



Center on Organizational Innovation

## Public Deliberation After 9/11

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In the wake of the physical devastation wrought by the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, politicians and planners seemed agreed that rebuilding the site would have to be a participatory process. There was talk of “inclusive” planning and “diverse voices” being heard. What was attacked was American democracy, those charged with the key decisions in the rebuilding process argued, and the response could only be more democracy. “Common ground,” indeed, “consensus” about the most important issues could be achieved.<sup>1</sup>

One might be forgiven for some skepticism about what such commitments would mean in practice. After all, New York City urban development has long been criticized for being driven by real estate interests (Pedersen 2002) and at the same time paralyzed by battles between community groups and developers (Sanders 2002). In that context, it seemed surprising that the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), an agency led by developers, financiers, and officials for economic development, should talk so enthusiastically about giving power to the people. Yet the rhetoric was matched by action. In the months after the terrorist attack, public forums proliferated. In January, 1,200 people attended a meeting with local officials in Stuyvesant High School organized by the community board that represents Lower Manhattan. In February, 600 people talked about their visions for Lower Manhattan in a forum sponsored by the Civic Alliance, a coalition of environmental and planning groups. In April, the Municipal Arts Society spearheaded a series of 230 “visioning workshops” around the tri-state area, with 3,500 participants generating ideas for memorials, job-creation programs, and livable neighborhoods. The LMDC held a public hearing in Manhattan in May and then a series of hearings in each of the boroughs in September. And in July, the LMDC collaborated with the Port Authority and the Civic Alliance to convene possibly the largest “town meeting” ever held in this country. Some 4,500 people met in a midtown convention center to jointly review the

preliminary plans for the World Trade Center site as well as to deliberate more broadly about the future of Lower Manhattan. That event, which attracted international coverage and was credited with sending decisionmakers back to the design drawing board, was followed by an online dialogue, more public hearings, an exhibition of new architectural design plans, and numerous public workshops.

Officials and observers have been enthusiastic about the striking level of public involvement in the design process. Governor Pataki declared recently that “aggressive outreach to a broader public” was responsible for the design plan that was eventually chosen for the site (Wyatt 2003). The designer himself, Daniel Liebeskind, met with a variety of citizens’ groups to campaign for his plan and believes now that intense give-and-take with the public will become a standard feature of urban design (Iovine 2003). Commentators have hailed a new responsiveness on the part of public agencies long indifferent to public sensibilities and a veritable “renaissance” in New York City architecture—all a result of public involvement in the process (Traub 2003; Muschamp 2002). The enthusiasm has been by no means universal, however. From the beginning, critics complained about the exclusion of elected city officials from LMDC board of directors and many have characterized the decisionmaking process as far from transparent (Wyatt 2002a; Sorkin 2002; Russell 2002; Hetter 2002). Massive town meetings and “listening sessions” have been more spectacle than substance, critics have charged (Sorkin 2002). Indeed, the civic coalition that partnered with the LMDC to sponsor the town meeting in July 2002 less than a year later denounced the LMDC for “closed-door efforts” to alter the Liebeskind plan (Civic Alliance 2003b). Nor has the populist sentiment been universal. A more anxious refrain has been evident from the beginning: a public referendum would not produce great design. What was needed was a Robert Moses, a design czar who could cut through the red tape and produce

the spectacular structures that the public would come to appreciate (Purnick 2002; Johnson 2002).

Together, then, these developments raise fascinating questions about the place of the public in the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan. As sociologists who have studied experiments in radical democracy (Polletta 2001; 2002; Wood forthcoming), we wondered how the “public” would be defined in that process and how its preferences would be balanced with those of family members, residents, developers, and designers. What would “consensus” mean in a process with high financial stakes and shifting hierarchies of moral authority? We were especially intrigued by the prominence of novel methods of public deliberation: “visioning workshops,” “electronic town meetings,” and “online dialogues,” among them. We were curious about their relationship to more traditional mechanisms for citizen input into planning decisions. In the context of a recent efflorescence of theorizing about the promise of more deliberative political institutions, were these new forums an indication of the promise of deliberative democracy? Or were they substituting the illusion of public input for real mechanisms of public accountability?

As of this writing, it is still too early to answer any of these questions definitively. However, we can say something about what forms public participation has taken so far as well as about its initial impacts, both on participants themselves and on those making decisions about Lower Manhattan. This report draws on participant observation and interviews with participants in two public deliberative efforts—*Imagine New York* and *Listening to the City*—to address three questions. One, why did people choose to participate in public forums around the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan? Were they advocates, pressing for a particular set of interests or a favored design plan; civic stalwarts—that is, the people who always attend community board hearings and City Council meetings—or people who do not usually participate but were directly affected

by the terrorist attack? Did they come to influence decisionmakers, to process emotionally the events of September 11, or for other reasons? Two, was what took place in the public forums created by *Listening to the City* and *Imagine New York* real *deliberation*? As we will argue in a moment, recent discussions of deliberative democracy have put great stock in strangers' capacity to engage in reasoned dialogue about issues of concern. However, we still know little about the conditions in which organized public forums are likely to foster that kind of dialogue. Our observations of the discussions and interviews with participants offer some insights into that issue. Finally, what short-term impacts have *Imagine New York* and *Listening to the City* had on participants and on the development process?

To anticipate, with respect to the first question, we argue that people did not participate in *Imagine New York* and *Listening to the City* thinking that it was a pipeline to those in power. In retrospect, they described diverse motivations, prominent among them a sense of obligation to participate and a desire to be part of a process they saw as important. *Listening to the City* participants became much more confident about their impact on decisionmakers after the original six plans that they were asked to evaluate were scrapped. But what participants liked most about both *Listening* and *Imagine* was the opportunity to talk in a mutually respectful way about issues that were important to them with people who were very different from them. With respect to the deliberative character of the discussions, we argue that although the very structure of these efforts sometimes sacrificed the possibility of deliberation in the interests of avoiding conflict, there was some evidence that discussing issues with people with quite different stakes in redevelopment did lead participants to modify or rescale their preferences. Finally, in discussing the impacts of *Listening* and *Imagine*, we highlight the tensions between advocacy and deliberation that inevitably mark public deliberative exercises but are little discussed in the

literature. The organizations that sponsored *Listening to the City* and *Imagine New York* found themselves in an ambiguous position, torn between serving as neutral mouthpieces for the public's views and advocates for those views. Their experience in trying to negotiate those roles suggests an intriguing possibility: that civic and advocacy groups, more than decisionmakers, may find political benefit in public forums. We turn to these issues after a brief discussion of current scholarship on deliberative democracy.

