainable Canadian Communities Roundtable, 2005). Access to the GTF funding program required the creation of ICSP based on collaboration and citizen participation which was one of the major reasons behind Wood Buffalo's citizen engagement initiatives.

A majority of the interviewees said that it would have been a lot easier for the municipal government to create an ICSP using consultants and municipal staff. However, they made the effort to consult with citizens because the ICSPs are expected (by both federal and provincial government) to be participatory in nature; as one senior planner said, citizen participation "was something that we had to do." Another municipal staff member explicitly stated that municipal staff and planners "don't do it with heart" because the citizen engagement process was more of a necessity in terms of getting approval from the federal government. Another planner stated that citizen participation is "a mandate" which worked as a main factor in making the effort to contact citizens. In short the provincial and federal governments had high expectations and some requirements that needed to be met regarding the participatory nature of ICSPs.

5.6 Effects/Implications of Citizen Participation

This section outlines the implications of the plan development and citizen participation process within the context of the Wood Buffalo ICSP. The interviewees mentioned that local residents have a generic expectation that the local government can take care of everything. The respondents listed citizens'

apathetic behavior as the main reason that the government adopted the level of citizen participation in "consultation." This level helps citizens to express their views through face-to-face communication with traditional power holders (e.g., planners and municipal staff). This level can be effective if citizens' views and concerns receive priority in case of making final decisions and all the respondents of this study unanimously mentioned that citizens' feedback have been considered and valued during the implementation stage. This level also helps traditional power holders to gain citizens' co-operation during project implementation. However, if citizens do not get the opportunity of direct involvement in the implementation stage, then the progression of rural development may decelerate (Fairbairn, 1998; Shepherd, 1998; Saric et al., 2011). Wood Buffalo's municipal staff should have offered to expand citizens' roles by involving them at the implementation stage (Cernea, 1985; Ahmed and Talib, 2011).

Lack of Citizen Empowerment and Learning Opportunities

The results of this research indicate that traditional power holders did not intend to empower or educate citizens through the citizen participation process; instead, citizens were perceived as a problem identification source. For citizen participation to be effective (e.g., to make citizens' input competent and relevant), the public must be significantly educated regarding complex issues before their opinions are sought. Those opinions must then be integrated in the final decision-making process (Beierle,1998) which was not evident in Wood Buffalo's planning process.

The effectiveness of the citizen engagement process "may depend on the availability of independent sources of technical skills and information for participants" (Verba, 1967, p.75). Wood Buffalo's planning approach lacked the initiative to exchange knowledge between lay people and technical experts. The study did not find any example or evidence where steps were taken to educate citizens about various technical terms and complicated issues of sustainability planning. To properly educate citizens and empower the citizens' advisory group, conferences or workshops and joint panels can play a crucial role: citizens can be invited to sit and work together with traditional power holders in the final stage of the planning (Beierle, 1998; Arnstein, 1969). Wood Buffalo's municipal staff did not take such initiatives to involve citizens in the policy-making phase.

If citizens do not have the opportunity to learn and share knowledge, they will not be able to contribute effectively to community development. In the long run, they might lose interest in supporting development intervention projects promoted by local administration (Beard, 2002; Thelander, 1981). In order to achieve local development and integrate citizens' local knowledge into the plan development process, it is important to use a planning approach in which, proper attention will be paid to how to make the best use of people's local knowledge (Beard, 2002). Wood Buffalo could have taken proper steps to create a scope of "mutual learning" between technocrats and common residents. As shown in this case study, the lack of collaboration between local and technical knowledge can create a substantial gap between sustainable development and the municipality's rural communities (Saric et al. 2011; Brooks, 1970).

Ambiguous Understanding Regarding the Term "Sustainability"

The absence of "learning" opportunities for citizens can be linked to the critical issue of citizens' vague conceptual knowledge and understanding regarding the term "sustainability." The planners and municipal staff also stated that citizens do not "understand and even appreciate" the concept of sustainability. For some, sustainability was about growing trees, for some it was about recycling and for some it was about saving the environment. So, the concept of sustainability remained unclear. Moreover, the concept of sustainability was not even clear among the municipal staff. One senior planner mentioned that "sustainability is a way of doing everybody's business." Another interviewee stated that "sustainability is a loaded term and I am not sure how to define it." The concept of sustainability remained ambiguous not only among citizens, but also among the municipality.

