Public Participation in Municipal Budget Decision Process:

City of Toronto's 2011 Core Service Review

MPA Research Report

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Introduction

Public participation has received increasing attention in the past decade. An expanded role for citizens in the governance process has been advocated by scholars and by professionals. Generally, there is a consensus that public participation will bring crucial value to decision-making, government administration and democracy development as a whole. So the discussions around this issue focus mostly on how to realize this purpose. Public participation by itself is a broad concept with various definitions and perspectives. Many similar, but different, definitions exist for citizen participation, citizen involvement and community engagement. This paper does not intend to differentiate among these terms and will use "public participation" as the one that stands for the broadest concept, which includes all types of participation activities by citizens, the media and other nongovernmental social groups. Also in this article, public participation will be analyzed in a particular policy decision environment – the municipal budget process, which will bring both opportunities and challenges into the implementation.

Calls for public participation in resource-allocation decision have been heard in the past. As indicated by Ebdon and Franklin (2006), during the 1990s and into the new millennium, the concern with cynical, distrustful citizens has led government to focus again on gathering citizen input during budgeting. Nowadays, the fiscal stress faced by local government becomes more serious. Both elected representatives and administrative officials are seeking to create public value in the squeeze between more public service and reduced costs and taxes. Painful decisions are required regarding service reductions or tax and fee increases. This appears to be an important time for citizens to play a role in helping elected officials determine the best solutions for government and the community.

Even though we are aware of the importance of public participation, and its special value in the budget process, scholars have shown their concern with the actual changes that public participation can make in the decision-making process. As claimed by Ebdon and Franklin (2004), participation is valuable for it provides an opportunity to gather input and encourage two-way communications. However, seldom are resource-allocation decisions modified as a direct result of the participatory input. Instead, city officials claim that input is considered along with preferences simultaneously received from other sources, and decisions reflect aggregated priorities. These concerns inspired the research questions of this paper on both participation process and its impact. This research is supported by a case study on the City of Toronto's 2011 core service review program.

Led by its newly elected Mayor, the City of Toronto attracted attention for its determination to achieve efficiency and maintain service quality. The City of Toronto faced difficult decisions in 2012 and will continue to do so in future years to meet its budget challenges. In supporting City Council's 2012 budget deliberations, a Service Review Program was suggested by the City Manager and approved by Council in April 2011. This Service Review Program includes three prongs: a "Core Service Review", a "Service Efficiency Studies" and a "User fees Review". Its intended purpose was to help address the City's serious financial challenges, set the foundation for services and service levels and establish the basis for multi-year planning and service delivery to meet the City's objectives in 2012 and beyond. It also garnered public interest as a support study for Mayor Ford's intention of "gravy-sniffing". This implied the city's goal as uncovering waste in all city departments and services with the purpose of identifying services ripe for "potential reductions and discontinuation" (City of Toronto, Staff report, Jan 6th, 2012).

This paper focuses on the public consultation in the Core Service Review, which operated from May 11 to June 17, 2011. As the first major component of the whole Service Review Study, Core Service Review sought public view regarding what they consider to be core service, their priorities, and what they would like City Council to consider when making decisions about future service delivery. The Core Service Review Consultation was led by the City Manager's Office and supported by City staff as facilitators. The City collected public concerns by using feedback forms and eight roundtable discussions held across the city during the period. There were 12,955 people in total who provided their input through either completing a feedback form and/or attending a consultation session.

The following parts of the analysis will begin by a literature review on both the process and impact dimensions. From the literature, an analytical framework will be developed and will lead to the case study. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be closely examined in the case analysis, which will be followed by explanations about the findings.

Literature review

Definition and importance

Public participation is a contested concept with various definitions and perspectives. According to Langton (1978), public participation is defined as citizen involvement in making service delivery and management decisions. King et al. used the "public participation" term, but refer to as "the role of the public in the process of administrative decision making". They point out that, this participation occurs when citizens and public officials have participation needs and

when participation mechanisms exist (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). Inherent in such definitions is an administrative-centric perspective that public administration research should assess how administration agencies are performing and how their practices can be improved.

It has been found that three main questions lead the discussion of public participation. They are "why we need public participation", "how people participate in certain field" and "How public participation impacts decision-making". This article tries to explore the latter two questions. But before we move on, a brief review of the first questions will be given in advance.

Barner (1984) argues that "democratic values are in nature participatory values". Democratic theories suggest that residents should be involved in the governing process. Most studies agree that democratic institutions are more effective, responsive and accountable when their residents actively engage in public affairs (Galston 2000). Beside its importance in building democratic values, public participation is also advanced by advocates as increasing the efficiency and responsiveness of democratic governments (Putnan et al. 1993) and enhancing the active involvement of citizenry. Creighton (1981) contends that participation leads to satisfying the needs of the public by enhanced communication between the public and government. This allows government to understand what the public wants. Wang (2001) generalize two public participation fields. Firstly, public participation appears in various public service functions, such as economic development, public health and environmental protection. Secondly, public participation occurs in policy making or decision making. In light of this, the public is involved in goal setting, strategy, policy, and implementation evaluation (Porster & Streib, 1999). Besides democratic value and consensus building, public participation has also been regarded as a way to resolve the tension between demands and management reality, as well as improving public trust in government (Creighton, 1981).

Process Dimension

Mechanisms

As stated above, in the last 30 years, public administrators and public administration scholars have become conscious of the importance of citizen involvement in administration. The question of why, or whether, citizens should be involved in administrative governance seems to be argued with less regularity, because we know that governance processes are generally improved with citizen involvement and that citizens should be involved in some way. Therefore the process of participation attracts more research attention. The involvement strategy, the method applied in soliciting input and the impact of participation become more important issues for both scholars and administrative officers. We might agree that citizens should be involved but we cannot agree about how to do this, in what process, and where or when citizens should be involved.

Citizen participation mechanisms help to reveal to officials the underlying preference structure of the citizenry and provide decision-makers with a picture of the underlying demand for public services. A variety of participatory mechanisms have been used in government budgeting and each method has strengths as well as weaknesses. Citizen surveys havelong been used to determine needs and service satisfaction levels. Survey responses may be representative, and consistent usage over time reveals trends in opinions. However, surveys may not reflect the intensity of a respondent's opinion (Thomas, 1995). Harry and Blair also point, citizens may not have appropriate information to make an informed decision, and questions can be written in a manipulative or leading manner (Harry & Blair, 1976).

Public meetings are common, as at least one open public hearing is required in most government before budget adoption. Usually, public meetings are not very good at giving

citizens direct influence, but they are used as forums for preliminary information sharing (Ebdon and Franklin, 2006). It is useful when it has been used in a deliberative way to provide two-way communication. It can also foster the education purpose by informing citizens with detailed knowledge on government and budget policies. Ebdon (2002) claims that one more problem of public meetings is the number of participants. that attendance is often low and may not represent the community as a whole. As with citizen surveys, participants in public meetings may also have insufficient knowledge for effective input (Thomas, 1995).