### New forms of democratic decisionmaking

In recent years, numerous scholars have championed “deliberative democracy” as an answer to Americans’ low levels of participation and trust in the political system (Barber 1988, Dryzek 1989, Cohen 1987, Guttman and Thompson 1996, Fishkin 1991; 1995). Ordinary citizens should be given the opportunity to discuss important political issues, exchange views based on reasoned arguments, and come to recognize areas of agreement as well as the legitimacy of other points of view. Contrary to the assumption that interests are pre-given and fixed, deliberation makes it possible for people to scrutinize and modify their preexisting interests and to develop new ones. But for deliberative democrats the object is not necessarily full consensus. Rather, it is parties’ recognition of the validity of a range of—but not all—arguments. Once that recognition occurs, people can accept a decision that does not match their preferences exactly (Cohen and Sabel 1997; Shapiro 2002:198). Democratic legitimacy, on this view, requires not that every constituent have veto power over decisionmaking but that he or she has the opportunity to deliberate. In principle, this means that public deliberation can be integrated with existing electoral, legislative, and administrative processes. Participants in such exercises are likely to become more trusting of their political institutions and, since deliberation places a premium on

good reasoning, are likely to seek out the information that will enable them to advance reasonable claims (Cohen 1989; Fishkin 1995; Guttman and Thompson 1996). In addition to a more engaged and informed citizenry, public deliberation should benefit political decisionmaking by stimulating public discourse that aims for reasoned agreement rather than polarizing along partisan lines or positions on hot-button moral questions (Fishkin 1995).

Alongside a rich theoretical literature on deliberative democracy, efforts to put deliberative democracy into practice have proliferated in the last decade: study circles, citizen assemblies, citizen juries, public visioning workshops, national issues forums, and deliberative polls among them (for overviews, see Button and Mattson 1999; Gastil 2000; Passerin D'Entreves 2002). Some research has claimed qualified success for these deliberative forums, with participants interviewed before and after their participation in a weekend of discussion gaining a greater sense of individual efficacy and trust in government (Fishkin and Luskin 1999); and participants in another forum leaving more politically informed (Gastil and Dillard 1999).

Still, empirical research on deliberative democracy has not yet caught up with the theoretical claims made for it. At least three areas demand further research. One has to do with the discursive and organizational conditions in which authentic deliberation is likely to occur in deliberative forums. Theorists have generally seen deliberative discourse as characterized by participants' equality, a diversity of viewpoints, claims that are backed up by reasoned arguments, and, for some theorists, by reflexivity—meaning that participants can question the agenda and the procedures for discussion (Cohen 1989; Dryzek 1990; Fishkin 1991; Guttman and Thompson 1996). However, there has been little close empirical analysis of the character of discourse in public deliberative efforts (for exceptions, see Hart and Jarvis 1999; and, on internet dialogue, Stanley, Weare, and Musso 2002). We need to know much more about the

organizational conditions and interpersonal dynamics by which people begin to seek out information outside their personal experience, shift opinions on the basis of reasoned arguments rather than subtle coercion, and question the rules of the game.

A second issue about which we lack adequate data concerns the impacts of public deliberation on participants. If research suggests that participants leave study circles, citizens' assemblies, deliberative polls, and issues forums feeling more efficacious and more trusting in government institutions, and with some increase in political knowledge, we do not know much about what happens next. Do people then go on to vote, to participate in other kinds of political action, to pay more attention to political developments, to engage in other forms of social capital formation? Determining whether participation leads to greater trust in government is also made difficult by the generality of the measures of political efficacy and trust, with participants asked to respond to statements like "people like me don't have any say in what the government does," and "public officials care a lot about what people like me think" (Fishkin and Luskin 1999: 3). One could imagine that, were participants to feel that their discussions had been ignored by politicians, they might become more skeptical about political processes rather than less so (Button and Mattson's 1999 case study suggests just this possibility). We need more research on how participation in public deliberative processes shape participants' attention to, involvement in, and satisfaction with a policymaking process over time.

If public deliberation has intrinsic benefits for participants, it is also usually seen as bearing on actual policymaking. However, as Judith Squires points out (2002), deliberative democratic theorists have been maddeningly vague about the normative relationship they envision between public deliberation and conventional political processes of representation, aggregation, and decisionmaking. How is deliberation to be incorporated into political



decisionmaking? What makes it difficult to answer the question empirically—how *are* public deliberative exercises incorporated into political decisionmaking?—is that such exercises have been organized by very different political actors in very different political contexts. Some have been sponsored by government agencies and public commissions (Fishkin and Luskin 1999; Stanley, Weare, and Musso 2002); others by local mixes of civic groups and foundations, sometimes with the involvement of local officials (Walters 1998); still others have taken place entirely outside political institutions (Button and Mattson 1999). This makes it more difficult to assess public deliberation’s political impact in any general sense. But there is another point. Public deliberative efforts usually figure in a policymaking process that includes numerous collective actors: political officials, civic organizations, advocacy groups, influential private groups, foundations, the press, and so on. Many of them claim to speak for the “public.” We need to understand better how the organizations sponsoring public deliberation relate to these groups. We also need to understand better how such efforts support, modify, or displace existing mechanisms for citizen input into official decisionmaking. Is their appeal in part as a substitute for such mechanisms? Who wins and who loses as a result?

### Public Deliberation After 9/11

Two large-scale efforts to solicit public input into the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan offer an opportunity to address these issues. *Imagine New York* was organized by a coalition of civic, neighborhood and arts organizations spearheaded by the Municipal Arts Society (MAS).

Concerned that early discussions among planners and architects were failing to tap New Yorkers’ ideas about and needs for Lower Manhattan, MAS staffers Eva Hanhardt and Holly Leicht began to envision a process by which a broad swathe of New Yorkers would share ideas

about what they wanted not only for the site but for the city and region as a whole. Planner Gianni Longo was recruited to help design the workshops. Longo's public "visioning workshops" in Chattanooga, Tennessee had been credited with playing a critical role in that city's widely admired revitalization (Walters 1998; Moore, Longo, and Palmer 1999), and he created a modified version of those workshops for *Imagine New York*.

With the support of the Surdna Foundation, 230 workshops were held in April 2002 around the metropolitan area—in all five boroughs, Long Island, and New York state, Connecticut, and New Jersey—along with a smaller number of more focused design workshops and arts projects for adults and children. The workshops were held in large-scale public venues like the Flushing Town Hall and Pace University and smaller venues like a senior citizens' center, a restaurant, and private homes. Participants were recruited through the membership rolls of the sponsoring organizations, outreach efforts by members of the Steering Committee, posters pasted around the city, some media coverage, and a television spot that ran on several networks.

