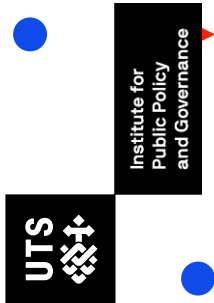




Institute for Public Policy and Governance



Local Democracy at Work?

Su Fei Tan, Senior Researcher, IPPG and PhD candidate

May 2019

sufei.tan@uts.edu.au

Local Democracy at Work?

-
- 1. Motivations for running for council – why does this matter?
- 2. Conceptions of democracy: decision making and representation
- 3. The role and function of councillors

Research Overview

■ Literature review

25 in-depth interviews (21 councillors and 4 key informants)

Secondary data (council documents, articles in the media etc.)

Mix of metro/rural/regional

Mix of men/women/ages*

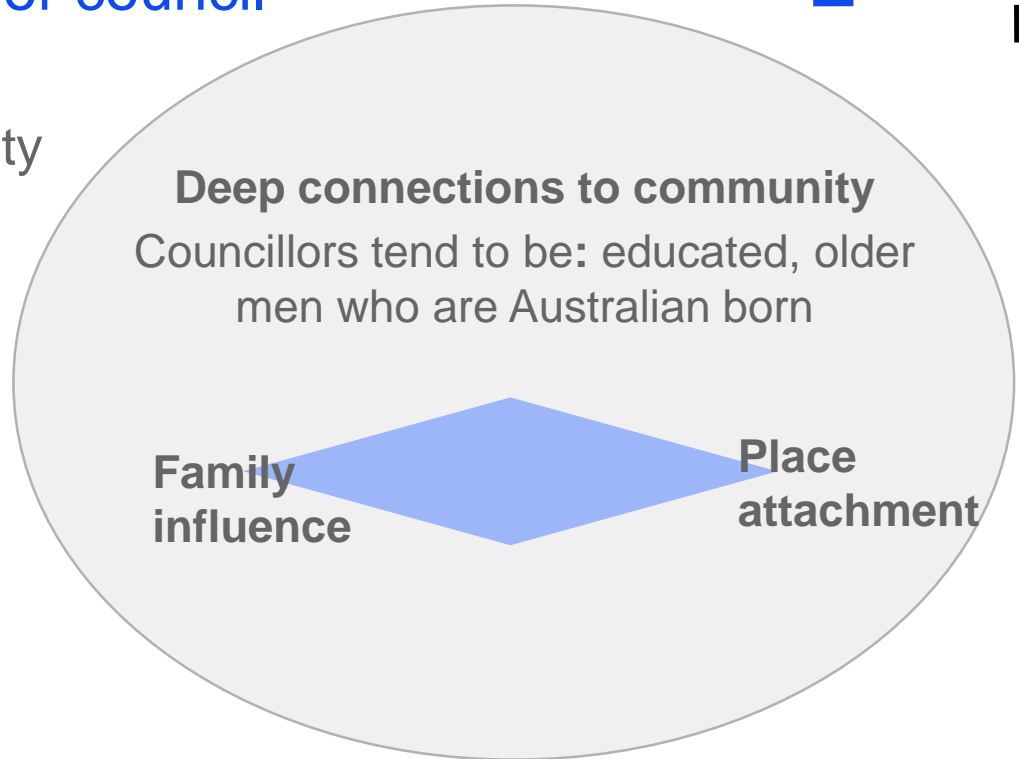
1. Motivations for running for council

- Deep connections to community

- Role of family

- Role of place attachment

BUT Why does this matter?



Why do motivations matter?

- If we want to improve the lack of councillor diversity, we need to understand why candidates and councillors run in the first place.

The research shows the important role socialisation plays in fostering an interest in politics and that political participation tends to run in families and be more prevalent among better educated groups.

What more can we do to encourage a wider group of people to stand for local government elections?

2. Conceptions of Democracy

Representation

Decision making

Representation: Trustee view

- “totally based on what is best after taking into consideration with the community says and what the council staff they and all the information that you get. I make the decision based on that. I am the one that has to sleep at night and I have to make the correct decision regardless of what everyone else thinks it’s the right way to go. That is the only way you can do it.”

- Logan, regional councillor

Representation: who do you represent?

- The whole community

People who are not at the table, those who can't vote, future generations

Rate payers

Representation: Elections

■ Being part of a team makes you more likely to succeed (what are the implication for councillor diversity?)

The important role of political parties, particularly in metropolitan areas

Decision making – the art of deliberation

- Accessing the information you need to make good decisions

The role the group dynamics play in influencing decision making

Councils generally sit on a continuum between what has been described as collaborative and adversarial

3. The role and functions of councillors

■
Overview

Community strategic planning and engagement

Relationship with the CEO/Organisation

Recognition of the role and the amount of work it requires

Overview

- Councillors told me their role was to:
 - Represent their communities
 - Make decisions for the good of the community
 - Provide scrutiny or oversight of other councillors and the organisation
 - Be a communication channel between organisation and the community
 - Advocate to other levels of government



Community strategic planning and community engagement



Varying degrees of councillor involvement in the development of the community strategic plan.

Does this matter – yes and no.

Relationship with the CEO/Organisation

■ The strategic space is blurry – councillors responses to the question of the split between operations and strategy were very diverse.

There are differences between larger metropolitan councils and smaller rural/regional councils

Recognition of the role

All councillors said it was a lot of work with some being able to put more hours in because of their situation than others (e.g. being retired or working full time). This has implications for

- Councillor diversity
- Participation in decision making and the quality of decisions taken
- Group dynamics

Questions

1. The challenge of achieving better councillor diversity
2. How can we support councillors individually and as a group to make better decisions?
3. Is it realistic to expect them to act as a board of directors?
4. The strategic operational space is blurry, what are the mechanisms for negotiation within this space – the importance of the CEO/Mayor relationship

Thank
you

Institute for
Public Policy
and Governance

UTS