Those who support focus groups describe them as an evaluative tool to determine potential changes in specific items, as well as being politically useful for a group outside the administration to agree with the mayor's decisions (Ebdon and Franklin, 2004). Morgan points to three fundamental strengths focus groups have: exploration and discovery, context and depth, and interpretation (Morgan, 1997). Each of these can be useful to city officials in determining citizens' preferences. However, focus groups are also criticized as being less representative, which will be further explained in the case analysis. There are other mechanisms that have been indicated by research and empirical studies, such as budget simulations (Simonsen and Robbins, 2000) and citizen budget advisory committees (Thomas, 1995). Toronto's case mostly manifested the above three mechanisms in its public participation process.

Design and implementation

Literature cites a variety of considerations such as timing, participants' representativeness gathering sincere preference, when designing the participation process. The way in which participation mechanisms are implemented is also important in their eventual effectiveness. As Ebdon and Franklin said, the most serious barrier to effectiveness was in the timing of the input.

If received prior to development of the budget proposal, it might be given greater weight by city officials (Ebdon and Franklin, 2004). This concern is supported by other scholars as Callanhan (2002) and Thomas (1995), who both claim that budget input is more beneficial during the preparation stage rather than the budget-adoption stage. Participation needs to occur early in the budget process, when there is a greater opportunity for it to be considered by officials in their deliberations.

The selection of participants is another important component in process design. Researchers suggest that participation should be open to large numbers of people and also be representative of the community to give access including minority groups (Thomas, 1995; Kathlene and Martin, 1991).This requirement is related to the various types of participation mechanisms mentioned before. Usually, consultation methods such as public meetings or focus groups have disadvantage of not being representative. An effective conversation sometimes cannot include as many participants as possible. Representativeness influences the input governments gather from the participation process. If the representativeness in the participation is low, the preference will only stand for a part of the community, which will add bias to decision making.

The third concern in process design is gathering sincere preference. Citizen preference surveys usually ask respondents to what extent do they support some particular services or how satisfied they are with them, which is not enough. Literature points out the importance of ascertaining not only citizen demand for service, but also their willingness to pay for those services, or their "sincere" preferences. Miller and Miller (1991) conducted a research on 261 citizen surveys about service delivery in forty states in the U.S. They found consistently good rankings in the feedback. They argue that without being faced with the real budget constraints

and service needs facing decision-makers or the cost of their choices, citizens appear to find acceptable any government services that don't offend them. In light of this, a new component called "preferences under a budget constraint" was suggested, which means presenting the citizens with the real budget constraints faced by government when asking them their preferences about services. Robbins and Simonsen think this can be helpful because it presents respondents with a "reality-based" experience, which will force the citizens to do some "trade-offs" when experiencing the dynamics of the actual decision-making process. They assume that, in this way, budget decisions may be presented to citizens in much the same fashion- and with the same trade-offs- as those confronting the government officials and councilors. They also propose a dynamic approach in their later work in determining citizen willingness to pay for public service in a full information environment (Robbins & Simonsen, 2000). In their model, the willingness- to –pay approach presents the respondent with an approximation of his/her tax price (per capita cost or average household cost) in supporting services.

Political and environmental issues are also important considerations in designing the public participation process. These factors may affect participation goals, mechanisms, implementation, and effectiveness. Population size and heterogeneity are two external influential variables. Wang (2001) found that participation is more prominent in large cities. He contends that larger cities are more heterogeneous, which might lead to increased political conflict because of varying group demands. So, citizens in these cities might desire increased access to decision makers.

Impact Dimension

Governments require public participation in various policy environments. Different policies will bring different requirement and challenges to the participation process. How does the budget process differ from other decision making environments and how does the budget process influence participation? According to Kloby, the budget is a critical part of policy making as the process involves identifying and establishing priorities for a community and aligning resources with program activities to address them (Kloby, 2009). Both scholars and government professionals agree that this is an opportune time for public managers and elected officials to engage the public to determine what works, what does not work and what services should be enhanced. Generally, this interaction could increase the likelihood of eliminating redundancy, fostering cost savings, and ultimately increasing citizen satisfaction with services (Callahan, 2002).

However, in practice, the budget process often excludes citizens from actively contributing to financial decisions. Beckett and King claim that, public participation is a way of practicing citizenship, which means being significantly engaged in governance and in considering the general good in one's engagement. But this is very difficult to achieve when the issues on the table are technical and complex (Beckett & King 2002). The orthodox view of public budgeting comes out of the structural and functional separation of administration and politics. They contend that the budget process is something distinctive, in which the technocratic expertise and competence of administrators in budget preparation and execution are responsive to, but distinct from the policy decision-making of politicians. Also, emphasized by Kloby, budget documents are likely designed to comply with extensive financial reporting standards that result in lengthy and data-rich documents. This will deter citizens rather than inform them. Rubin (2000) concludes that in the budget process the technical side is for managers, and the decision

making of the final proposal is for the representatives. “An affirmative or active role for citizens is rarely mentioned. When it is, it is more often an anecdote of local innovation” (Rubin, 2000). Therefore, he infers that, for the most part, citizens are outside the budget process. It is generally believed that public participation is a necessary component in daily governance. But no agreement has been reached in terms of whether public participation has direct impact on decision making or not. Some authors have positive reports in which public officials said input was influential in the City’s final resource allocation decision (Ebdon 2002, Simonsen and Robbins 2000). These findings are subjective for they are mostly based on the senior managers’ perceptions. Franklin and Ebdon (2004) found no changes in resource allocation from their case studies. Instead, they state, citizen input was used to confirm proposals made in other venues or to set the stage for discussion of modification in later years.

Citizen participation techniques and processes require effort and resources. A more pragmatic concern is whether the time, effort, and expense have value. One can find from the process design that both citizens and governments invest much time and effort into public participation to achieve certain goals. Suggestions also have been made to improve the process in order to enhance the investment. In terms of that, it is important to discuss how to measure the outcome of participation as the next step. From literature cited earlier we have learned that there are very few cost- benefit study had been done on public participation and seldom seen any program evaluation on the engagement projects. Questions remain here about whether participation efforts should be continued if the results cannot be assessed.

The most obvious measurement of participation level related to numbers of individuals involved. Scholars do not explicitly say that the larger participation turnout, the better effect it has. Callahan (2002) proposes that citizen should be equal partners in decision-making. She

measures the result by examining whether the citizens advisory boards changed the outcome toward their own preferences. Ebdon (2002) suggests that success of participation was occasionally measured by the number who attended meetings. Robbins and Simonsen (2002) consider the application of their model as allowing administrators and electors to make informed decisions that reflect the majority preferences.