Trained volunteers facilitated the three-hour workshops. Groups of about 10-15 people were seated in a circle and asked to reflect on and then respond to two questions: "What have we lost and how have we changed?" and then, after a visualization exercise, "How can we move forward from September 11<sup>th</sup>?" Participants' round-robin responses were recorded by the facilitator on large sheets of paper taped to the wall. The group was then asked to identify overarching "themes" in the ideas recorded. Forming small groups around each theme, participants crafted a "vision statement" and a strategy for realizing the vision. The workshop concluded after each subgroup read aloud their statements. All the materials were collected and a total of 19,000 ideas were eventually culled and synthesized into 49 draft "vision statements" by *Imagine New York's* steering committee. These were reviewed, amended, and ratified at a

“Summit Meeting” of some 300 returning participants—all workshop participants had been invited—on June 1, 2002. The final visions were released to the press on June 10 and were submitted to the LMDC and other decisionmaking agencies. An *Imagine New York* website displayed ideas and designs submitted by people who had not participated in the workshops ([www.imaginewyork.org](http://www.imaginewyork.org); the foregoing is based on Arana, Cowan, Hanhardt, and Leicht interview, 5/14/02; Leicht interview 10/23/02; Polletta, Wood, Peng, and Smithsimon notes on workshops).

*Listening to the City* was conceived by the Civic Alliance, a coalition of environmental, planning, and civic groups formed after September 11 and led by the Regional Plan Association. The July 20 and 22, 2002, events followed a smaller but similar event held in February. Both were designed and run by AmericaSpeaks, a Washington-based organization that specializes in conducting “electronic town meetings.” AmericaSpeaks had run a national public forum on social security and a forum on livability issues in Washington DC, but it was through a friendship with a member of the Civic Alliance that AmericaSpeaks President Carolyn Lukensmeyer came to the attention of the leaders of that group and proposed the idea of a town meeting on Lower Manhattan. Members of the coalition were receptive and the February event garnered the interest and support of the LMDC. That paved the way for a much larger forum, in which thousands of New Yorkers would register their ideas about the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan and the design of an appropriate memorial. The LMDC signed on, as did the Port Authority, and both committed some funding. The largest share of the estimated two million dollars required was raised by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund; additional funding (though less than anticipated) came from corporate contributions. There were serious conflicts in developing an agenda for the event: the Regional Plan Association and the Civic Alliance wanted a regional

focus and a discussion of economic and social justice while the Port Authority and the LMDC wanted a focus on the site and on the preliminary concept plans. Organized family members, meanwhile, wanted a clear signal from the public in favor of slowing the decisionmaking process down altogether. The publicity around the preliminary plans—they were roundly criticized in the press—had also made for substantial interest in *Listening to the City*, and organizers reached their mark of 4,500 participants well before July 20. Some 4,300 people would participate in the July 20 day-long event at the Jacob Javits Center and another several hundred would participate in a repeat meeting on July 22. A week later, an online *Listening to the City* dialogue began, with eight hundred people discussing their ideas for the site in small dialogue groups (Listening debrief 7/21; Goldman interview 9/23/02; Todorovich interview 6/17/03; [www.weblab.org](http://www.weblab.org)).

At the July 20 event, participants were assigned to ten-person tables, with over 300 tables in a giant auditorium. An effort was made to make the table participation diverse, with as many family members as possible scattered throughout room and translators provided for Mandarin and Cantonese speakers. Carolyn Lukensmeyer moderated the event and after introducing rebuilding officials, asked participants to register demographic information into their keypads. As would be the case for the rest of the day, the polled information was tabulated and projected on jumbotron screens located throughout the auditorium. The rest of the day's discussion alternated between small group discussions, in which table members discussed options for redevelopment jointly and tried to come to group conclusions, and individual polling. A member of the group typed group responses to questions into the table's laptop computer, along with "minority reports" by dissenting participants. These were then relayed via network to a "theme team," which synthesized responses and projected them onto the screen along with illustrative quotes. Periodically, participants registered individual preferences on their personal keypads on

issues such as the importance of housing on the site, how each of the six proposed plans rated, and how confident they were that decisionmakers would listen to their recommendations.

By the end of the day, the six site plans that the LMDC had proposed had been rejected—participants were uniformly critical of them as well as of the idea that eleven million square feet of office space would have to be built on the site. Shortly after the event, which received international media coverage, the LMDC announced that it scrapped the plans and arranged for a panel of architects and planners to select seven teams of architects, many internationally known, to develop new ideas for the site.

Polletta joined *Imagine New York's* steering committee in December 2001 and attended meetings of the Civic Alliance, the group that sponsored *Listening to the City*. Those initial contacts made it possible for us to mine several sources of data and we designed a study with four components: 1) a longitudinal study of participants in *Imagine New York* and *Listening to the City*, along with those in a control group of people who registered for but did not participate in *Listening to the City*, that would allow us to assess whether and how participation in the deliberative exercises influenced people's attention to, involvement in, and views of the development process; 2) a comparison of those who participated in the *Listening to the City* face-to-face forum with those who participated in the on-line forum in order to flesh out profiles of the modal users of the two deliberative forms; 3) a discursive analysis of the 26 on-line discussion groups organized as part of *Listening to the City* to identify the discursive and organizational conditions in which authentic deliberation occurs; 4) interviews with the planners of the two deliberative exercises as well as with those charged with decisionmaking around the redevelopment of the site and with representatives of new and old advocacy groups in order to assess the impact of these forums on the decisionmaking process overall.

We are at different stages in the four lines of research. In this paper, we draw on our first round of interviews with fifty participants in *Listening to the City* and 33 participants in *Imagine New York*; our participant observation of the planning of the forums, their operation, and subsequent efforts to disseminate their results; and our interviews with the events' organizers and the decisionmakers targeted by the forums. Our interviews with participants focused on why and how they came to participate in the forum; how confident they were in the forum's impact on decisionmakers, both before and after their participation; and whether and how their preferences and priorities had changed as a result of their discussions. We also asked questions designed to assess people's knowledge of and attention to the development process as well as the forms of their civic engagement; this to provide baseline information for our second round of interviews. Our interview samples were not as representative of those who participated in *Imagine* and *Listening* as we had hoped. Our interviewees roughly matched participants in terms of income level and geographical residence. However, whites, people with advanced degrees, and older participants were over-represented among our interviewees. One check on our findings comes from the fact that participants in *Listening to the City* were polled on some of the questions we asked, for example about participants' level of confidence in decisionmakers and their satisfaction with the discussions, and came up with the same results that we did. Still, we treat our statistical data somewhat gingerly.<sup>2</sup>

#### Who spoke and what did they want?

Who participated in *Imagine New York* and *Listening to the City*? Organizers of both efforts sought to secure a diverse cross-section of New Yorkers, *Imagine New York* by drawing on its organizational partners to do outreach in the five boroughs and the region, and *Listening to*

*the City* by relying on an outreach firm that selectively targeted neighborhoods and demographic groups that were not showing up in the data gleaned from the ongoing registration efforts. Neither strategy was entirely successful. *Imagine New York* had a hard time filling the public venues. And indeed, our interviews suggest that people were more likely to be drawn to the event through networks of work, community, and friendship than through media spots and flyers. Forty-one percent of our *Imagine* respondents heard about the event from an organization of which they a member; 25% through friends or family members; 22% from a coworker. Only 28% had heard about the event only through the media. The latter was true for more participants in *Listening to the City*: 34% had heard about the event only through the media. However, *Listening to the City*'s efforts to reach minority neighborhoods were not especially successful. African Americans and Hispanics were sharply underrepresented, African Americans making up only 7% of *Listening* participants compared to 20% of the region's residents; and Hispanic participants making up only 10% of the group compared to 20% of the region's residents.