The main aim of creating the ICSP and providing Gas Tax Fund (GTF) was to achieve rural sustainable development in the long run. The main objective of promoting ICSP will not be fulfilled if citizens and municipal staff fail to comprehend the empirical aspects of sustainability, including "what to sustain" or "how to practice a sustainable lifestyle." The values of sustainable development may remain abstract when the term sustainability remains vague (Jepson, 2004); thus, it can be difficult for the municipality to effectively implement the proposed sustainability actions, since community residents, and even the municipal staff, don't fully understand the term "sustainability.

Citizens' Roles Not Clearly Defined

The findings indicate that within the municipality, ambiguity and inconsistency existed regarding citizens' role (Day, 1997) in the plan development process. One reason for this was the consulting company's strong involvement in dealing with the citizen participation process; interviewees supported this conclusion, pointing out that very few staff members were involved in public engagement sessions on behalf of the municipality.

Along with a majority of the respondents, a senior councillor stated that, "Obviously there was some success in the community involvement process but I haven't heard anyone formally tell me 'here is what we did, and here is how we did it and here is where we were successful.'" The role of citizens and the purpose of citizen participation were not clear to the municipal staff. Citizens were not given any responsibility in terms of fulfilling or implementing sustainability projects. In this case, the probability of getting citizens to accept and support implementing sustainability actions could decrease in Wood Buffalo since the role and contribution of citizens were not clearly articulated (Rowe and Frewer, 2000).

5.7 Conclusion

This research shows that citizen participation was present in the development of Envision Wood Buffalo and that the level of participation can be characterized as "consultation" (Arnstein, 1969). Citizens were predominantly consulted during the initial period of plan development through various methods (e.g., open houses, surveys, focus groups, social media) compared to the implementation stage. One-

way communication was more evident in Wood Buffalo than in Hinton. In Wood Buffalo, this communication included online feedback-gathering techniques through websites, emails and social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter), surveys based on questionnaires, radio announcements, and newsletters. These methods updated citizens and allowed them to give feedback, but did not empower them to influence the final decision-making process.

Citizens did not receive opportunities to make decisions at the implementation stage, due to technocratic dominance. The technocratic approach has the tendency to overlook social values and subjective perceptions for making logical deductions based on knowledge. This process of final decision-making is independent of political administration and citizen involvement (Fischer, 1990; Harcourt, 1999), and can be seen as the opposite of deliberation. In a technocratic process, questions of ideological values can be easily ignored, as constructive discussion among experts and citizens does not "actually" take place. Wood Buffalo could have given more attention to facilitating constructive dialogue between expert planners and citizens during the implementation stage to successfully attain local sustainable development.

Proper alignment, support and communication among the federal, provincial and municipal governments are also important for promoting rural sustainable development. Interviewees described Wood Buffalo as financially secure, as economic growth is emblematic in this community based on oil and gas productivity. A majority of the respondents mentioned that acknowledgement and co-operation of federal and provincial government are the central issues of

importance for developing the sustainability plan. Less important, they said, was for the local government to merely receive funding and direction from federal government.

Moreover, the municipal staff's long-term commitment and dedication are also crucial for ensuring the consistency and effective implementation of local sustainability plans. The study shows that the "employee turnover" aspect is frequent in the municipality of Wood Buffalo. It has also been found that the majority of municipal staff who were involved in conducting citizen participation, along with Dillon Consulting Company, left their jobs a few years ago. The respondents considered this issue a challenge in terms of implementing the plan, as new staff who are now responsible for executing the actions of the plan are not familiar with how the actual plan was designed, or how citizens were involved during the initial stage of planning. It took a lot of time for the new staff to become familiar with various aspects of Envision Wood Buffalo, and it remained difficult for new employees to gain empirical knowledge and understanding about something in which they were not at all involved. The interview findings also indicated that new staff was hesitant to talk about the citizen participation issue. The interviewees in this study expected "a very serious and consistent commitment" from municipal staff for the successful implementation of long-range planning such as Envision Wood Buffalo.