Berner, Amos and Morse (2011) add multiple dimensions into their effectiveness analysis by a series of forty telephone interviews in four cities across North Carolina. Three main stakeholders were identified in the participation process: elected officials, government staff and citizens. Their research finds that these stakeholder groups defined "participation effectiveness" differently. Elected officials regard effective participation as being passive and as having established mechanisms in place to encourage citizens to indicate their preferences. Staff defines an "effective" participation as a process of educating citizens and receiving support of active citizen advocates. Citizens see their participation "effective" as being interactive and the process featured with open dialogue, two-way communication and timely feedback. These three dimensions of analyzing "effectiveness" are actually connecting the outcome measurement with the various purposes stakeholders have in the process. Goals and outcomes are two strongly connected elements in public participation. Goals should be set at the beginning of the process, and outcomes will be assessed and compared to what was expected when the goals were established. Ebdon and Franklin concluded the goals from the government perspective into several categories: changing resource allocation, gathering input for decision making, enhancing public trust in government and reducing cynicism, educating the public about the government services, gaining support for budget and creating a sense of community (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006). We will have detailed descriptions of the them and their relationship with effectiveness

analysis in the following sections. This paper will also develop goals from the citizens' perspective through the case study.

Research question and methodology

The above literature review provides a broad picture of related theories that support this research. From the first part of the literature review, we come up with a theory checklist to examine whether Toronto's public participation is a well-designed process and how was its participative level. Table 1 is the participative indicators that we learned from various researches and that will be applied in the process analysis.

Table 1 – Participative level checklist

Elements	**Criteria**
External Environment	• Population size and diversity
Process design	• Timeline – early stage of budget process • Sincere preferences / Willingness to pay • Accessibility to large participation
Use of Mechanisms ***(two-way communication)***	• Citizen survey • Public meetings • Focus groups • Advisory committees

Goals and outcomes	• Turnout • Change resource allocation • Gather input for decision making • Enhance trust / Reduce cynicism • Educate participants about the budget/ government service • Gain support for budget proposal • Create a sense of community

Impact analysis will focus on the research question "how Toronto's did public participation in budget process impact its decision-making?". In order to answer this question, we will use both qualitative and quantitative data gathered from the case. They are retrieved from Toronto's service review website (http://torontowervicereview.ca). Quantitative data is gathered through the feedback form City use for consultation and contains citizen's input for six main themes. They are "Service priority", "Overall funding preference", "Property tax increase", "Provision of Service", "Overall service level" and demographic information. Qualitative data is from both the feedback form and the roundtable consultation, providing more detailed information on how citizens view services and their suggestions. Besides these, council minutes, staff reports and online news was also been used in supporting the analysis.

Process analysis

Program Design

As the largest city in Canada and the provincial capital of Ontario, Toronto's census metropolitan area (CMA) had a population of 5,583,064 and City of Toronto had a population of 2,615,060in the 2011 Census(Statistics Canada, 2012). Its cosmopolitan and international

population reflects its role as an important destination for immigrants to Canada. Toronto is one of the world's most diverse cities by percentage of non-native-born residents. Toronto is a large and compact city with highly heterogeneous population with about 49 per cent of the population born outside Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, September 2006). A number of empirical studies suggest a city's democratic background is an important indicator influencing its public participation condition. Nalbandian points out citizens in large and more heterogeneous cities might desire increased access to decision makers (Nalbandian, 1991). In terms of this, City of Toronto is a typical place that has both the incentive and necessity to acquire large public participation in its governance.

The City of Toronto recognized the challenges in public participation and the complexity of the budget issue. We noticed that city staff had done a well-designed preparation in order to create more opportunity and have the participation expanded. In preparing for the consultation, city realized that the topic was complex and required time to read, review, discuss and learn for citizens. Various methods were used to support this learning process. Firstly, a website- www.torontoservicereivew.ca – was established with information about the City and its service. This website provides a particular column for education purposes called "learn". By clicking this, citizens will have access to five sub-categories including issues on service providing, Toronto's specialty in service providing, Government decision-making process, City's finance reports and the Service Review Program. Each of the sub-categories will lead citizens to more and detailed learning materials, which is all downloadable from the website. Secondly, City opened a blog for people to discuss their ideas and ask questions, which contains most of the updates of the progress of public consultation. However, this blog did not appear to be a popular platform for involvement from the record. By the date I began my research, there were 9 posted

articles on the blog with only 6 comments in total. Thirdly, the City provided a calendar and map of City-run and Councilor-led sessions, social media links and the consultation plan to the citizens.

According to the theory framework, scholars suggest that government should provide accessibility to large population for their involvement. The City of Toronto demonstrated strong evidence in this part from three aspects. Firstly, the whole public engagement program was advertised a month early through a mix of print media, online advertisement, billboards, transit shelter ads, radio, posters, and outreach efforts by the community and by City staff (City of Toronto, 2012). Secondly, translation efforts were recognized. As we already noticed, Toronto is a city with various immigrants and diverse culture. Over 140 languages and dialects are spoken in the Great Toronto Area (GTA), and over 30 per cent of Toronto residents speak a language other than English or French at home. In order to make opportunity available to larger population and gain valuable inputs especially from minorities, ads were translated into the top 10 most spoken non-English languages in Toronto, as well as French, and published in multi-lingual newspapers. The feedback form used in consultation and information kit made for learning purpose were also been translated into 10 most spoken non-English language. They were even made available in Large-Print and were available online and at all public meetings. Thirdly, the City provided extra service in order to support the implementation of public consultation meetings. These supports included interpretation, attendant care, seating requests to accommodate individual needs, Large-Print materials, TTC or childcare reimbursement. American Sign Language (ASL) was provided at all sessions, and all consultation locations were accessible.

In terms of the timing issue that some of the research raises, Toronto's consultation timeline indicated that the public engagement happened in the very first part of the whole process. There were two public engagement components in its 2012 budget process, one was public consultation in the Core Service Review, and the other was the public advisory meeting at the end of the process. The engagement we analyze in this paper was the first part. It was conducted from May 11 to June 17, 2011. As indicated by literature, an early conducted public participation process turns to be more effective. In the above analysis on Toronto's participation process design, we can have an initial conclusion that, the process met the criteria suggested by literature and was conducted in a well-designed manner.

Engagement Mechanisms

Two main participation mechanisms used by Core Service Review are public surveys and consultation. Both of the methods have been designed according to the City's needs and were different from what was indicated in the literature. According to Toronto's consultation plan (City of Toronto, 2012), all participants were encouraged to provide their input on the City's services using a Feedback Form which was designed for consultation and made available online and in paper copy. This feedback form included both multiple choices and open-ended questions. Because of the complexity and scope of the topic, this feedback form was longer than typical City survey forms. All the questions contained in the form were arranged in sections to assist participants to work through. Besides the paper version used in all the consultation, the City also encouraged citizens to provide inputs through the online version. Participants could choose to provide input on all 35 services, while the paper version provide space for participants to select 3 services with an option of inserting additional sheets for additional services. In terms of the content, this feedback form solicits citizens' information on various service issues. For example,

citizens weres asked to indicate importance of key municipal issues, service priorities, opinions on investing or reducing costs for governance and support services. Questions also involved comparing Toronto to other municipalities, property tax increases and support services (City of Toronto, 2012). A special notice should been given here about gathering sincere preferences. The Feedback Form used one third of its space for questions related to citizen preferences about funding the services. As the literature suggested, the consultation should contain a "willingness to pay" component. Citizens' preferences will only have limited values to the actual budget decision if the preference has not been tied to money they willing to pay. In Toronto's consultation, citizens were asked to present and explain their preferences between service maintenance and cost reduction. In the third section of questions on the feedback form, citizens were firstly asked to give their preference on a particular service field if "Maintaining the quality is more important" or "lowering the cost to the City is more important". After that, if they choose "Maintaining the quality", they will be asked to indicate their preference in how the City should funds the activities for the service by four options as "increase user fees", "increase user fees only for those who can afford them", "increase property tax" and "use a mix of property tax and use fee increase". This question directly echoed what the literature said and connected citizens' service satisfaction with budget decisions.