We noted that many of our participants heard about *Imagine* or *Listening* through their social networks. But relatively few of the people we interviewed came with anyone, and even fewer came as a group. With a few exceptions, which we will discuss later, they were not people who had organized to represent their collective interests in the process. Were they then typical civic engagers, the people who always go to community board meetings and city council meetings? Of the 32 *Listening to the City* participants who have responded to our questions on this issue, 84% had voted in the two years before they participated in *Listening to the City*, 22% had given money to political candidates; 50% had given money to advocacy groups; and 63% had contacted a public official. Thirty-four percent had attended a community board meeting. How do these compare to Americans generally? Though not exactly comparable, 73% of a

random sample of Americans said that they had voted in 2000, a presidential election year. Only 5% of that sample had given money to political candidates; 5% had given money to advocacy groups; and 22% had contacted a public official (Burns et al., 2000). Another indicator of the high level of civic engagement in our sample was the fact that 38% had volunteered on a political campaign in the last two years, compared to 12% of a random sample of Americans who had volunteered in 2000 (Belden, Russonello & Stewart Research and Communications, 2/5/00). Of our *Listening* sample, 16% had a professional or vocational interest in design and planning: they were architects, planners, or amateur designers. Most strikingly, these were people who had been paying attention to the redevelopment process. Twenty-five percent said that in the week before they decided to register this was the top news story they were following; an additional 40% said that it was among the top three stories they were following. We asked who currently held the lease to the World Trade Center site, information that was not provided in the materials available to *Listening to the City* participants nor mentioned over the course of the day: 64% knew that it was Larry Silverstein.

Why did they participate? Not because they believed they had a pipeline to those in power. Most people we interviewed said that they had not been very confident that the recommendations that emerged from the exercise would be followed by decisionmakers. Forty-three percent of the *Listening* sample was not very confident, they said; 36% were somewhat confident; 11% were confident; and 9% were very confident. Compare these figures to the level of confidence that most Americans had in local government in 2000: only 22% had very little or no confidence; 20% had quite a bit of confidence; and 18% had a great deal of confidence (NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll [December, 2000]). *Listening* participants attributed their skepticism mainly to their belief that the important decisions had already been made (31%)



and/or that developers' interests would ultimately prevail (29%). Our respondents may have been exaggerating their skepticism to highlight the change in their views, since fully 90% became more confident of the exercise's impact after it was over. However, our figures are not dissimilar to those polled during the event itself toward the end of the day. Asked, "How confident are you that your voice will be heard?" 21% said that they were not confident at all; 45% that they were somewhat confident; 23% that they were confident; and 10% that they were very confident (Listening to the City 2002:21).

So if they were not confident that decisionmakers would listen, why participate? For several reasons. One is that many people saw the possibility of influence, slim as it was, as a worthwhile gamble. Forty-seven percent of our *Listening* sample said that they had participated because they wanted to influence the process or wanted to have "a voice." But they often combined that desire with a recognition that such influence was by no means guaranteed. A rescue worker who participated in *Listening to the City* explained, "I was a cynic *and* I was willing to take a risk. You know the expression: You hope for the best but you expect the worst" (L-FP9).<sup>3</sup> A planner: "I hoped it would have an effect. *Believed?* No" (L-IP2). Fewer of our *Imagine New York* respondents described their motivations for participation in terms of wanting to influence the process: 28%. This was probably because the timing and agenda of the two efforts were somewhat different. While *Listening to the City* participants spent much of their time reviewing proposed master plans, *Imagine* participants spent much of theirs giving voice to their feelings of loss as a result of the Trade Center attack. Forty-seven percent of *Imagine* participants explained their participation in terms of wanting to process emotionally the events of September 11 compared with only 9% percent of *Listening* participants.

Both *Imagine* and *Listening* participants also talked about their participation as an end in itself, as a civic obligation: 25% of our *Imagine* sample and 34% of our *Listening* sample did so. Our respondents sometimes groped for language to describe their sense of obligation. It was an opportunity “to have my voice heard, whether personal or in terms of planning [the site] ... It’s a personal thing, a civic thing,” said one (I-FP9). “I did what I had to do,” said an *Imagine* participant from Queens (I-GS 5). Other respondents talked about wanting “to be a part of the rebuilding” (L-FP5); wanting to “add a small grain of sand to the system” (L-LW10); wanting to “give an opinion that might be worth something” (L-LW1). Still other kinds of motivations appeared in our interviews: 16% of our *Listening to the City* participants said they hoped to learn something about the issues involved or the deliberative process (“I was fascinated by the process and the electronic stuff—curious about how it would work” [L-LW16]), and 12% said they had simply looked forward to meeting and talking with other people.

We were struck by the number of people who participated because they wanted a “voice.” One can interpret “voice” in political instrumental terms, as synonymous with “influence in the process.” But we noticed that respondents often then talked about liking the event because they felt that they were “heard”—by people at their table. This suggests a less political, perhaps even a therapeutic, understanding of voice. However, our second round of interviews, just completed, sheds more light on the metaphor. When we asked respondents explicitly what they had meant by talking about wanting a voice, a number said that they had wanted to be heard by “the community” as well as by “decisionmakers;” or that they wanted to listen as much as to speak. The impression they gave was of wanting to be part of a dialogue involving people with diverse viewpoints, in which they would discover their own views as much as communicate them to decisionmakers.

Can we draw any conclusions from these responses about who is likely to participate in public forums generally? It is hard to imagine that people would be as galvanized by a sense of wanting to participate for its own sake, without the expectation of influence, in discussions of more prosaic matters. On the other hand, when asked, all of our respondents said that they could see this kind of forum being used to discuss other issues, from education to crime to foreign policy. Three respondents suggested that Congress should use *Listening*'s format. And many attested to the utility of the model without our prompting. Indeed, we were struck by how many respondents volunteered that they had contacted friends, acquaintances, and coworkers to tell them about their experiences, sending out group emails, speaking up in church. A *Listening* participant who initially believed that the decisions about the site were "a fait accompli," recounted that "that night in the restaurant I was telling people about it and it was almost like giving a speech. I told people that it had been unanimous that 5,000 people had told Pataki where to go" (L-LW1). "I'm spreading the word," said another *Listening* participant, and a third said she had made a point of describing the exercise to members of her small business association. "It wasn't something I would have done before," she observed (L-MS11). A longtime activist: "I sent emails to friends about it, saying that it would shame politicians into acting," and that the exercise could be used to grapple with other issues (L-FP6). And a teacher: "Believe me, the word spread. My big mouth went to my church... We're like little disciples," she concluded (L-LW20). These responses suggest that similar forums on other issues could draw broad participation. The foregoing discussion also suggests, however, that public deliberative efforts that do not exploit ties of friendship, community, work, and church in recruiting participants are unlikely to draw a demographically representative group.