Based on the results of this research it can be said that for an economically strong community like Wood Buffalo, money is not the solution for developing sustainable plans. The main factors behind successfully promoting rural

sustainable development are a supportive political rapport between local and federal government, transparency and legitimacy of the decision-making process, citizens that have a sense of belonging and a co-operative attitude, and a government that understands citizens' lifestyles and nature of employment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Overview of the Research

Sustainability Planning and Citizen Participation

The concept of sustainability has received enormous attention in planning and public policy making fields by academics, government and private organizations, professional consultants and technical planners (Hanna, 2005; Goldstein et al., 2000; Kenny and Meadowcroft, 1999). Along with the global promotion of sustainability, the Government of Canada has also taken a significant step in endorsing sustainable development in rural communities. As a part of this initiative, the Federal Gas Tax Fund (GTF) was introduced during 2005 in the Federal Strategy of Canada. One of the main goals of this strategy was to have each local community develop an "Integrated Community Sustainability Plan" (ICSP) in order to become more sustainable in the domains of economy, culture, social, governance and the environment. Access to the GTF depends on the successful creation of ICSPs, which require planners, municipal staff and local citizens to work collaboratively (Planning for Sustainable Canadian Communities Roundtable, 2005).

The municipal staff of Hinton and Wood Buffalo considered citizen participation a crucial factor in creating goals and objectives for community sustainability plans. Both federal and provincial governments mandated the inclusion of local citizens in developing the ICSPs. This thesis has sought to comprehend the levels of citizen participation in the creation of community sustainability plans in Hinton

and Wood Buffalo. The results have provided empirical information and understanding regarding the development of sustainability plans in rural Alberta communities. The results of this study can help other rural communities to formulate participatory methods, which are intended to be collaborative, inclusive and feasible in nature. This research can also be a useful source of empirical knowledge for planners, community leaders, municipal representatives, policy makers, NGOs and environmental agencies who are involved or aim to get involved in constructing democratic and participatory development interventions for rural and small town communities.

6.2 Citizen Participation in Hinton and Wood Buffalo

The results show that the sustainability plans of both Hinton and Wood Buffalo adopted long-term strategies. Both communities designed their sustainability policies by striking a healthy balance among social, environmental, cultural, governance and economic themes. The findings of this study also indicate that along with these five themes, Hinton and Wood Buffalo emphasized the issues of inclusiveness, collaboration and citizen participation. All the interviewees in this study consistently agreed that there was no lack of initiative in engaging citizens in the plan development processes. The respondents also recognized citizen participation as an essential feature of community sustainability planning. Both communities used diverse techniques (e.g., surveys, coffee shops, newsletters, focus groups) to engage citizens, in terms of gathering their visions and feedback about the sustainability plan. However, in both communities the citizen engagement predominantly occurred at the initial level of planning (e.g., problem

identification stage) and citizens are not actively involved in the implementation stage.

To be more specific, in Hinton citizens were granted the opportunity to engage in the implementation stage, through Citizen Engagement and Accountability Committee (CEAC). Citizens were invited to join this committee and work together with municipal staff and expert planners to make final recommendations to the councillors; thus, citizens were given the scope to work with traditional power holders by being a part of the CEAC. This level of citizen participation can empower citizens to influence the final decision-making stage by allowing them to sit and work together with expert planners. Arnstein (1969) categorized this level as "Placation." However, this term is not appropriate in case of Hinton as "Placation" can represent undesirable implication (e.g., citizens were just given shallow assurance that their voices have been heard). This implication is not true in case of Hinton because citizens were given numerous opportunities to express their views and their concerns were given priority during plan development process. Additionally, citizens were not only consulted about plan development but also received the opportunity to give feedback on plan implementation through CEAC. However it was not guaranteed that citizens were empowered to take part in any final decision-making processes, nor are citizens given authority to make such decisions. The respondents of this study also did not provide any example of projects where citizens and municipal staff worked together through CEAC committee. Thus, the citizen engagement process of Hinton is complex in

nature and cannot easily be understood through Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation.

In case of Wood Buffalo, the citizen engagement process is consistent with the "consultation" stage (Arnstein, 1969). Unlike Hinton, there was no joint panel or committee (like the CEAC) through which citizens could work together with traditional power holders at the decision-making stage. In this municipality, citizen participation largely occurred in the initial stages of Envision Wood Buffalo (Phase 1). Though this level does not guarantee that citizens will receive the opportunity be to influence the final decisions, but "consultation" can help integrate citizens' visions and local knowledge into the sustainability plan. Municipal staff of Wood Buffalo provided citizens the opportunity to express their concerns and visions through surveys, open houses, town meetings and other consultative methods (e.g., workshops, seminars). Citizen participation was considered as an essential factor for the plan development process of Wood Buffalo beyond having complex socio-economic conditions.