The second mechanism used by Toronto is public consultation. It is different from general public meetings that function only as an "information session" to the public on the already decided budget decisions. The consultation conducted in the Core Service Review is a combination of public meetings and focus groups, which created a two-communication between citizen and government. Indicated by Toronto's consultation plan, the public roundtable discussions aimed to provide information on City services and facilitated discussions among

participants. There were eight public sessions in total and each two hours' session included two 40-minute discussions. It also included a presentation from either the City Manager or the City's Chief Financial Officer on the City's operating budget and a snapshot report on the general themes that emerged from participants in their first discussion. Besides these eight public consultations, a number of City Councillors hosted their own meetings with local residents to discuss services and the best way to fund them. From what we learned from the consultation plan, these consultations firstly functioned as platforms for information sharing. The City also used consultations to educate citizen with the basic information about governance and service providing. Secondly, these consultations created communication opportunities among citizens, representatives and chief administrative officers. City staff facilitated the table discussions, encouraged participants to ask questions and complete their own feedback form either at session or afterwards. This facilitation was a process of communication between citizen and government, which contributed to valuable and authentic feedback. The City responded to this consultation by making all the raw data and analysis available to citizens. This was a very important sign to the public that their input had been seriously considered by the government and been documented. Thirdly, the City took efforts to provide convenience to citizen in order to encourage the participation.. Pre-registration has been used to ensure that adequate and appropriate resources were available at each consultation location. Prior to each session, the City sent email to registrants with directions to the venue and a description of the format and what to expect at each session. Shown by the later report on these consultations, half to two-thirds of the registrants attended the sessions with extra-unregistered people.

After this process analysis, we have some initial conclusions. Firstly, City of Toronto has an external incentive to enlarge its public participation.Even though in this analysis, there is no

other case for comparison in terms of how the external environment influenced the participative level, we cannot ignore the effect of external influential aspects. Based on what was learned from the literature, Toronto's population and diversity is the external reason for both government and citizen to enlarge the public participation in the decision-making process. Secondly, in the process design, the public participation was implemented very early in the whole service review program. It also occurred in an early stage of the whole budget process. Citizens were the first group to be consulted along with external firms for service preference and suggestions. Immediate analysis was conducted by city staff on the inputs gathered from public consultation. The public's input was then provided as a report to support City Council's Standing Committee discussion began in middle July. Thirdly, Toronto enjoyed the advantage of a mixed approach of engagement methods. Both the feedback form and roundtable discussion received positive feedback according to staff report (City of Toronto, 2012). The public indicated they "were committed to sharing their ideas by attending and hosting public sessions and completing… Feedback Forms and submitting…for consideration." (City of Toronto, 2012). Last but not least, the City had 12,955 people participate through either Feedback forms or roundtables, which was a significant figure compared with the turnout number of other public engagement tasks. Based on these above conclusion, Toronto's core service review had a high participative level and was implemented with a well-designed process.

Impact analysis

In this impact analysis, we are trying to explore how Toronto's public engagement impacts the government decision-making. We will firstly analyze the raw data retrieved from the online database and present what was indicated by citizens in terms of service preference and their willingness to pay.

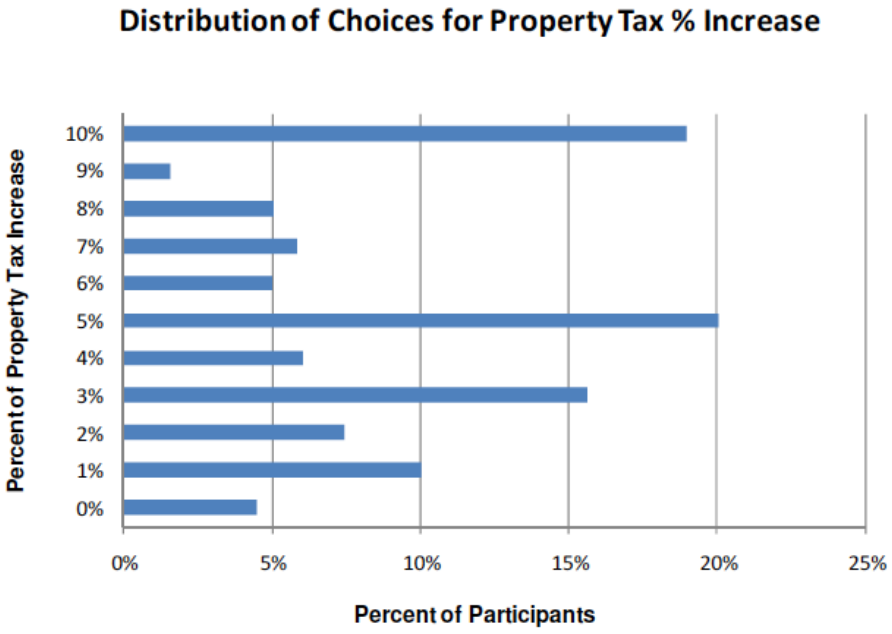
Public input analysis

Public input was collected around two main themes, one is service preference. In this section, the public was asked to rank all 35 service areas based on their importance. Three categories were provided; "Necessary for the city to liveable and prosperous", "Contribute to the city but less important", and "Not required for the city". Input was also solicited in terms of "who should deliver municipal service". The public was asked to review total 35 service area again in one of four categories: "The city should provide this activity", "The city should contract out this activity", "I don't care as long as it costs the city less" and "I don't care as long as the quality is good". Based on the data we got, we can rank the importance of 35 service area and the preferred provision method. First finding is the top 10 service areas in both lists were almost the same with little difference in ranking, which means, the public have achieved general agreement on what are the key services to them and to the city. Among all these key service, 90% of them were expected to be provided by the city itself. These service that shared by both of the lists are: public transit (TTC), Fire Service, Public Health Service, Police service, Public Libraries, Emergency Medical Service, Water treatment and distribution, City parks. From the staff report on final budget decision made by council, we tracked all these 8 service areas and found council approved new cash flow funding for new developing projects in all these service areas. This demonstrated that these service were indeed the crucial component of city's livability and valued

by both public and government. (City of Toronto, Jan 17th , 2012). Again, in the pie chart of where the City's operating budget goes, we found Toronto police service and TTC were the top two program expenditures, followed by soft service accounts for 30.5% and hard service for 13.4%.