### Was this deliberation?

Participants in both *Imagine New York* and *Listening to the City* were enthusiastic about their experience. Strikingly, it was the deliberative character of the discussions they appreciated. “I broadcast this to everyone I knew,” a travel writer recounted. “I said, ‘the most amazing thing happened, I was in this town hall and no one argued, and I was listened to and it was a great day’” (L-FP5). Many of our respondents had anticipated a more conventional public hearing, they told us, in which people lined up behind a microphone to speak for three minutes, or they expected to be lectured to by public officials—“you know, hearing various pieces of propaganda about how [the WTC site] should be rebuilt without a whole lot of voice” (L-FP11). Instead, they said, “people listened to each other” and talked rather than argued. They appreciated that their table-mates were “respectful;” that discussion was “calm,” that people didn’t “rant,” that “there was no shouting and everyone heard us.” Thirty percent of both *Imagine* and *Listening to the City* respondents referred to the civility of the discussions as what they liked most about the event. Interestingly, a number described *Imagine* or *Listening* as not “political”—implicitly associating political discussion with rigidity and contention.

*Listening* and *Imagine* respondents also emphasized the diversity of people and viewpoints they encountered in naming what they liked most about the event—48% of our *Listening* respondents and 22% of our *Imagine* respondents did so. Participants liked being exposed to different points of view, ones that they had not considered. And they liked feeling that they were, as one put it, “a microcosm of New York,” or as another did, “being in a tiny little miniature New York at each table” (L-IP3). They liked the sense of being representative of New Yorkers and they wanted their recommendations to have the prescriptive force of that

representation. Several respondents gently complained that the forums were not diverse enough and they suggested means for tapping underrepresented groups for the next event.

So participants experienced both *Imagine* and *Listening to the City* as more deliberative than other kinds of forums they had encountered, both in the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan and in their community affairs. Were their discussions in fact deliberative? Were they characterized by the equality, openness to diverse opinions, validation of reasonable arguments, and reflexivity that scholars have seen as requirements of authentically deliberative discussion? To answer that question would require a close examination of the discussions themselves. However, our observation of the discussions and their planning, in conjunction with our interviews with participants, do permit us to make some observations. The picture is a mixed one. *Imagine's* planners self-consciously sacrificed opportunities for deliberation in the workshops in the interests of avoiding conflict. The workshop allowed no time for discussion in the larger group, and only a short period at the end for people to talk in groups of three or four as they worked on their vision statements. For most of the workshop, participants were to register their preferences individually and in turn. Facilitators were told to steer group discussions back to the individual response format (Polletta, notes on facilitator training, 2/28/02). Gianni Longo, who designed the *Imagine* workshops, said that his usual workshops involve a segment in which participants prioritize their preferences. However, the raw emotions still attached to the World Trade Center site made such an exercise inappropriate (Longo interview, 3/9/02; see also Moore, Longo, and Palmer 1999). In fact, our interviews with *Imagine* participants and observations of the workshops suggest that some groups adhered to the prescribed format and some did not. Where groups followed the format, respondents said that they appreciated the fact that everyone's ideas were heard and recorded and treated as equal in value. But they also complained about the

paucity of discussion and some regretted the fact that the small group brainstorming at the end was so brief. “I think the last question really encouraged more interaction between the group than when we were just sort of making lists of things,” said one (I-GS4). In other workshops, however, groups refused to be bound by the format, insisting on collectively answering questions and brainstorming solutions. This may account for the fact that several respondents who participated in both *Imagine* and *Listening to the City* referred to the unstructured and more satisfying character of discussion in *Imagine*, this despite the fact that *Listening*, formally at least, had more opportunities for group discussion.

In *Listening to the City*, participants were expected to come up with joint answers to the questions posed them, and, if necessary, a minority report. Was this deliberation? In authentically deliberative discussion, one should expect to see people, if not coming to embrace views or preferences that are radically different than those with which they began, then at least coming to recognize the legitimacy of other views and preferences. Our interviews with participants in *Listening to the City* suggest that these kinds of shifts did occur. We developed a scale to capture the kinds of opinion shifts that people experienced. Moving from less to more substantial opinion shift, we identified five categories: 1) *I did not change my mind at all*; 2) *I learned new information*; 3) *I came to understand other people’s points of view*; 4) *I clarified my own views and values*; 5) *I came to support a practical solution that I had not thought of before*; and 6) *I came away believing something different than I did at first*. Respondents often made several kinds of statements in the same interview. Of those we interviewed, 33% percent said they did not change their minds at all. Twenty percent said they had not changed their minds but had garnered new information; 20% said that they had come to appreciate the views of others; 27% said that they had not changed their opinions but had clarified them; and 35% said that they

had come to believe in practical ideas that they hadn't thought of previously—that you could run the PATH train downtown, for example, or that one could build bury West St. Thirty-two percent said that they had changed their minds.

Of those who said that they had changed their minds, 84% also said that they had come to appreciate the views of others. This figure does not tell us whether there was a causal link or what it was, but one possibility is that hearing and empathizing with the views of others led people to change their minds. This is the deliberative democratic argument. Our interviews indicate that many people did indeed change their minds about issues because they came to appreciate those holding different views. “We had a family member who had lost someone at our table and she actually sounded very reasonable and I guess it made me see how important the memorial really is for people,” one interviewee said, concluding, “we have to deal with [the memorial] first” (L-MS9). A Battery Park City resident recounted, “There was one woman who worked at the towers. She educated me about where the money was going and how some people are still having difficulty finding work, and so I learned that we needed to find money for jobs” (L-LW12). A woman who once worked in the towers, in turn, was educated by a Battery Park City resident who was concerned that burying West Street would create more security problems. “And I said, ‘you know, I didn’t think about that...I thought, wow, security...’” (L-LW20). “I work downtown,” said one young man. “I felt very strongly about the towers as symbols of what America was—its wealth and accomplishments. I wanted to restore the ability, the right, to dream big dreams. I hadn’t really thought about the people who had died. About their families. After the session, as a result of the people at the table who lost their sons, the people started to matter more. The symbols are still important but the human factor was stronger.” And a Brooklyn resident, “I guess I come from a higher income family than some of the people at the

table, and other people have different priorities. You can't ignore them when there is someone in front of you rather than just a statistic. You have to say, 'I guess they're right, we should compromise on this fact, on affordable housing, and things like that' (L-LW21).