To illustrate, both Hinton and Wood Buffalo faced numerous challenges in case of engaging citizens to the development of sustainability plans. Some of the major challenges were transient population, citizens' limited understanding of the concept of sustainability, socio-economic context (e.g., busy working population), logistics of meeting (e.g., road and weather conditions). These issues were more evident in Wood Buffalo since majority of the population of this municipality is transient in nature. These individuals come to the municipality for specific time period based on their job contracts (e.g., 5 years contract). These transient citizens

do not have strong sense of belongingness to the community and that's why do not show much interest to engage in long-term community sustainability plans. Additionally, in both Hinton and Wood Buffalo, citizens were more interested to talk about some specific issues (e.g., transport, housing, recreation centre) and were often more unconcerned towards broader sustainability issues (e.g., energy efficiency, waste management, climate change). This was identified as a big challenge to citizen engagement process. These challenges in citizen engagement are part of the explanation for the limited community involvement in the integrated community sustainability plans of Hinton and Wood Buffalo.

The case studies on citizen engagement in sustainability planning of Hinton and Wood Buffalo contribute to our understanding of theories of citizen participation, deliberative democracy and technocracy. Specifically, sustainability planning in these communities appears to be consistent with a broader process of consultation, but does not necessarily give citizens decision-making authority or a role in implementation. These results also demonstrate that frameworks such as Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation do not necessarily account for all of the contextual factors that affect people's engagement in planning processes. Citizen participation processes are not easily understood in a hierarchical form. Additionally, the findings of this thesis suggest that sustainability planning is a longer process of social learning and that consultation processes cannot necessarily facilitate the deep goals of sustainability.

6.2.1 Effects of the Participatory Process

The research shows that ambiguity surrounding the concept of "sustainability" existed in both communities. The interview findings indicate that neither citizens nor municipal representatives had a clear understanding of what sustainability means. Based on the interview findings, it can be said that there was difficulty in both communities in terms of educating people to understand the meaning of sustainability, which makes the collaborative nature of the planning questionable.

Sustainability planning is supposed to be collaborative and educative in nature in order for citizens to gain knowledge regarding the principles of sustainability (Gasparatos et al. 2007; Goldstein et al., 2000; Kelemen et al. 2008). Furthermore, during the course of developing sustainability plans, it is important to educate and train local people about complex yet recurrent issues of local planning and the implications of sustainability (e.g., what needs to be sustained, how waste management should be done, how citizens can contribute to energy efficiency) instead of simply asking for feedback regarding specific projects prioritized by technical experts and local administration (Jonsson, 2005).

Respondents in both communities claimed that citizens were given the opportunity to speak up or to give feedback, but nobody said anything about citizens being given the opportunity to learn. Because learning was not stressed, the concept of sustainability remained vague in both communities. If citizens do not understand how to lead a sustainable lifestyle by protecting natural resources, cultural diversity, economic stability and social values, then the possibility of achieving rural sustainable development becomes highly unlikely.

Mutual learning, an exchange of knowledge and the practice of promoting education in the case complex issues of planning are crucial factors for formulating effective public policies (Sarno and Wagner, 2002). However, the concepts of social learning, knowledge sharing, and training did not seem to exist in either of the communities.

If citizens had been given the opportunity to take responsibility in terms of "actually" working on a sustainability project or action, then both experts and local citizens could have benefitted in terms of an exchange of local and technical knowledge. But the core principles of collaborative planning were not adequately present in the communities. Those principles include knowledge sharing, construction of knowledge, co-operative communication between technical experts and local people, a combination of technical and local knowledge in the final decision-making process, and equal distribution of planning responsibilities among stakeholders, local citizens and expert planners (Healey, 2006; Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2002) .

Moreover, based on the findings, it can be said that a more technocratic approach to planning received precedence over local knowledge in both communities. Unfortunately, this can prohibit active citizen participation, as citizens will feel isolated and incapable because they lack adequate technical knowledge. Including technocrats and their dominance in the decision-making process does not ensure an effective implementation of plans and policies (Eden, 1996). If local residents are not given the opportunity to integrate local knowledge and diverse viewpoints, the final outcome of the environmental decision-making process will not be

efficient enough to address their concerns and local problems (Eden, 1996). In order to understand the economic, social and cultural diversity of a rural community, planners and municipal staff have to understand the values, beliefs and lifestyles of that community's residents (Albrechts, 2000) by sharing knowledge as well as solving problems and working together at the policy formulation stage.