In the second theme of overall funding strategy, we have some interesting findings which bring out the conflict between public preference and politicians' campaign promises. Public participants were asked to consider the following five funding strategies for the City in terms of service providing: a) No increase in user fees or taxes even if this means reducing the level of service; b) Increase user fees to keep the same level of City service; c) Increase property taxes to keep the same level of City service; d) Increase both use fees and property taxes to keep the same level of City service; and e) Significantly increase both user fees and property taxes to increase the level of City service. Participants rank their preference from 1 to 5, with 1 being the first choice and 5 being the last. From the mean ranking number given to each strategy, "Increase property taxes to keep the same level of City service" was the highest in 2.25. It was followed by the preference of "increase both user fees and property tax" and "increase [only] user fees". The lowest ranking strategy indicated by public was "no increase in user fees or taxes". From this data, we found that the general public holds strong willingness to pay more in order to have the same level of service. This trend again was proved in another "willingness to pay" question. In the feedback form, public participants were also asked how much more property tax they would be comfortable paying if the City has to increase rates. The distribution of choices for property tax increases was illustrated by the following chart. We noticed that, people who were business owners, with university degrees or high income would have mean above 5 % while the opposite parts have mean around 4.4%. But, overall, the mean property tax increase for all participants

was 5.15%, which suggested a large majority of participants were willing to increase the amount of property tax that they pay.



(City of Toronto, 2012)

This preference contradicted what we learned from Mayor Ford's mandate at the beginning of Toronto's 2012 budget process. Toronto's 2012 budget and the whole Service Review Program attracted people's attention since the beginning. Politicians, especially Mayor Ford, aimed to achieve "reducing waste and eliminating unnecessary taxes" from this year's budget and project large surplus for future years through seeking efficiency in the City Hall and service providing (Ford platforms and positions, 2010). Since the election campaign, Mayor Ford claimed that the City had been doing business in an inefficient way, which he referred as "City spending was out of control for years"(City of Toronto, Jan 12th, 2012). Ford campaigned on ending wasteful spending at City Hall and his slogan such as "Stop the Gravy Train" and "respect for taxpayers" resonated with the public. More detailed, in Ford's campaign platform,

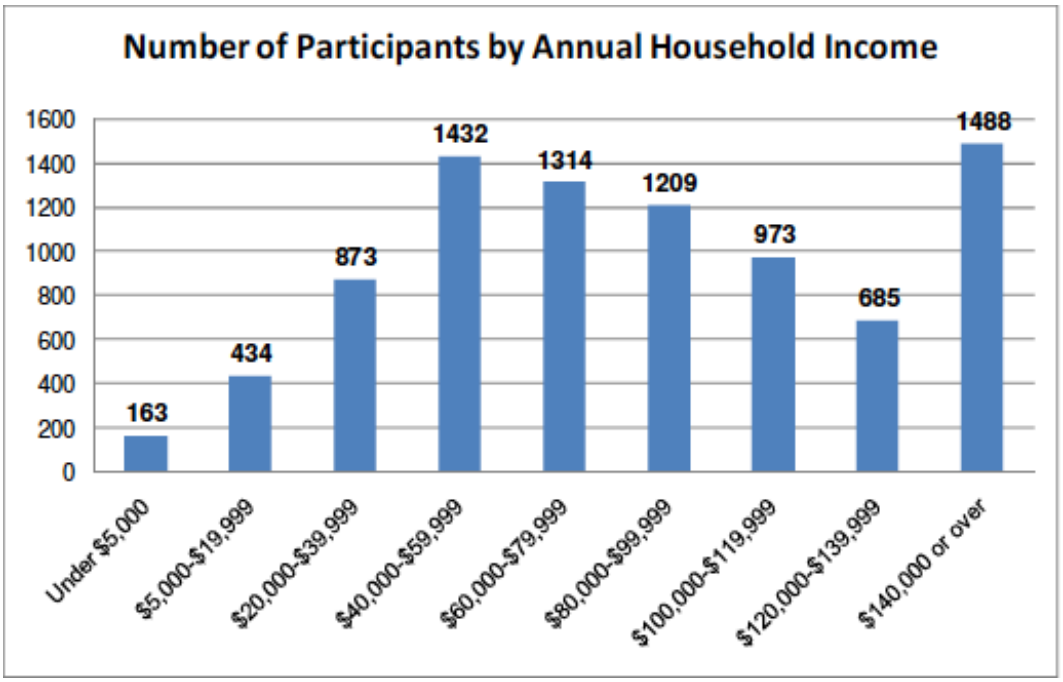
he claimed to "reduce spending by 2.5%, 2%, 1.5% and 0% in first four years by improving purchasing practices and more effective management; Produce $1.7 billion surplus over 4 years and allocate it to priority services, rebuilding reserves, and repay debt"(Ford platforms and positions, 2010) He also aimed for eliminate one-time funding by 2013, which is for the first time for City of Toronto to stop this revenue sources to balance the budget. And most importantly, all these claims for efficiency and tax cuts was boosted by his promise that "[he will] make savings at City Hall without cuts to service, guaranteed." (David, 2011) Ford created grassroots momentum by his strong mandate for tax reduction and his confidence about saving money from efficiency studies.

However, what we perceived from the budget decision process was that the council and Mayor had to back down from the original plan and there was not that much "gravy" in the field. It also been noticed that the "efficiency mandate" actually resulted in putting service under attack. As stated by the Mayor before, there was "so much gravy and waste flow[ing] at city hall [that] he could scrape savings off the ground without notice" (James, 2012). This statement then turned out to be over-confident. Conflict appeared between cost reduction and service quality. The decision-making process became controversial in terms of keeping the tax reduction promise and the public's opposition to service cuts. Obviously, such opposition was also a kind of public participation along with the process, but in a more informal way. The budget decision underwent changes as more information came out with the process of Service Review Study. We noticed from the report of standing committee meetings, executive meetings and council discussions that, formal projected reduction and cuts had been preserved, such as in the areas of child care, parks and recreation, and even public transportation (TTC).

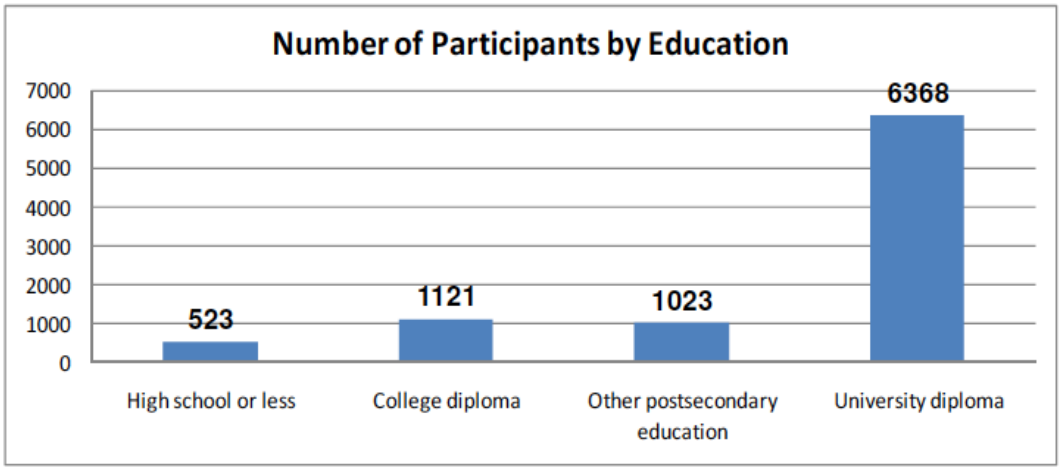
Paradox explanation

We learned from participant input that the public was willing to increase their taxes or user fees to keep the service, and even to improve the level. Politicians firstly insist on taxes reduction and ensure service efficiency. But they kept backed off because tax freeze policy will result in hurting services. So, why did politicians go against the public will and why did they preferr to put services at risk instead of increasing taxes to the amount recommended by public input? In answering this question, we went back and examined the stakeholder groups. Another interesting finding came from the demographic analysis.