Note that in the above examples, people who one might imagine would have stake in the future of Lower Manhattan—a downtown worker and a Battery Park City resident—shifted their preference orderings in response to new information and perspectives they gained from other participants. Unsurprisingly, the family members of victims of the World Trade Center attack had a special kind of authority in these shifts. But some participants were pleased to discover that family members were willing to listen to other points of view. “I thought that having a survivor at the table was going to be a real drag,” confessed one woman. “I thought that she was going to get p.o'd at me and then I was going to get judgmental against her. And it didn't end up happening that way. She listened to me and I listened to her” (L-FP4). Another respondent said that when relatives of victims introduced themselves at his table, his “first reaction was ‘this is going to be a long afternoon,’” but that he left both “surprised with how people could have respect for divergent ideas,” and with new ideas of his own. “I came in with big picture ideas and I moved toward thinking more on the individuals” (L-MS2). Respondents referred with pleasure to the experience of being affected by other participants' arguments. One said, “The fact that I was willing to listen to other people's point of view was very exciting and to really see other people's point of view” (L-LW18). Another reflected, “much of my thinking prior to the event had been solo thinking. The experience made me aware of other people's experiences...After a couple of minutes of seeing where someone was going, it opened my mind to a different point of view, and perhaps a more valid point of view than what I was holding” (L-LW19). A respondent who describes herself as politically conservative said she was “amazed at what came out of my



mouth. I said there should be low income housing down there.” She explained that the discussion gave her “time to really think about things I’ve never thought about very much” and she came to believe “this could be a new beginning for a lot of—for our city and for all of us—and to have low income and middle income housing... would be a new beginning” (L-LW18).

Statements like these suggest that people were redefining their preferences. Now, was the redefinition subtly coerced? Interestingly, after saying “I was amazed at what came out of my mouth,” the last respondent continued, “because there was one man at the table who I thought was a trifle racist and I was amazed I said there should be low income housing down there” (L-LW18). This suggests that she was coming to see her own preference *in contrast to* that of someone else’s. Other respondents also emphasized that when the group reached consensus, it seemed genuine. They remarked frequently that group members had strong individual opinions.

In participants’ accounts, then, and in our own observations, discussions seemed to be characterized by the equality of participants, diversity of viewpoints, and in some cases, the mutual validation of reasoned arguments. Some deliberative democrats also argue that authentic deliberative discourse should be characterized by reflexivity. That is, participants should be able to appraise, criticize, and if necessary, change the rules of the game. They should be able to revise the agenda and to jointly decide on new procedures for discussion. Did reflexivity characterize the discussions in *Imagine New York* and *Listening to the City*? Overall, we were struck by participants’ desire to follow the prescribed agenda. *Imagine* participants were often given confusing instructions about how to identify a “theme” and yet they struggled diligently to come up with what they believed the facilitator wanted. They refrained from commenting vocally on other people’s contributions, instead nodding their heads vigorously. Repeatedly, we noticed that when a participant made a comment that might be interpreted as controversial, other

participants reinterpreted it to sound less controversial or ignored it. In *Listening*, too, we noted participants' unease when controversial issues came up, especially about America's place in the world. In interviews, however, some people expressed concern that the format of the questions and of each event made it difficult to depart from the agenda. "The moderators kept telling people to save things for later so people were basically not allowed to talk," one respondent said of both *Listening* and *Imagine* (L-MS4). And we did occasionally see participants collectively altering the rules, for example, when *Imagine* groups refused to be bound by the round-robin style, instead shifting to a more free-form discussion.

When the rules of the game were challenged, our interviews suggest, participants experienced it as opening up new possibilities. When asked whether her discussions had led her to change her mind about anything, one respondent said that before, she would have thought that she had to choose from the six plans and so she would have done so. "But then I found that most people were dissatisfied with the plans, and they sort of reflected what I was thinking, and I was like, 'Oh, I guess it's okay not to like any of the plans, and it's okay to like, not have to pick from a,b,c,d, or e, and [instead] create my own category. And that's what was good about the event ... I felt as if I could say something different and I could actually put it out there and not just have to select from what was presented to me'" (L-LW21). Accounts like this one suggest that we need a better understanding of the conditions under which this kind of challenge to the rules of the game leads participants to feel more empowered rather than unsettled.

### Was the public heard?

On December 18, 2002, seven teams of architects presented new designs for the World Trade Center site. Introducing the plans, LMDC President Lou Tomson underscored the

“democratic process” that had produced them. “Since the LMDC was created, we pledged that the public would shape the future of Lower Manhattan and today we are honoring that pledge,” Tomson declared. “The seven teams were chosen because of their bold ideas and strong beliefs but they were not given a blank slate. Instead, they were presented with a program that incorporates a full accounting of the public’s comments. It’s no accident that every plan attempts to reclaim our skyline with a powerful symbol, and it’s no accident that every plan respects the footprints as memorials and as cultural space. As our city heals, these elements are in each plan because that’s what we learned the public desires” (Polletta notes, LMDC briefing, 12/18/02).

Whether the extraordinary level of public commentary on the design process really did influence decisionmakers and designers remains in dispute. Recent accounts of the selection of the Liebeskind design suggest that agency turf battles, the governor’s determination to put his stamp on the process, and the degree to which particular architects seemed willing to alter their plans in line with the Port Authority’s objectives played much more of a role than did public input. Since that decision, substantial alterations have been made to the Liebeskind design that have never been seen by the public, let alone commented on. Indeed, some say that the current Liebeskind plan is uncomfortably similar to one of the plans that were so roundly rejected by *Listening to the City* participants (Wyatt 2003). So was *Listening to the City* simply a feel-good exercise in citizen participation without any impact? Former LMDC Vice President for Design and Planning Alex Garvin argues that *Listening to the City* was critical in giving him the leverage he needed to open up the design process against the original wishes of the Port Authority. “It wasn’t just that there was an overwhelming reaction of ‘this is not good enough,’” he argues. “There were other things that came out which had a big influence: ‘we liked that promenade on West Street. We want our skyline back. We want a street grid. We want a variety of different sized open spaces, and we want you to treat the footprints with respect’” (Garvin interview 7/3/03).

Certainly, public interest in the design process had an effect on the architects competing in the subsequent design study. The finalists, Daniel Liebeskind and the THINK team, hired public relations firms, met with family groups and other advocacy coalitions, appeared on Oprah Winfrey, and orchestrated email campaigns in support of their plans. “Architecture will never be the same,” Liebeskind has said, predicting that this kind of interaction with the public “clients” of urban design is likely here to stay (Iovine 2003). Commentators have seen in the Port Authority’s recent selection of the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava to design the World Trade Center’s new transportation center another sign of change. “The fact that officials staged a worldwide competition for an architect was almost as astounding as the fact that they chose a figure widely described as the world’s greatest architect of transportation,” James Traub writes. “It seems plain that the public demand for meaningful architecture had altered the climate within which the Port Authority operates” (Traub 2003).

*Listening to the City*’s use by groups critical of the development process should also be entered on the balance sheet of its impacts. The Civic Alliance, which sponsored *Listening to the City*, recently called on the LMDC to honor the public’s desire for less commercial development at ground zero, criticizing its unwillingness to reduce the amount of office space planned for the site (Civic Alliance 2003b). Advocacy groups fighting for towers identical to the height of the originals have cited *Listening to the City* as evidence of the public’s desires for the restoration of the towers (Wyatt 2002b).