Another crucial finding of this research is that there was no systematic alignment between the planning and implementation stages in either community. Specifically, plan development was given more attention than plan implementation. This case was more evident in Wood Buffalo as its ICSP project, "Envision Wood Buffalo," is now considered "outdated" by the respondents and some of its sustainability goals have been integrated into the statutory plan, the "Municipal Development Plan," for implementation purposes. The results also indicate that municipal staff is not obligated to implement Envision Wood Buffalo's targets and sustainability actions.

In Hinton, the CEAC has assumed accountability for implementing the sustainability actions proposed in the Hinton Community Sustainability Plan, but a different group, the citizens' advisory group, did the plan development and citizen engagement sessions. Because the plan development and implementation processes were led by two different groups of people, there were some inconsistencies and a gap in communication between the members of these two groups. These became evident when it came time to integrate and prioritize the proposed actions (during the plan development stage) in the final stage.

Due to a lack of alignment between plan development and the implementation stage, some common problems were persistent in both communities: a) both the local public and even some municipal employees continued to have uncertainty about the concept of sustainability; b) contradictions continued to exist between stakeholders' interests and citizens' input; and c) nobody (e.g., planners, councillors and municipal staffs, committee members) justified or guaranteed that citizens' visions were incorporated in the final outcome. These challenges can impede the promotion and adoption of rural sustainable development in the long run. Most importantly, this inconsistent process (where the lack of a shared vision is evident) can be a challenge to effectively implementing sustainability actions at the local level.

6.3 Future Research

The findings of this research indicate that it is necessary to conduct future research based on the framework of citizen participation in rural sustainability planning, in order to fulfill the limitations of this study. Due to time and financial restrictions, it was not possible to choose more than two case studies for this research. If future research is done on other rural communities in Alberta, and is based on a bigger sample size, a more holistic picture may emerge in terms of the participatory processes, challenges, stages (plan development and implementation) of citizen participation, role of citizens in the decision-making process, presence or absence of professional consultants and initiatives of local government to promote sustainable development. The two case studies in this research, Hinton and Wood Buffalo, received funds from the AUMA to develop

their plans. These two communities can also be considered economically strong, so financial restrictions were not a significant concern, which gave them the option of hiring professional consultants and technical experts.

The hiring of professional consultants was more evident in Wood Buffalo, as Dillon Consulting Company was hired to develop the plan as well as to conduct citizen participation on behalf of the municipality. In Hinton, town councillors and senior, experienced residents of the town who had various professional and educational backgrounds formed the citizens' advisory group and Citizen Engagement and Accountability Committee (CEAC). These two committees were responsible for conducting citizen participation and creating the plan based on citizens' visions. Now a question arises: if those communities did not have AUMA funding or a strong economy, what would the participatory nature of the ICSP development process have been (e.g., less dominance of technocratic approach, emphasis on local knowledge instead of technological knowledge, more or less participatory sessions)? The answer to this question may be discovered if further research is done on other rural Alberta communities that do not have proper funding or are going through financial constraints.

It was not possible to interview local citizens in the communities due to time and financial restrictions. The research findings and analysis are based on a review of pertinent literature, official planning documents, the official websites of Hinton and Wood Buffalo and key informant interviews. Specifically, the analysis of this study is based on the experiences and opinions of key informants (e.g., municipal staff, planners, councillors, consultants, members of the citizens' advisory group

and CEAC), since it was not possible to contact lay citizens, due to limited time and money. Thus, the results could not integrate the perceptions, experiences and views of community residents in Hinton and Wood Buffalo. Future research needs to be conducted based on citizens' opinions and insights regarding the participatory nature of the sustainability plans in both communities.

The comprehensive picture regarding the role of citizens in developing sustainability plans can be generated by integrating citizens' experiences in future research. This method may also help to answer some critical questions, including whether or not citizens understand the concept of sustainability; what their definition of sustainability may be; which participatory methods are preferred by local people; what sort of challenges and problems occurred during their engagement sessions; whether or not citizens want to participate in the final decision making process, or if they would rather local government took care of the implementation stage; whether citizens find the process of community sustainability planning complicated; and what factors will increase their willingness to participate more actively. Answers to those questions can help planners and municipal staff to design any participatory sustainability plans for their communities. Additionally, a more advanced research method, an enhanced time period and larger sample size are crucial for understanding the detailed process of citizen participation (Barnes, 1999) within the context of rural Alberta communities.