From the public participation side, some key criteria indicated that the people who actually participated in the process did not represent the population. The following three charts describe the number of participants by annual household income, by education and by age group. These three demographic items, people with higher income, younger age and higher education, did participate in great numbers compared to the general population. One reason for that, based on a staff report, is because much of the consultation was conducted online and those who are more likely to be online was the group with easier access to the internet (City of Toronto, 2012).



(City of Toronto, 2012)



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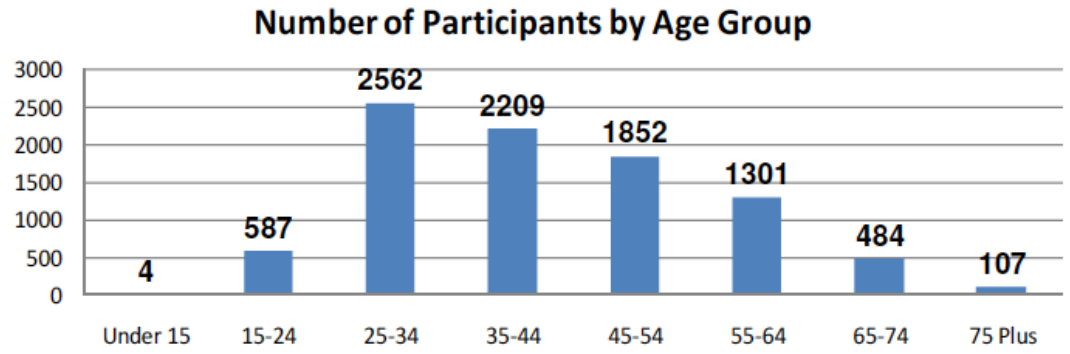


(City of Toronto, 2012)

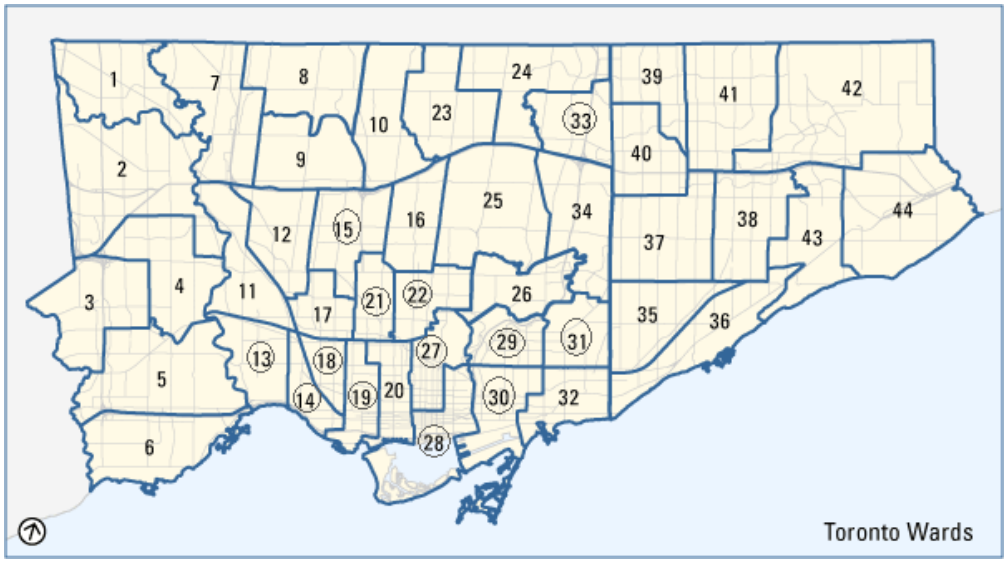
We also took a look at the previous data of Toronto's 2010 election. Rob Ford, the former ward 2 Councilor won on October 25, 2010 with almost half of the vote citywide. In Taylor's analysis of the Toronto's 2010 election, he points that, form the overall mayoral vote in each of the 44 wards there is a stark divide between wards that supported Ford and those that supported another candidate - Smimitherman. Smimitherman won all wards generally corresponding to the pre-amalgamation City of Toronto while Ford carried all of the outer wards. He also found over 80% of Ford's support came from outside the former City of Toronto (Taylor, 2012). We included a map of the vote from Zack in the Appendix, map 2. One can find that Ford's area of strength (the blue areas on the map) was outside former City of Toronto. However, from the other map we retrieved from City of Toronto showing the number of participants by postal code, we found, the group who participated in the core service review was actually from the pre-amalgamated Toronto area.

It is interesting to observe the division of the two groups from the maps – as included as appendixes. Those who voted for Mayor Ford in 2010 and supported his political mandate did not participate in the budget process while those against Ford in the Mayor election had a high participative level instead. This already explained our confusion on the conflict between public

input and the politicians' mandate. People who live in downtown Toronto with higher income and education prefer to pay more and have higher demand of public service, while people in suburban areas usually do not have the same desire for public services as those located in downtown, who have more concern about a tax freeze policy. As we learned before, Mayor Ford gained much support from people in suburban areas for his plan on tax reduction and "gravy-sniffing", which obviously contradicts the preferences of the participing group.

This interesting finding leads to more discussion in our impact analysis. Firstly, the component of participation challenged our initial conclusion on participatory design. Though having significant turnout numbers, this participation did not represent the broad community. This can be tied back to the difficulties faced by government in processing public participation. Two reasons account for this downtown-centered participation condition. One is mentioned above as internet accessibility. The other is consultation locations. We tracked those locations and councilor-led consultation on the ward map and found, most of them are in the downtown area. Even with a well-prepared process and promotion, Toronto's consultation still can't have participation evenly spread across its geographic areas. Several external reasons also influenced this as challenges, such as transportation, and convenience. Beside this, we argue that the previous vote decision may also influence people in not attending the participation. One explanation here is those who voted for Rob Ford, supported his platform including his plan for new budget. So they trusted the politician and believed he would lead the government to achieve what he promised for the city. In terms of this, compared to Ford's voters, those people who did not vote for Ford's ideas might regard the participation process as a chance for influencing and have stronger willingness to provide their input.