In contrast with *Listening to the City*, *Imagine* met with little response on the part of decisionmakers. For Garvin, the fact that *Imagine*’s agenda had not been developed in consultation with the LMDC meant that it was simply “not responsive to the issues in front of us” (Garvin interview 7/3/03). Garvin attended the June 2002 press conference at which the 49

visions were released but made only vague statements about the value of the exercise and pointedly refused to respond to a question about whether the LMDC would follow the recommendations made in the report (Polletta notes, Imagine report release, 6/10/02). Presentations to the LMDC staff were fairly coolly received as were those made in hearings convened by the State Assembly speaker (Polletta notes, steering committee meeting, 12/6/02). On the other hand, *Imagine New York*'s smaller scale and its connections to a number of civic groups allowed MAS staffers to turn the project into an ongoing seminar and referendum on the development process, something the organizers of *Listening* were not able to do. Since the June summit meeting, *Imagine* organizers have joined with advocacy groups to outline nine principles that had not been addressed by the LMDC's guidelines; invited workshop participants back to comment on the second set of design plans—and then presented a summary of those findings at LMDC hearings—convened another set of workshops to solicit public input about transportation issues at the site, and they are now organizing educational seminars and workshops for people to weigh in on the proposed designs for a memorial at the site (<http://www.Imaginewyork.org>). *Imagine*'s lower cost and low-tech format may have made it easier for organizers to maintain an ongoing campaign for public involvement.

This is interesting because one of the concerns of participants in both forums was with the implementation of the findings they had generated. People talked about the project as an ongoing one: they were interested in the next steps and they wanted the recommendations they had arrived at to be *advocated* for. Asked whether he thought *Listening to the City* would influence decisionmakers, one respondent answered, “it depends on the people who put *Listening to the City* together, how vigilant [they are]...If they back off and let them maneuver and manipulate this situation, it will be null and void what we did.” (L-FP12). Another *Listening*

participant said that had he been running the event, he would have pushed LMDC and Port Authority representatives to make a firmer commitment, to “strip them bare,” as he put it. “They were still wearing their skivvies when they walked out” (L-FP2).

Our respondents thus raised important questions not only about public deliberation’s direct impact on decisionmakers but about what role the sponsors of such efforts should play in pressing the recommendations generated by them. Certainly, neither set of recommendations had any formal authority. The LMDC never outlined how it would take into account opinions expressed by the public, nor how it would balance the multiple and sometimes competing voices of the public, groups representing families, small businesses, and residents, and its own advisory groups (Hetter 2002). That put the sponsors of the deliberative forums in an ambiguous position. Were they consultants to the LMDC, their job to tap the public’s views, identify whatever areas of consensus there were, and then stay out of the way? Or were they public watchdogs, their job to determine whether the LMDC and other decisionmakers were following the public’s wishes and, if not, try to publicize where decisionmakers were falling short?

From the beginning, *Imagine*’s planners said that they had two goals: “To gather ideas and visions from the broad public. To ensure that those voices and ideas were heard by decision-makers who in the months and years to come will be formulating the plans and policies that are critical for the future of the region” (*Imagine* 2002:5). Those commitments were underscored in statements to the press and in speeches in workshops and at the *Imagine* summit meeting on June 1. But what the second commitment meant—ensuring that the public’s ideas “were heard by decision-makers”—or better, how big a role the MAS should play in realizing that commitment, was unclear. MAS staffers had sought the LMDC’s endorsement before the *Imagine* workshops began. By the summer, however, they had shifted into more of an advocacy role as they joined

with groups that had been more publicly critical of the LMDC in order to press for housing, sustainable building, and job creation—concerns that, they said, had gotten short shrift in the LMDC’s planning. At the same time, however, MAS staffers were wrestling with whether their agenda was indeed best served by taking a role of public critic. As MAS’s Holly Leicht put it to us, the question was whether to be “an outside advocate or a monitoring partner.” Quiet lobbying was an “MO that MAS uses all the time” Leicht explained. But she confessed that striking a “balance between staying public on issues and having a quiet relationship—influential board members talking to people in LMDC“ was no easy task (Leicht interview, 10/17/02).

The organizers of *Listening to the City* confronted parallel questions. In February 2002, Civic Alliance head Robert Yaro explained that that “our role is not to be directly part of the public process but to be a resource to people who make decisions” (quoted in Pedersen 2002). The Alliance did indeed have a consultative role early in the process, says staffer Petra Todorovich, helping the LMDC to identify development concerns. That changed after *Listening to the City*, when neither the LMDC nor the Port Authority made any immediate moves to abandon the plans that had been so soundly rejected. The Civic Alliance issued a press release calling on the LMDC to scrap the plans and, from that point on, began to take its criticisms of the decisionmaking process to the press, something it had not done before (Todorovich interview, 6/17/03; Civic Alliance 2003a). “Because *Listening to the City* was such a phenomenal success from a media standpoint, the club we were swinging was bigger than anyone was used to,” one Civic Alliance member explains now. Plans to adapt components of *Listening to the City* for use in LMDC hearings about the new round of designs fell apart in the process, and the LMDC relied on a fairly conventional public hearing format, along with staffers’ meetings with residents’ and families groups, and comment cards that were submitted by visitors to a public exhibition of the

nine plans. In December, *Listening to the City* participants received an email from the Civic Alliance declaring that “the public agencies have ignored our call for a thorough public process” in reviewing the new design plans and urging them to write officials demanding more public input (email to *Listening to the City* participants, 12/17/02). By that time, according to observers, the Civic Alliance was out of the consultative loop with the LMDC, and its role was firmly critical rather than collaborative.

AmericaSpeaks, which had conducted several public forums before *Listening to the City*, describes its role as one of “neutral, honest broker” and emphasizes that “any organization attempting to involve the public must position itself so that citizens have confidence that the forums they are participating in are unbiased and meaningful” (AmericaSpeaks 2002: 1,2). But does guaranteeing “meaningful” forums require that the sponsoring organization sometimes move from a role as “broker” to one of public advocate for the positions arrived at in the forum? The question has been raised especially sharply in this case but its relevance goes beyond Lower Manhattan.

Public forums about the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan were convened in a unique set of circumstances. Few development projects are likely to stir the passions of so broad a swathe of citizens. Few projects will have to negotiate such a complex process of decisionmaking, involving multiple levels of government, numerous stakeholders, and moral hierarchies of authority as well as political and economic ones. That said, public deliberation around the World Trade Center site may have lasting impacts, not only on the eventual design of the site but on the landscape of citizen participation in urban planning. We conclude this paper simply by identifying several possible scenarios, involving different kinds of longer-term impact.