6.4 Lessons to be Learned

The findings of this study suggest that the following factors are necessary for improving citizen participation in the community sustainability plan development process:

Communication

Good communications plays a key role in improving citizen participation in public decision-making. Local government needs a strong communication strategy to ensure that the final outcome of a plan development process is the transparent and accountable. According to the interviewees in this study, the sustainability plan "needs to be in the newspaper, needs to be on the radio, and needs to be talked about in the coffee shop. All of these can only happen with a good marketing, [and] communications strategy." Specifically, listening is a key part of the effective communication approach. It is not enough simply to invite citizens and exchange information. Citizens have to be listened to carefully and their insights have to be integrated in the final outcome; otherwise the issues of trust and accountability may deteriorate.

Patience

Patience (on the part of both planners and municipal representatives) is a crucial aspect in continuing the process of citizen participation. The respondents in this study mentioned that it is not easy to contact people for citizen engagement sessions, especially when the topic of discussion is broad (e.g., climate change, sustainable energy issues, sustainable waste management). This is due to citizens'

hectic work schedules and busy lifestyles; thus, constant efforts are needed to encourage citizens to join town meetings or open houses to talk about the community's future plans and goals. Persistence and time are essential to make those efforts.

Knowledge of Demographic Characteristics

This study suggests that it is important to recognize the nature of the local population to effectively engage residents in the planning and decision-making process. To illustrate, before involving citizens in discussions, or even designing participatory methods, the municipal staff have to become familiar with the basic demographic features of local citizens (e.g., nature of employment, level of income, level of education, age, sex). Based on these features, diverse participatory methods have to be designed. One single type of technique is not going to be effective in terms of communicating with different groups of people (e.g., housewives, senior citizens, camp workers, students).

Informal Language

In order to encourage citizens to participate in the planning process, it is necessary to use informal and local language during participatory sessions. The respondents in this study also emphasized that the language of presentations in open houses and town meetings should be interesting and precise, instead of complicated and technical.

Attire

The interview findings show that the way municipal staff and planners dress while communicating with citizens has significant implications. One senior planner from Hinton mentioned that "sitting up there in ties and suits, you just kind—you've already set the tone that the average lay person working in the mine wouldn't even want to become a part of." Other interviewees from both Hinton and Wood Buffalo also said that when communicating with citizens, regardless of position, status, and expertise, one should dress like a typical community resident. If municipal staff go out to shopping malls or restaurants wearing expensive suits, people will never feel free to talk to them. The interviewees suggest that even in open houses or town meetings, municipal representatives should dress like average, local people, so that others can relate, engage them in honest conversation and feel that they truly belong in the community, which is how citizens will be inspired to participate in various participatory sessions.

To summarize, being disciplined and focused in terms of addressing local needs and integrating those needs into local policies are two overarching priorities crucial for attaining sustainable rural development. Furthermore, the issues of transparency, accountability and openness are significant for inspiring citizens to participate in the discussion about their towns' future plans and goals (Dahl, 1994). Citizen engagement in the local decision-making process can enhance the democratic values and principles of public policies and plans (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Beierle and Cayford, 2002).

The results of this thesis indicate that Hinton and Wood Buffalo's planners and municipal staff considered citizen participation a significant factor for creating the

sustainability plans. Diverse participatory methods were used by both communities to gather citizens' feedback and concerns with an aim to integrate those in the goals and objective of the sustainability plan. However, citizen participation was more robust at the initial stage of planning compared to the implementation stage. Various obstacles, specifically citizens' busy lifestyle, vague understanding about "sustainability" and transient nature of population has been identified (by both planners and municipal staff) as main reasons for not transferring decision-making power to lay people. The power of making final recommendations remained in the hands of expert planners and municipal staff. This is potentially problematic, because if citizens in Hinton and Wood Buffalo do not see the integration of their input into the final goals and objectives of the sustainability plans, the result will be a lack of trust between them and their local government officials (Irvin & Stansbu ry, 2004; Beierle and Cayford, 2002).

The results of this study also show that both planners and municipal staff of Hinton and Wood Buffalo noted that the concept of "sustainability" is not clear among the community residents. The interviewees in this study also mentioned that citizens do not clearly understand that three major pillars (environmental, economic and social) need to be deliberately integrated into the sustainability plan in order to attain a sustainable community; this suggests that the process of social learning, where planners and local citizens exchange knowledge through constructive discussions regarding the meaning and implications of sustainability, is not evident in either of the communities (Sastre-Merino et al., 2013). If lay people do not understand the concept of sustainability, they might also not

appreciate the importance of a sustainability plan. In such a case, citizens might refrain from adopting sustainable lifestyles, which would make implementing sustainability plans and objectives difficult and unproductive (Jepson, 2004).