Public participation in the budget is a broad term. Toronto's case is special here for the whole population turned out to have impact on the budget but by separate ways. We cannot only discuss the participation process between citizen and civil administration, but ignore the interaction between citizen and representatives. The political participation, especially voting for the head of representatives, also impacted the final decision. This can be very important not only in Toronto's case but also in other cases with various contents. When Beckett and King discuss how citizens influence budgeting, they mentioned that there are a wide range of ways for participation. Among the traditional roles for the public-at-large to affect local budgets and management, they point that "voting for representatives" is the very important one (Beckett & King, 2002). However, this part of indirect participation is usually ignored by much of the literature when they analyze the how citizens' engagement influence the decision-making.



Many articles in this field focus on public participation outcomes. Suggestions and recommendations havealso been made for government in order to improve the "effectiveness" of public participation, especially in the budget process. Inspired by Berner, Amos and Morse (2011), we take a multiple perspective in this analysis. Citizen is the essential component in

engagement. Public has various roles in participating governance such as audience of City manager's presentations and public service receivers. They are also the evaluators of City's performance and consultants of service improvement. They provide input and preference to government in helping with the decision making. This idea supported is by "New public management", whose advocates view participation from a managerial perspective. In this model, citizens are the "consumers" or "customers" of government service and their input is important in order to deliver high quality products and service. From the other, government led the actual participation process. The City sets the tone of how the process goes. Meeting locations, survey design and even the information kits in helping with citizen's understanding of budget decision were decided by the City of Toronto. Both internal staff and Council members controlled the participation process. From administrative side, city staff planned the process and facilitated with mutual conversations. From political side, City council provided vision and leadership though the engagement with authorities in final decision-making. .

In light of this, the "effectiveness to public" will relate to what citizens as a whole want to achieve after their involvement. From the qualitative feedback we have from Toronto's consultation, citizens have the following expectations: 1) have their voices heard and considered by government, 2) have pleasant experience in participating (meeting or survey), 3) find questions from government pertinent to their daily concerns, 4) have direct communication with government members, and 5) find changes in final decisions that reflects their inputs. However, from the government perspective, participation theory provides some explanations on what government aim to achieve in conducting public participation in the budget process. The first goal is informing decision making, which is often accomplished through passive participation in which citizens communicate their level of satisfaction with the proposed budget to the decision

maker through testimony at public hearings (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006). Secondly, education is an important goal of budget participation, as much of the research has stressed (Bland and Rubin 1997; Franklin and Ebdon 2004). Government budgets are complex, with multiple funds and inherent trade-offs in decision making, through budget participation, it has been found to be beneficial in educating citizens about these complexities (Ebdon, 2002; Franklin & Ebdon, 2004) Finally, affecting the final budget decisions or resource allocation is also a goal for participation. In an ideal situation, the government conducts public participation throughout the decision making process and solicits citizens' preference to form their database for decision making. The City of Toronto articulated its purpose of public consultation as "Inform, Involve [and] Consult the public"(City of Toronto, 2012). This implied the engagement project is a platform for two-way communication between citizen and government. Both civic administration and politicians hope to use public participation convey the message on budget decision and acquire public preference through facilitation.

We can measure the difference between public preferences with the final decision, but it is not a good indicator for the "effectiveness". Because "changing the situation" is not the priority for most varieties of public participation, including Toronto's case. Firstly, we noticed there is limited room in the budget that can actually been changed. It is widely agreed that budgets are cyclical and not linear. Budgets address a one year fiscal calendar, but during that year there may be three difference budget cycles – planning the next budget year, executing the current year, and auditing the prior year. Although a mandated budget hearing may be based on a nearly completed plan, that plan is often flexible enough to allow for shifting emphasis in application. Allowing and encouraging public comment at the approval stages can provide valuable and authentic input in governance. Even though the general plan of a proposed budget

may not change based on public comments at the hearing, their comments affect the implementation of the budget, and can affect the planning of the next budget. It cannot be logically concluded that just because citizens' comments do not change a budget document they do not affect the budget process or that the comments are not welcome.

Secondly, it has been observed that both citizen and government focus more on communication and learning. According to Beckett & King (2002), active citizen engagement assumes that both the administrators and the citizens involved learn from the experience of listening and talking with each other about governance. This suggests a new perspective in viewing public participation. It is more than a tool for government to inform citizens with the decision. And also, it is more than a platform for citizens in trying to changing the political dynamic or current policy setting. Public participation is more like a type of discussion that allows all involved to learn from the conversation. In this context, the first question about whether a citizen participation effort is a success is to ask if the citizen and the administrator if each learned from the experience.

Thirdly, the influence of public participation is usually a long-term outcome that cannot be easily measured shortly after. Toronto planned this engagement in order to balance the 2012 budget, but most importantly for its multi-year financial strategy. It can be assumed that the input from public during this process will be further analyzed by the government in the following years and will contribute to government decisions in the long-term. Also, government educated the public with essential information about governance and public services. Government informed its citizen about Toronto's distinctiveness. This education helps citizen understand how services have been provided, which will contribute to a more rational and authentic participation in the future.

Conclusion

When considering public participation, perhaps the only conclusion that scholars and practitioners can agree on is that it is an extremely complex issue. There are multiple variables within each element, but also within each variable, there are choices in the range of coverage. We used the City of Toronto's 2011 Core Service Review as our research case and conducted the analysis from both a process perspective and an outcome perspective. From a process perspective, governmental efforts were directed at enlarging participation through a well-designed mechanism and project promotion. Careful analysis and report also have been conducted on the inputs gathered from public. The analyzed input was submitted to council meeting for further consideration. Toronto's public participation process met most of the requirements suggested by the literature in defining an "effective" participation process. The turnout number, as the most obvious way of measuring a participation project, also proved that Toronto's public engagement was a success. In our impact analysis, we found input from the public indicated a strong willingness to pay more in order to maintain or increase service, which contradicts Mayor Ford's budget mandate on taxes cuts. Moreover, it has been found that some public services had been attacked in order to realize the budget goal of "spend[ing] less". In demographic data examination, we found, most of the participants characterized as people with high income, university education who were located in downtown Toronto. This reflected the biggest shortfall of this participation project: it did not have a good representation of the population. The reason for this problem can be traced back to one of the challenges public participation faced. Trying to engaging as many citizen as possible and aiming for a good representation of the population are always difficult for government officials in both designing

and implementing the engagement project. In Toronto's case, the location of public consultation meetings can be one of the reasons why the city failed to engage people in suburban places. Besides that, the complexity of budget issues as mentioned by numerous scholars is another important reason, which potentially blocks out citizen with low education background even though the government tries hard in explaining budget decisions. Toronto's case brought a special third reason for this problem. Based on our analysis of the divergence between "who vote" and "who participate", we found the people who voted for Mayor Ford in 2010 were mostly located in suburban areas, the area which coincidently included the people who did not participate in this public consultation project. The explanation we gave for the paradox is that these people did their "participation" in advance by voting for the Mayor and believing that this politician would realize his campaign promise, especially on budget decisions. And from our analysis of Ford's election campaign, his claims surrounding taxes cuts, efficiency achieving and putting taxpayers' interest before that of labor and special interests did attract wide support among diverse immigrant communities in most suburbs. Voting for a representative is one of the traditional participation methods but seldom mentioned in the literature. For most researchers dealing with public participation in the budget process, only interaction between citizen and government officials was analyzed, which is not enough. The relationship between citizen and representatives is also very important in government decision making and service providing. In terms of this, we suggest that the interaction between citizen and their representatives also needs to be explored when analyzing how public participation impacts government decisions.