One scenario, of course, is that the perceived success of public deliberation in rebuilding Lower Manhattan leads to efforts to substitute deliberative forums like *Listening to the City* for more traditional modes of resident input in other development projects. To critics, City Council hearings and community board meetings seem administratively clunky and too often dominated by advocacy groups rather than ordinary citizens. And, in fact, our respondents referred approvingly to the fact that *Imagine New York* and *Listening to the City* were so unlike the community hearings with which they were familiar. Rather than being required to present fully formed positions, participants were given the opportunity to explore their own opinions and preferences in discussion with people of diverse backgrounds and commitments. Sometimes, that discussion strengthened participants' original views, at others, it led them to alter their views. In their recognition that preferences are rarely fixed or fully informed, forums like *Imagine* and *Listening* make it possible for people with very different stakes in development to reach agreement.

In a second scenario, forums like *Listening to the City* may become institutionalized--but not because they enable the public to control development decisions. Rather, critics worry that forums like *Listening to the City* give the public the illusion of participation without providing mechanisms for keeping decisionmakers accountable to the recommendations that come out of them. Recall that the LMDC and Port Authority never made clear how they would incorporate *Listening's* results. That they eventually did incorporate them, to the extent they did, was a result of extraordinary media coverage and the fact that LMDC insiders wanted the changes, as critics see it. Rebuilding officials pointedly did not open themselves up to another public referendum when the second set of plans was released. And it is unlikely, on this scenario, that they would do so in the future unless they had firm control of the agenda and/or little responsibility to act on

it. By providing the spectacle of democracy—the impressive numbers of people gathered in one place, the electronic tabulations of individual preferences, the presence of decisionmakers--and by carefully organizing contention out of the process, forums like *Listening to the City* restyle democracy as consultation. The people get to “speak,” but not to “decide,” and the former is mistakenly confused with democracy (Sorkin 2002; see also Young 2001).

Whether it is even possible to organize contention out of public deliberative forums is questionable, however, and this insight suggests a third possible scenario. Civic and advocacy groups may have as much to gain from public deliberative forums as decisionmakers do. For groups that claim to represent priorities that are being given short shrift in the development process, to be able to invoke the expressed desires of the public is a powerful tool in gaining leverage. Indeed, it is likely that contention will permeate such forums from beginning to end: rather than an agenda and results being controlled by official decisionmakers and their influential allies, diverse groups may mobilize to shape the agenda, composition, and interpretation of future deliberative efforts. Several groups managed to have an informal organized presence at the July 20th *Listening to the City* forum: small businesspeople, Chinatown residents, and a group lobbying for rebuilding the Towers. They came to get media coverage as well as to raise public consciousness about their concerns, and they were effective in doing so.

What organized efforts to shape deliberative forums means for the *deliberative* character of such forums, as well as for their status as the recognized voice of the people, is an important question. No group at *Listening to the City* managed to hijack the proceedings. However, some participants in the online dialogues found their groups dominated by advocates for rebuilding the towers. One participant complained that they had made reasoned discussion impossible: “They had their own agenda and they just storm trooped the group. They wanted to rebuild the towers.

So they spammed the group: ‘Rebuild the Towers! Rebuild the Towers!’” Participants began to drop out of her group in frustration and “by the end of it there were only two or three people left” (L2-FP9). This suggests that maintaining the deliberative character of discussion in public forums like these may be difficult to square with maintaining their openness—since that openness should encompass even organized groups with preexisting agendas. If deliberative forums are institutionalized, we may see conflicts emerge as forum organizers try to lessen the influence of such groups, either by screening out participants, spreading them out across tables or online dialogue groups or concentrating them in one, or using facilitators to police discussion.

Together, these scenarios suggest that if it is naïve to think that the sponsors of a deliberative forum can neutrally transmit the unmediated views of the public to decisionmakers, it is just as naïve to think that official decisionmakers will be the only groups seeking to shape that process. The challenge for champions of deliberative democracy is to figure out how to create forums that are at once truly open to the public and that maximize deliberation, and forums that have the cooperation of decisionmakers without being controlled by them. The challenge for students of deliberative democracy is to recognize that the impacts of public deliberation are mediated by complex processes of interpretation and, often, contention.

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- Lauren Arana, Darya Cowan, Eva Hanhardt, Holly Leicht, Municipal Arts Society, New York City, 14 May 2002.
- Alexander Garvin, LMDC, phone interview, 3 July 2003
- Joseph Goldman, AmericaSpeaks, phone interview, 23 September 2002.
- Eva Hanhardt, Municipal Arts Society, phone interview, 23 October 2002
- David Kallick, Labor Community Action Committee, phone interview, 19 October 2002.

Holly Leicht, Municipal Arts Society, phone interview, 17 October 2002.

Gianni Longo, ACP Planning and Imagine New York Steering Committee, New York City, 9 March 2002.

Petra Todorovich, RPA and Civic Alliance, New York City, 17 June 2003.

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<sup>1</sup> Polletta notes at *Imagine New York* press conference, 10 June 2002: remarks by Alexander Garvin (LMDC) and Ron Pisapia (Port Authority); LMDC 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Our 53 interviewees were recruited, in the case of *Imagine New York*, through our attendance at twelve workshops, and in the case of *Listening to the City*, through participant lists provided us by the organizers. Of those who heard our pitch, 45% were eventually interviewed in the case of *Imagine New York* and 60% in the case of *Listening to the City*. Iara Duarte Peng and Greg Smithsimon also observed Imagine workshops and conducted some of the interviews; Iara Duarte Peng and Meredith Slopen conducted some of the Listening interviews. More on our sample: whites made up 63% of *Imagine* participants and 78% of our *Imagine* sample, and 66% of *Listening* participants and 79% of our *Listening* sample. Whites make up 64% of the region's population. Five percent of our *Listening* respondents were African American, compared with 7% of participants overall and 20% of the region's population. Both samples were broadly representative in terms of geographical distribution as well as income level, although a greater proportion of our *Imagine* interviewees had incomes of less than \$34,999 than did *Imagine* participants overall. However, both our samples were badly skewed on educational attainment. Forty-four percent of our *Imagine* respondents had postgraduate degrees (compared to 35% of *Imagine New York* participants overall and 13% of residents in the region); our *Listening* sample was even less representative, with 52% having postgraduate degrees. Men were underrepresented in our *Imagine* sample (only 22% compared to 49% of participants overall). *Imagine NY's* modal

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age category was 45-65, as was ours. While our 30-44 and 18-29 distributions were roughly similar, we chose not to interview anyone under 18. By contrast, 13% of *Imagine NY's* participants were under 18. (*Listening to the City* used different age categories than ours—35-54 and 55-64 where we used 30-44 and 45-64—however, our 45-65 category [57%] on its own accounted for roughly the same proportion of participants as their two categories combined [59%], suggesting that our sample was skewed upward in terms of age).

<sup>3</sup> Codes refer to the sample (“I” for *Imagine New York* and “L” for *Listening to the City*), the interviewer, and the interview number.