Local sustainability plans should be developed in such a way that expert planners, municipal staff and community residents are engaged in knowledge sharing and constructive discussion throughout the plan development process (e.g., from problem identification to final decision stage), in order to create effective and collaborative plans. Citizens should not only learn from technical experts and professional planners, but expert planners and municipal staff should learn from citizens, who have local knowledge and experience. As Nielsen wisely observes, "It's becoming more and more common for the most valuable analysis to be done by people outside the original laboratory" (Nielsen, 2011, p. 108).

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview Questions about Community Sustainability Plans

Telephone Survey Guide

Possible definition for Sustainability: living in a way that meets our needs without undermining the ability of our children and future generations to meet their needs. *– Alberta Municipalities Association. Comprehensive Guide for Municipal Sustainability Planning. June 2006 (page 11).*

Background

Many communities across Canada, have created sustainability plans to address issues of balancing environmental accountability, social goals, infrastructure needs and the economy together to make communities more sustainable. We obtained your contact information from your community's official website. The results of this study will be used in support of my university-sponsored research on sustainability plans. I plan to publish the results in academic journals and present the findings at academic conferences.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to examine the processes involved in developing and implementing community sustainability plans. The results will reveal the intentions of many rural communities for sustainability and provide information for organizations and policy makers in making progress toward sustainability.

Study Procedures

This interview will ask you some questions about the development and implementation of your community's sustainability plan. We are interested in your detailed thoughts or reflections on sustainability planning process and implications, benefits, costs to your community. We have about 21 questions we would like you to answer, and this interview will take approximately 30 minutes

but could be less or more depending on the level of detail you wish to discuss. The survey is being recorded and your responses will be transcribed into a data file, which will be used only by survey researchers. We will link your responses with information we have gathered from your community's sustainability plan and from Statistics Canada about your community.

Benefits

You may benefit from this interview by reflecting on the processes involved in developing the plan and in thinking ahead as to how the plan will be implemented. Society will benefit by gaining new insights into the factors affecting the development and implementation of sustainability plans. Your only cost in participating is the time involved.

Risk

We do not anticipate that you will face any risks as a result of participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if participating in the study. You can opt out without penalty and can ask to have any collected data withdrawn from the data base and not included in the study. That is, even if you agree to be in the study you can change your mind and withdraw at any time. If you opt out, we will remove your information from our data set. You can do this up until the point of hanging up on your telephone interview or hitting reply on your email message. After that, we will continue to use the data we have collected so far.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

The results of this research will be used for research articles and presentations. You will not be personally identified in any of these. The data will be kept

confidential, and will be accessed only by the researcher and the research assistants. After contacting you, your name and contact details will not be associated with your responses. In that way, your answers will be kept anonymous. The data will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of 5 years following completion of research project. The electronic data will be password protected and/or encrypted. When the data are no longer needed, they will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. If you wish, we can send you a copy of a report of the research findings. If so, please indicate that to the interviewer or on your email response.

Further Information

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Glen Hvenegaard at gth@ualberta.ca or 780-679-1574. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Consent Statement

Do you understand the purpose and procedures of this research study? Do you have any more questions? By responding to the oral interview or email request, you agree to participate in the research study described above.

We sincerely thank you taking the time to speak with us today.

1. Does your community have a "community sustainability plan?"

   If Yes:

   a) What is the name of the plan?

   b) When was it approved?

2. What is the population of your community?

   __ greater than 100,000

   __ 50,000-100,000

   __ 10,000-50,000

   __ 5000-10,000

   __ 1000-5000

   __ less than 1000

3. Integration of economic, social, and environmental goals into community governance is a common theme in sustainability planning. Has your area taken steps toward integrating these broad areas together into a vision of community sustainability? Please answer yes or no.

   If yes:

   a) Which issues were covered by the plan? Please indicate all that apply: economy, culture, social, governance, environment.

   b) Can you describe why the issues were or weren't chosen? Use table:

a) Capacity constraints for addressing all or certain the issues	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
b) Integration of issues is not currently feasible	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
c) Some issues were not deemed a priority for the community.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

Additional comments:

4. What are the ***main*** priorities of your community in particular? For example, some communities strive to make a vibrant downtown, for some the most important goal is to decrease crime among adolescents and create programs for youth, for some water conservation is key – it depends on the particular goals of that specific community. What would you say those are for your community? Please use as much detail as you need, and feel free to speak about as many objectives as are very important to your community.