Scholars have provided some measurement models (Mohr, 1988, Ebdon & Franklin, 2006), but these models still cannot confidently evaluate the extent to which public participation impacts budget decisions and in what ways. The most important reason lies here is the limitation

of room for changes in the annual budget. With over half of the expenditure already decided, what can be changed in a budget decision is only a small proportion when compared to the total amount. In terms of this, the money amount should not be a good indicator for impact. We also agree that the impact of public participation is a long-term outcome. This paper also suggests a multiple perspective in participation impact analysis. To different stakeholders in the budget process, effectiveness is defined by different purposes. As Beckett and King indicate, even though the general plan of a proposed budget may not change based on public comments at the hearing, these comments affect the implementation of the budget, and can affect the planning in the long run.

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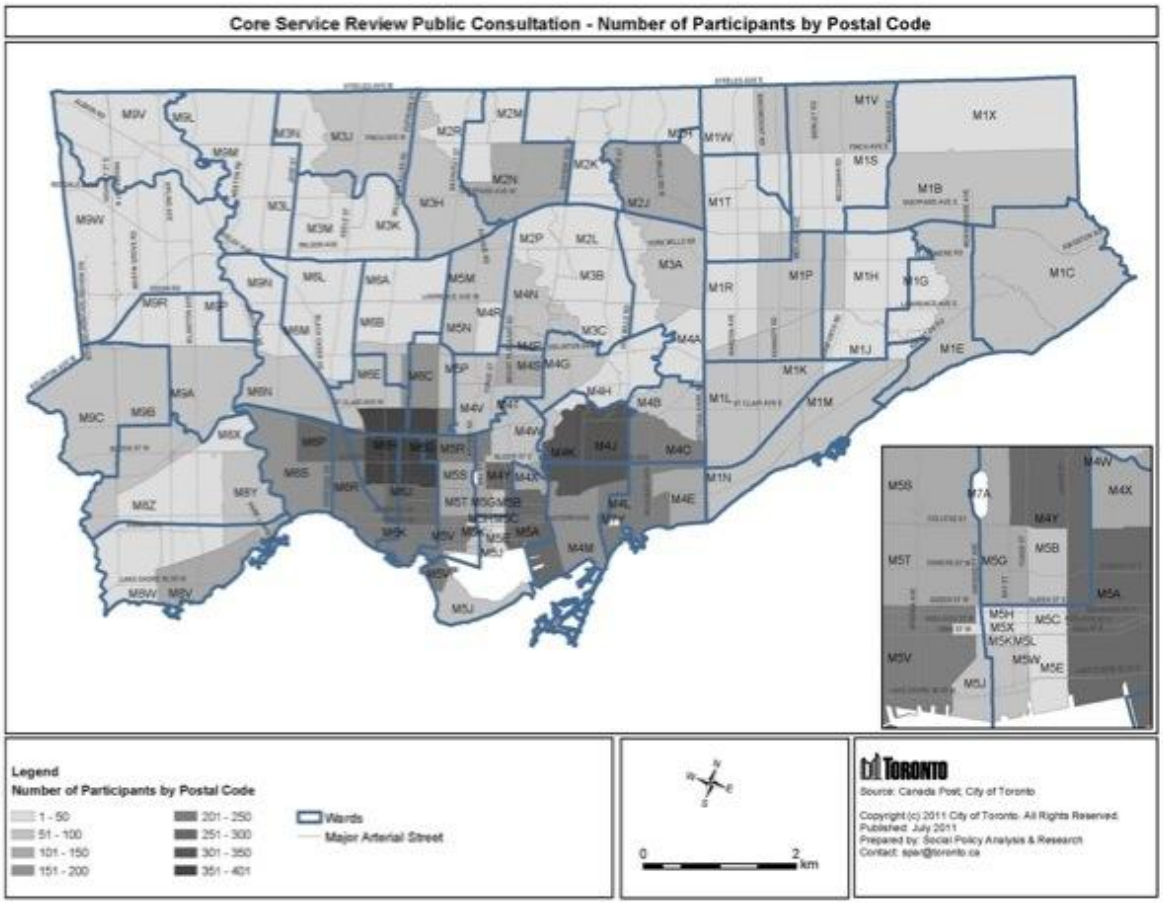
Appendix A

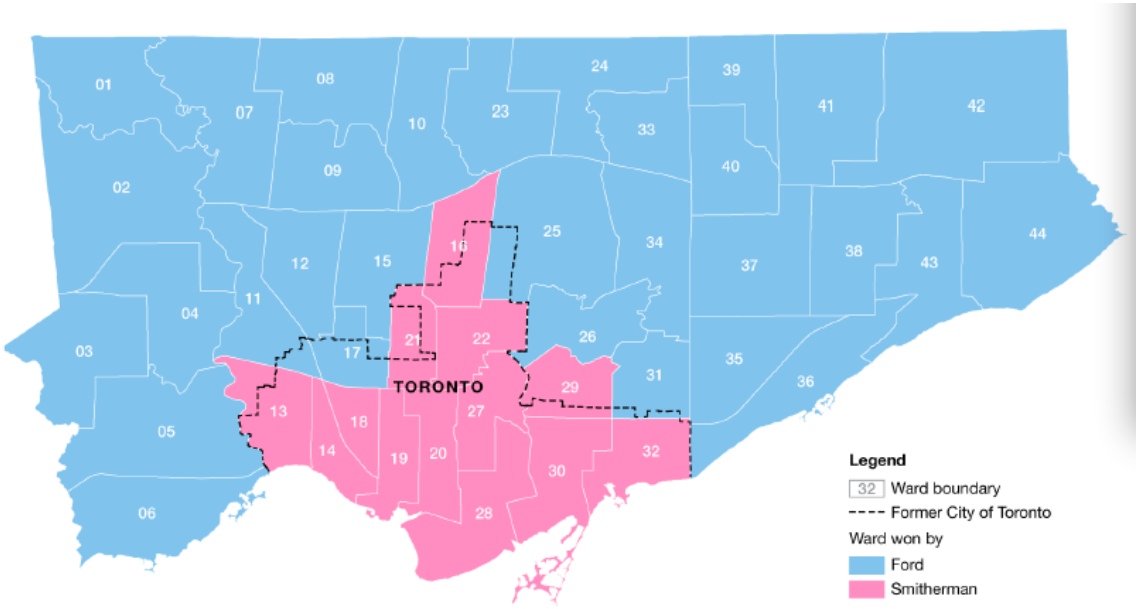
Number of Participant by postal code (Map)



(City of Toronto, 2012)

Appendix B

Winner of the mayoral vote, by ward (Map)



(Taylor, 2011)