In order to organize the targets for your community, I will ask you in which area the goal fits and then talk about the specific target.

Area of Goal	*Specific Goal*	*Details*
Environment		
Social		
Governance		
Culture		
Economy		

5. Which of the elements or actions in your sustainability plan have been implemented so far? Please describe.
6. On the steps implemented, please indicate why they were successful. For the following statements, please indicate if you agree or disagree.

a) They were unanimously agreed to by the community-at-large	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
b) The were unanimously agreed to by the administration of the municipality	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
c) They had clearly defined desired end-goals	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
d) The goals are being met according to the timeline.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

e) I am satisfied with the progression towards fulfilling the goals of the plan.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
f) I believe most or all of the specified targets in the plan will be met.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

7. Please elaborate on the steps not implemented, and why. What is missing to keep the community from fulfilling all of the goals that it has set out for itself? Is motivation lacking, or are there capacity constraints?

a) There is some resistance in the community towards change.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
b) There is some resistance in the municipal administration toward change	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
c) They do not have clearly defined targets.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
d) There is some uncertainty in the community whether or not they will achieve sustainability goals.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
e) There are some capacity constraints.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
f) There are some financial constraints.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

8. Do you believe additional support from the provincial or federal government, would help your community move towards its target more effectively?

a) Our community could use additional capacity support, governance and direction.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
b) Our community requires financial support to be able to effectively meet targets.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

9. Were you successful in arranging a town meeting to create goals for your community?

   If yes, did it have a favorable turn out, and are citizens interested in making a change?

10. How responsive are citizens to requests for town meetings? Do they want to participate in and want to influence discussions about the town's future plans and goals?

    a) Was broad citizen participation a key factor for creating your plan, and will it be to carry out the goals of the plan?

11. Do citizens of the community have a clear vision of the end outcome of the sustainability planning?

    a) If yes, are the citizens interested in the particular details of the sustainability plan, in other words do you feel that they are empowered to make these changes, or does a degree of apathy or fear exist among residents?

    b) Do citizens understand or appreciate the concept of integration? In other words, do they realize that in order to have a Sustainable community, economic, social and environmental concerns need to be deliberately linked?

12. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) believes communities should consider five dimensions when thinking through the sustainability of their communities: social, cultural, environmental, economic, and governance. Would you say that your community has addressed each of these dimensions individually, and made strides to integrate them in some fashion? Can you please elaborate on how that is being done?

Area of Goal	*Addressed?*	*Integrated?*	*Details*
Environment			
Social			
Governance			
Culture			
Economy			

13. How would you rate the importance, in order starting with most important to least important, of the above mentioned five dimensions.

    Please rank: social, cultural, environmental, economic, and governance.

    a) Do you believe any of the dimensions have to precede another? If yes, which ones?

14. Has your town made use of any of the toolkits available – for example, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA)? Have you found the toolkit as a useful starting point or guide, or not?

    Comments

15. Where do you see the sustainability plan in the next five years? Therefore, what goals do you think will be met and why, and what goals will be particular challenges in that time period.

Goal	5 year projection

16. Please answer if you agree or disagree with the following questions about your community's plan to fulfill its sustainability goals:

a) The community has the needed tools to its disposal, to accomplish the objectives of the sustainability plan.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
b) Sufficient capacity exists to meet targets.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

17. Has the decline in the agriculture, oil and gas, and forestry industries affected your community? Would you say the economic effects of these industries are felt at least in some sense in your community?

If yes, to what extent? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5.

1= Strongly felt	2= definite disruption	3 = neutral/no effect	4= small effect	5= no effect

18. I feel the sustainability plan will help integrate and lessen the effect of, or improve community cohesiveness during times of economic turmoil.

Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

19. Does your community compete with other local communities for business associated with these industries? Yes / No
20. If yes, do the youth choose to leave the community because of economic opportunities elsewhere? Yes/No
21. In your opinion, does rural and small town Alberta, but specifically your community have to change in some way to address economic, social and environmental challenges, regardless if the sustainability plan is carried out or not?

a) The *status quo* not acceptable, some change needs to happen regardless if the sustainability plan is able to meet the challenge.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
b) The sustainability plan is able to address most of these issues.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
c) Legislation will be required to address some of the issues in our community.	Strongly disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree

Thank you for participating in this study.